

The Warsaw Tigers bounced back in a big way Saturday, finishing runner-up in the Elite Division at the Marion Invite.

After struggling to a fifth-place finish in Tuesday's NLC meet, the Tigers came out with a much more aggressive approach from the start. Warsaw's top seven runners went through the opening mile between 5:04 and 5:12, putting themselves in position for a strong team finish.

Leading the Tigers was senior Jaxon Lehman, who placed 17th in a personal-best 16:44.5. Sophomores Eli Swinehart and Luke Vander Bie followed closely, finishing 20th in 16:53.9 and 21st in 16:57.0. Senior Jack Boggs placed 27th in 17:08.6, junior Keenan Lyons was 30th in 17:11.5, freshman Jadon Flamm finished 34th in 17:16.3, and senior Nolan Stump rounded out Warsaw's top seven in 44th place with a time of 17:30.5.

Fort Wayne Carroll won the Elite Division with 31 points, while Warsaw finished second with 101. Northridge was close behind in third with 106 points, followed by Northwestern with 108 and Chesterton with 114.

"The biggest thing we talked about before the race was getting out strong, being aggressive, and gaining experience," Warsaw head coach Matt Campbell said. "We have a good mix of upperclassmen and underclassmen, and when those two groups come together, I think we have the ability to be a really strong team. These guys have put in way too much work to not give themselves a chance to do something special."

Campbell was especially proud of the growth shown by Warsaw's senior class.

"More than anything, I want this senior group to walk away having a successful season," Campbell said. "They were part of two really good teams as freshmen and sophomores, but many of them weren't even in our top 20 at that point. On this same course as freshmen, Jaxon ran 22:25, Nolan ran 21:56, and Jack ran 20:20. Now those guys are the dudes representing us at the varsity level. That says a lot about their commitment and how much they've improved."

That development, combined with a talented group of younger runners, has Campbell excited about what the Tigers can accomplish this season and beyond.

"Our message was pretty simple: seniors, lead this team. Underclassmen, don't fall into the trap of thinking there's always next year," Campbell said. "The time is now. Gain that

experience now and see what you can do. With the young group we have, it's going to be a lot of fun to watch them develop over the next few years."

Lehman delivered one of the biggest performances of the day, dropping more than 30 seconds from his previous personal best to run 16:44.5.

"I'm super happy for Jaxon," Campbell said. "That was a huge breakout race for him. Eli and Luke also had breakout performances, both breaking 17 minutes for the first time. Jack and Keenan had big days as well and are knocking on that sub-17 door. That's a big milestone for high school distance runners."

Flamm continued an impressive start to his freshman season despite recently missing training because of a minor strain.

"Jadon had a little strain about a week and a half ago and had to miss some time, which makes what he did even more impressive," Campbell said. "This was only his third high school race, and he's already running 17:16. That's exciting."

Warsaw also received strong performances deeper in its lineup, including freshman Brady Dewey in 17:42, sophomore Logan Martin in 17:58, and freshman Alek Lantz in 18:02.

"It's always a good sign when you have young guys already running around or under 18 minutes," Campbell said. "As they become more consistent and gain more racing experience, it's going to be fun to see how much more time they can drop. We took a good step forward today, but there's still a lot of season left and a lot of room for this group to keep getting better."

In the JV race, the Tigers were led by sophomore Rushabh Gorhe, who finished 10th in 19:14.1. Senior Benjamin Mort followed in 13th place with a time of 19:18.0, while freshman Ben Maile placed 15th in 19:20.8. Senior Nicolas Balbuena-Kline finished 28th in 19:45.2, sophomore Keaton Kuhn was 33rd in 19:48.5, senior Grayson Waldo placed 34th in 19:49.2, and junior Owen Aukeman finished 35th in 19:51.0.

Freshmen Teo Petre and Abner Boren also reached a big milestone, breaking the 20-minute barrier for the first time. Petre finished in 19:53.5, while Boren crossed the line in 19:59.3.

“Seniors Ben Mort, Nic Kline, Grayson Waldo, and Kevin Gough have done a great job leading our Rising Varsity and JV groups,” assistant coach Ryan Goon said. “I was really happy to see those guys up there leading the way for us today. They all put together strong summers of training, and they continue to set the tone and lead by example in practice.”

Goon also highlighted the improvement Gough has made throughout his high school career.

“Kevin ran 30:40 on this course as a freshman, and today he ran 21:47,” Goon said. “That’s an incredible improvement and a great example of what consistency and sticking with it can do.”