

Warsaw Boys Cross Country Claims Freshman/Sophomore Championship at Culver Invitational

In a last-minute addition to the schedule, the Warsaw boys cross country team traveled to Culver Military Academy on Saturday to compete in the 44th Annual Culver Invitational. The Tigers split their roster between the varsity, freshman/sophomore, and reserve races, giving their younger athletes an opportunity to compete against runners in their own grade levels while chasing some hardware.

The decision paid off, as Warsaw captured the Freshman/Sophomore Championship and placed seventh in the varsity competition.

Varsity Tigers Finish Seventh Out of 24 Teams

In the varsity race, Warsaw finished seventh out of 24 teams, led by senior Jaxon Lehman, who placed 24th overall. Junior Keenan Lyons followed in 33rd, with senior Nolan Stump finishing 40th and senior Jack Boggs taking 52nd.

Rounding out Warsaw's top seven were senior Owen Meerzo in 123rd, senior Grayson Waldo in 125th, and senior Ben Mort in 127th.

"Jaxon looked great today," said Warsaw head coach Matt Campbell. "He was able to keep his breathing under control and looked like the Jaxon we saw at the beginning of the season. Having Jaxon back up front is huge for our team and completely changes the look of our lineup."

Campbell was equally encouraged by the performances of Lyons, Stump, and Boggs.

"Keenan and Jack continue to be consistent and reliable. I loved seeing both of them finish in the top 25 percent of the field. Stump also had a very good race, certainly his best of the season. He's starting to get fit, and I really believe he could be a difference-maker for us down the stretch."

The race also provided a special moment for several of Warsaw's seniors.

"It was neat having Owen Meerzo, Grayson Waldo, Ben Mort, Nicolas Balbuena-Kline, and Kevin Gough competing in the same race together one last time," Campbell said. "These guys have invested a lot into our program, and it was great seeing them have that opportunity."

Young Tigers Capture Freshman/Sophomore Championship

Perhaps the biggest highlight of the day came in the freshman/sophomore race, where Warsaw captured the team championship with 36 points, finishing ahead of runner-up Penn, which scored 47. The Tigers topped a field of 16 teams.

Sophomore Luke Vander Bie claimed the individual championship, while classmate Eli Swinehart finished runner-up, giving Warsaw a 1-2 finish.

Freshman Jadon Flamm placed eighth, followed by freshman Brady Dewey in 11th, sophomore Logan Martin in 14th, freshman Alek Lantz in 16th, and sophomore Rushabh Gorhe in 31st.

"What a fun race to witness," Campbell said. "Luke and Eli stayed patient through the first kilometer, then took control of the race the rest of the way. We love seeing a Warsaw jersey up front, but seeing two is even cooler."

Campbell praised Vander Bie's confidence and Swinehart's patience throughout the race.

"Luke is really starting to get this figured out. He looked strong, confident, and determined. He wasn't going to lose that race. Eli didn't match Luke's move, but he ran a smart, controlled race and held off a strong opponent to secure the runner-up finish. I think either one of those boys could have won today. Luke just had that extra gear."

Beyond their performances on the course, Campbell pointed to the work ethic and leadership both sophomores have demonstrated.

"These two are fun to coach. They get their work done in the classroom, and they get their work done at practice. They're motivated, committed, and genuinely enjoy competing. What a great moment for both of them. Hopefully, this gives them another boost of confidence heading into the postseason."

Warsaw's strong freshman class also played a major role in securing the championship, with Flamm, Dewey, and Lantz all finishing among the top 16.

"Flamm and Dewey remind me a lot of Luke and Eli," Campbell said. "They have a great bond, they push each other, and they're connecting really well with our team. Lantz is beginning to realize just how good he can be. He's continued to perform well, and I'd love to see him run with our varsity group more consistently. He has another gear. We just need to find that consistency. He's someone who can become one of our guys in the coming years."

Campbell also highlighted the development of Martin, a first-year cross country runner who played football as a freshman.

"Logan has been a huge addition to our program. He's an absolute workhorse. For someone who had never run cross country before this season, he isn't afraid to mix it up with our top guys. It's only a matter of time before he takes a huge leap. He's going to be a difference-maker for this program down the road."

The championship offered another glimpse of the young talent developing within the Warsaw program.

"These guys are exciting to watch," Campbell said. "They're learning how to compete, they're building confidence, and they're doing it together. We're excited about what they can accomplish over the next few weeks, but we're just as excited about what this group can become over the next several years."

Reserve Runners Continue to Develop

In the reserve race, freshman Henry Schotter led the Tigers, followed by freshman Ben Maile, sophomore Keaton Kuhn, freshman Chris Sanchez, freshman Roosevelt Hoffert, freshman Abner Boren, and freshman Teo Petre.

Campbell emphasized the importance of continued development among Warsaw's younger runners.

"We have a lot of guys in this group who you could see representing us at the varsity level down the road," Campbell said. "Our hope is that they continue to invest in themselves, stay consistent, and trust the process. Every one of these guys is capable of making significant jumps. It's just a matter of continuing to put in the work."

Tigers Encouraged by Performance Heading Into October

While the Culver course produced slower times than many athletes have run this season, Campbell was pleased with the overall performances.

"Times might not jump off the page when you look at the results, but for whatever reason, this course tends to run slow," Campbell explained. "A lot of the frontrunners were 30 to 45 seconds off what they normally run. The grass isn't always cut the shortest, and there are quite a few turns. But you certainly can't beat the view of racing along the lakefront."

Despite splitting the roster, Warsaw remained competitive in the varsity standings. Campbell noted that adding just one of the Tigers' top five freshman/sophomore runners to the varsity lineup would have moved Warsaw from seventh to fourth in the team standings.

"Overall, I thought our varsity ran great," Campbell said. "Finishing seventh was encouraging, especially knowing that plugging just one of our top five guys from the freshman/sophomore race into that lineup would have moved us up to fourth. Our younger guys ran lights out, and that has us excited about what this team can accomplish."

With the postseason approaching, Campbell also discussed the competition Warsaw expects to face at the regional level, particularly Oak Hill and Fort Wayne Bishop Dwenger.

"Oak Hill and Bishop Dwenger are two teams we're going to have to compete with come postseason," Campbell said. "Oak Hill has two really strong frontrunners, including one of the top freshmen in the nation. They finished fifth today, but when you combine our varsity and freshman/sophomore results, we would have finished ahead of them."

Campbell recognizes the challenge that lies ahead.

"Oak Hill is well coached, and they're going to be ready when regional week comes around. Bishop Dwenger also ran well at New Haven today. We know what we're up against. We have to continue plugging away, and our strength is going to have to come from our pack. We need to overcome some of that strong front-running with five guys working together."

With the Northern Lakes Conference Championships on the horizon, Campbell stressed that the Tigers will continue to focus on the bigger picture.

"We're excited about where we're at, but we know there's still a lot of work to do," Campbell said. "Even with the NLC Championships coming up this week, we're going to continue taking things one day at a time. We're playing the long game. We want to be running our best when it matters most in October."

Nine Tigers Establish Personal Records

Despite the challenging course, nine Warsaw athletes established new personal records at Culver:

- Rushabh Gorhe
- Henry Schotter
- Keaton Kuhn
- Chris Sanchez
- Johnathan Shoue
- Kevin Gough
- Gavin Mort
- Luke Macke
- Jitheash Nithyanandhi

The Tigers will now turn their attention to the Northern Lakes Conference Championships as they continue preparing for the IHSAA postseason.