



Area Bowlers, Coaches, Excited About Season Kickoff, Have Solid Expectations For Year

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Salem Green, Highland, Harrisburg Win Divisions In Season Opening Zach LeCuyer Invitational Boys Bowling Tournament, Area Teams All Bowl Well



By COLIN FEENEY

COLLINSVILLE – The mid-November Zach LeCuyer Invitational Boys Bowling Tournament served as the kick-off for the season and Collinsville Purple Team finished sixth in the Gold division, with Jersey Blue coming in ninth, Alton came in third in the Silver division, while Civic Memorial was sixth and Triad came in second, Jersey White third, Collinsville White sixth and Granite City was 10th in the Bronze division at the season-opening Zach LeCuyer Invitational boys bowling tournament recently at Camelot Bowl in Collinsville.

The Wildcats, led by a perfect 300 from Nick Gregg in the fifth game, won the Gold division with a six-game team score of 6,163, with a high game of 1,172, Waterloo was second with a 6,123 score, third place went to Belleville East White with a 6,097,

O'Fallon Gold was fourth with a 6.074, Mascoutah Purple was fifth at 6,072, the Kahoks purple team was sixth with 5,900, Carterville came in seventh with a 5,762, eighth place went to Mt. Vernon at 5,709, the Panthers Blue team was ninth at 5,684 and Herrin was 10th with a 5,592.

Highland won the Silver division with a team score of 3,003, while Freeburg was second at 2,633, the Redbirds were right behind in third at 2,632, Taylorville came in fourth at 2,627, O'Fallon Blue was fifth at 2,583, the Eagles came in sixth with a 2,581 score, Columbia Blue was seventh at 2,567. Salem White was eight with a 2,561, Mascoutah White was ninth with a 2,508 and Columbia White was 10th with a 2,326 score.

Harrisburg took the Bronze division with a score of 2,593, with the Knights coming in second at 2,589, the Panthers white team was third with a 2,413 score, in fourth place was Belleville East Blue with a score of 2,399, Cahokia was fifth at 2,325, Collinsville White was sixth with a score of 2,264, Carbondale was seventh with a score of 2,254, eighth place went to Lebanon with a 2,157, Centralia was ninth at 2,102 and the Warriors finished 10th with a score of 1,952.

The atmosphere inside the house was very positive and upbeat, with many parents and fans cheering on the bowlers, and it exactly what was needed as things started going back to some kind of normalcy after the 2020-21 season was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The tournament went really well," said Kahoks' head coach Sean Hay. "It's nice to be back," he said with a laugh. "It's really nice to be back and looking like normal. And so, I think every team has little hurdles they need to undo, there are things, culture things that just come from generation to generation, year after year. We skipped a year of normal bowling, so some of that culture stuff, as a coach, I worry about. We picked up right where we left off as far as camaraderie and everything, we have some physical stuff I knew we weren't quite prepared for. We're not at end of season form yet, but we're definitely headed in the right direction every time we hit the lanes. So today went really well, I was really happy we made it to the Gold division, and I was extra happy that every time we bowl, we get one more bowler averaging over 200. So, Mason Foley came through today and bowled really well after struggling earlier this year. Brandon Campbell bowled really well, which he's been kind of our rock this year, and Evan Flowers is a senior who hadn't bowled for us in three years, so he came out and he bowled really, really well and averaged 200 today as well."

The old camaraderie was indeed out throughout the day, as the bowlers not only cheered for their own teams but for each other as well, and the chemistry between bowlers, coaches and fans was upbeat and positive throughout the day.

"Oh, absolutely," Hay said. "What you're going to see in bowling is we're rooting for each other as well as for our own teams. So when we see success, like Nick Gregg, like he's shooting 300, we're all really excited about that. So, things like that just get us going more and make us appreciate that we have this opportunity."

Alton head coach Dave Meyer felt his team bowled well throughout the day, and kept fighting throughout the entire tournament.

"The boys did good," Meyer said. "I have higher expectations for them as a team, but they did good, they fought, they stayed with it. It's still early, but that's why the coaching, getting in there and learning what these guys want. I'm proud of them."

Ben Mitchell and Blake Markel were the standouts on the day for the Redbirds, and led the way for Alton.

"Blake and Ben did well today," Meyer said. "You always want better, but they did good, and I'm happy, proud of them. As a team, we finished just above halfway; I think we should have finished around 12th, whenever the scores are finally done, out of 30 teams. We know where we can build on and grow on that. We still have that ultimate goal to get to state, so we know how to learn and coach these guys even better."

Meyer agreed that it was great to have fans back in the building and is looking forward to having a normal season.

"Yes, it is great to be back," Meyer said, "and that's what all of us coaches said too whenever we had the coaches' meeting, was that it was good to be back. let's stay with it, and the parents help out with that. Let's keep them masked up and everything."

Jersey head coach Chris Skinner felt his bowlers did well, overcoming mistakes and bowled well during the second half of the tournament.

"Not bad," Skinner said. "We made some mistakes early, and then had a nice afternoon, and kind of lost our mojo in the afternoon. But that'll come with practice, because as the season goes along, they'll get better at it."

Despite the setbacks, it wasn't too bad of a day for the Panthers, and Skinner was very happy with the outcome.

"Yeah, I think we're going to end up in the top ten," Skinner said, "and you know, we're young. We have one senior on our team, and he bowled really well for us in the five

games he bowled, and Quinn Schulte, and then Tyler Ayers and Jacob Elliott were pretty steady all day long. So, we get Pete Barton and Hunter Watson going, I think we've got a chance to have a really good season."

Skinner also agreed that it was great to be back, and felt the atmosphere was tremendous all day.

"Yeah, it is," Skinner said. "You know, we had a full house here today, 30 teams, and that tournament's going on well. And I think the kids are excited to be back at it, doing something, get back to some normalcy."

CM head coach Shane Stille felt the Eagles did well and bowled about as well as could be expected.

"I think we did alright," Stille said. "I think we did as good as I expected us to do coming in. We had a few mix-ups whenever the lane started drying out and had a few kids struggling to find their shot. But overall, I think we had a few bowlers that really kept us together and picked some spares that really helped us out and had some strikes that helped us keep going as well."

Stille cited Eric Harkey, Braden Prout and Arden Hawk as his best bowlers on the day.

"Our top bowler today was Eric Harkey," Stille said, "and then, we also had Braden Prout and Arden Hawk; they all three shot all six games, shot a little bit under 1,200, all three of them did. But they were all pretty consistent in hitting marks and just had a few bad breaks here and there."

Stille also echoed the comments about being back for a normal season after the COVID-restricted and shortened season of a year ago.

"Oh, absolutely," Stille said. "It's so nice to be back in a bowling alley, see kids having fun, competing against each other and seeing how rigorous a tournament of six games can be."

Waterloo's Brady Stumpf was the individual winner, with a six-game total of 1,409 and a high game of 267, with Aiden Keen of O'Fallon Gold second with a 1,340. Herrin's Chase Lannom was third with a 1,312 series, with Gregg fourth at 1,310, including his perfect 300 fifth game, easily the highlight game of the day. Fifth place went to Taylorville's Cameron Adams with a score of 1,294, Salem Green's Charlie Hunter was sixth with a 1,286 set, Collinsville Purple's Brandon Campbell was seventh with a 1,281

series, eighth place went to Jameson Strozier of Lebanon, who rolled a 1,277, Hunter Hediger of Highland was ninth with a 1,269 series and Colton Shoemaker of Salem Green rounded out the top ten with a 1,267.

Other area bowlers that finished in the top 30 included Foley, who placed 11th with a 1,261 series, Ayers came in 25th with a series of 1,215 and Flowers was right behind in 26th with a 1,213 set.

As far as expectations for their teams this season, the various coaches are hoping for one thing: To get to the state tournament, which is set for Jan. 28-29 at St. Clair Bowl in O'Fallon/Fairview Heights. It's the only state finals held in southern Illinois, and the teams are looking ahead to the chance.

"This season, we are going to take the next match that we do, and do the best we can," Hay said with a smile. "And then, we want to get to state. That's always our goal."

Having the state tournament in the Metro-East area is a big advantage for the local teams as well.

"It's close by," Hay said. "It's usually a benefit; we can sleep in our own beds, and that's a big benefit. Like I said, we're not in end-of-season form yet, but we have the season for that reason. As I said, we're getting better every time we hit the lanes, and our goal is to be a little bit better today than we were yesterday."

Meyer's ultimate goal is, of course, going to state for both days of the tournament, and the team's been notified by the IHSA that the Redbirds will host the sectional tournament at Bowl Haven Lanes in Alton on Jan. 22, a big feather in the cap for the program.

"Yes, that what it is, and the other goal is that we've already been notified, we are hosting sectionals on (Jan.) 22nd at Bowl Haven. So we're hoping that'll help us even make that a better way to state. Thanks everybody out there, and let's hope that whenever we're at home at a match or whatever, that we get more support from parents and fans."

Skinner has the same hopes and ambitions for the Panthers, and has his goals set very simple and precise.

"I just want us to get better every day," Skinner said, "limit the number of opens that we have. And if we do that, I tell them that their strikes are going to come, score on your

spares, and if we can limit our number of opens each game, I think we'll be competitive every night that we bowl. Just excited to be back out, seeing all the other kids and coaches."

Stille is expecting to see the Eagles be very competitive in their matches and tournament, and although CM is a young team, there's always room to improve and be better.

"I expect us to compete in conference and compete in a few tournaments," Stille said. "We're a young team as far as our four, and I think we have some room to improve. I expect us to get better on our spares, and that'll just help us out tremendously.