

Watts Wins Individual Title, Tigers Get Four In Top Ten To Win Class 3A Regional Cross Country Meet, Westbrook Qualifies As Individual For Granite

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NORMAL - Ryan Watts won the individual championship for the second year in a row, while Edwardsville put four of its runners in the top ten in going on to the team championship of the IHSA Class 3A Normal Community boys regional cross country meet Saturday morning at Maxwell Park in Normal.

The Tigers won with a score of 45 points, with O'Fallon second at 67 points, Quincy was third with 84 points, Pekin was fourth with 118 points, fifth place went to the host Ironmen with 132 points and Bradley Bourbonnais was the last team to qualify, finishing sixth with 152 points. Belleville East was seventh with 159 points, Belleville West was eighth with 164 points, Alton came in ninth with 241 points, 10th place went to Granite City with 264 points and Collinsville was 11th with 292 points.

The Edwardsville strategy going in was similar to the one used in the Southwestern Conference meet, and it the strategy worked very well for the Tigers.

"We tried to have a similar philosophy with the (Southwestern) Conference meet, where we let the top three runners let the other schools dictate the pace," said Edwardsville head coach George Patrylak. "Ryan and Geo (Patrylak) made a move at the halfway point of the race. At the two-mile mark, they separated themselves from the field, and made one final move with about 1,200 meters to go, and never looked back."

The strategy worked beautifully as Watts went on to the win, while Patrylak tightened up with about 400 meters left, and ended up finishing fifth. Meanwhile, Jacob Grandone, who came in 10th, ran the race of the day for the Tigers.

"It was the first time this season he was within a minute of our top runners," Patrylak said. "He ran a superb second half of the race."

Edwardsville also decided to hold back promising runner Hugh Davis to save him for the sectional, and Patrylak thinks that his team will be ready to go for next week's sectional.

"I think the boys will be ready for a big race next weekend in Quincy," Patrylak said.

Watts won the race with a time of 15:23.8, while Fiken Rosen of Quincy was second at 15:29.2, Byron Jones of Belleville East was the first of the five individual qualifiers by coming in third at 15:32.3, O'Fallon's Eli Greenstreet was fourth at 15:32.5, Patrylak was fifth at 15:41.9, with teammate Ryan Luitjohan sixth at 15:44.4, seventh place went to Zack Thoman of O'Fallon, who came in at 15:50.4, in eighth place was Jackson Custer of Pekin at 16:11.1, Jeremiah Lanum of Bradley Bourbonnais was ninth at 16:17.6 and Grandone was 10th at 16:18.8,

Also going through as individuals were Granite City's Thomas Westbrook, who had a time of 16:38.9, and Collinsville's Andrew Gonski, who came in at 17:03.9. The top five runners from non-qualifying schools went through to the sectional.

Outside of Edwardsville's top four, Jack Draper had a time of 16:48.9, Ben Peruti was in at 16:52.7 and Liam Hoeflerlin had a time of 17:14.2. Dylan Forsythe led the Redbirds with a time of 17:09.1, while Victor Humphrey was in at 17:37.9, Simon McClaine was in at 17:47.0, Noah Gallivan had a time of 17:48.3 and River Wrischnik had a time of 18:10.5.

Along with Gonski, Brock Cunningham of the Kahoks was in at 17:36.3, Alejandro Mendoza had a time of 18:39.7, David Garcia was in at 18:10.4, Evan Heintz came in at 19:29.2, Dylan Meek was in at 19:46.0 and Laurentino Martinez's time was 20:09.4. In addition to Westbrook's time, the Warriors had Sam Yeager in at 17:53.7, Ethan Beatty's time was 18:08.8, Aiden Harris was in at 18:09.4, Leighton Cohea had a time of 18:15.4, Daniel Wilson had a time of 18:33.0 and Brenden Rayl was in at 18:59.9.

Watts made history with his win, becoming the first Edwardsville runner to win back-to-back regionals since Garrett Swett, and Patrylak feels that Watts is just getting started.

"The best is yet to come from him," Patrylak said.

The Tigers and the other five teams, along with the top five individuals, move on to the sectional meet at Quincy next Saturday, and Patrylak is very excited about and looking forward to the meet.

"The boys should be somewhere from first to fourth at sectionals," Patrylak said.