

Edwardsville Cross Country Teams Enjoy Very Successful Season As Watts Finishes Eighth In Boys 3A Meet, Nuttall Enjoys Breakout Girls Season

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville High boys and girls cross country teams completed one of their most successful seasons ever on Nov. 6 as the Tigers saw senior Ryan Watts finish eighth in the boys Class 3A race as the boys placed 20th as a team and junior Emily Nuttall conclude a breakout season by leading the girls' team to a 22nd place finish in a race that saw six of its runners set personal records.

The most important thing was that the Tigers, along with the entire state, we're able to compete in a full season with few restrictions after the 2020 season was severely limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the state meet wasn't held because of it.

"It was nice to return to some kind of normalcy to cross country in Illinois," said Edwardsville head coach George Patrylak. "The kids were excited to be able to participate in a full regular season, including traveling outside the COVID region and being able to have a full postseason, including state."

There was another big factor involving the Tigers, as Patrylak was able to perform a dual role as both coach and dad to his son Geo, a senior who also made key contributions to the team's success.

"For me, it was extra important for my dual role as a coach and a dad this season," Patrylak said. "This year was one of the largest senior boys classes, with 14 seniors. We also had three senior girls, and I'm excited that our seniors not only had a fairly normal season, but also a successful one. Our seniors did an outstanding job of not only competing week in and week out, but also incorporating our younger runners, especially our freshmen and incoming runners, our team culture and expectations with them."

Watts was certainly the leading runner on the boys' side and still had an outstanding season despite missing some of it because of injury.

"I know overall, Ryan was a little disappointed," Patrylak said, "but when you look back to where he was this past summer, there are not many people who would have had the ability or work ethic to return to a top ten status, especially in a state where cross country is as strong as it is in Illinois."

In addition to Watts, the top four seniors of Patrylak, Jacob Grandone, and Ryan Luitjohan formed a very close-knit group that was a big part of the Tigers' success. The experience all of them gained in postseason meets as both sophomores and juniors helped immensely. Their closeness off of the courses also made an impact on their coach as well.

"This group has a special bond," Patrylak said, "a level of respect and a genuine care for one another as much as, if not more than, any group that I have ever coached."

Freshman Hugh Davis and sophomore Jack Draper also had a positive impact for the Tigers as the season went on, and both are expected to make big contributions in the future.



The girls' team had to contend with a lower-body injury to junior Riley Knoyle that kept her out of the lineup all season. Nuttall, a junior who transferred to Edwardsville from Olney Richland County, had a breakout season that more than made up for Knoyle's absence, and was a big factor in the Tigers' success this season.

"She wound up developing into a number one runner," Patrylak said of Nuttall's season. "Going into this season, Emily's best cross country time was 19:57. She took off two minutes of time in one year and became only the seventh runner in team history to go under 18 minutes. It's an incredible accomplishment, and makes it exciting for next year."

Besides Nuttall, junior Madison Strotheide and sophomores Olivia Coll, Whitney Dyckman, Belle Horsfall, Maya Lueking, and Emma Patrick formed a top-seven team that had breakout years as well, with six of the runners setting personal records at the state meet. All return next season to form an excellent team that Patrylak is looking forward to coaching.

The most important takeaway from the 2021 season is the closeness of both teams that Patrylak won't soon forget.

"This will go down as a bittersweet season," Patrylak said. "I enjoyed almost every moment of it and have gotten to know the athletes in many ways, because they were not only athletes I coached and students I taught, but as friends and family to my son. For me, I always wanted the best for them. It's such an amazing group of guys and ladies, and I, along with the coaching staff, we're blessed to work with all of the members of the team."