

Tigers Place Third at NLC Championships, Show Major Growth Heading Into Postseason



The Warsaw boys cross country team closed out the regular season with a strong performance at the Northern Lakes Conference Championships, placing third overall after finishing fifth at both NLC Super Dual meets earlier in the season. Northridge captured the overall championship with 39 points, followed by Wawasee with 73. Warsaw finished third with 91 points, followed by NorthWood in fourth with 104, Mishawaka fifth with 110, Goshen sixth with 110, Plymouth seventh with 200, and Concord eighth with 221.

Leading the way for the Tigers was senior Jaxon Lehman, who placed 10th overall with a personal-record time of 16:43. Sophomore Luke Vander Bie finished 16th in a personal-best 16:53, while senior Nolan Stump placed 20th with a lifetime-best 17:05. Sophomore Eli Swinehart followed in 22nd at 17:06, and junior Keenan Lyons placed 23rd in 17:12.

Rounding out Warsaw's top seven were senior Jack Boggs, who finished 28th in 17:25, and freshman Jadon Flamm, who placed 32nd in 17:34. "What a race. The NLC is stacked," Warsaw head coach Matt Campbell said. "This is the deepest I've seen the boys side of the NLC since I've been coaching. Six teams had their top five average 17:06 or better. I thought we ran awesome today. We averaged 17:00 and had our top five within 29 seconds of one another. That was a really good showing."

Campbell was particularly pleased with the Tigers' ability to run as a pack despite not having a traditional frontrunner throughout much of the season. "We are doing this without a true frontrunner, but today we had a big-time performance from Jaxon Lehman that gave us a nice low stick," Campbell said. "Lehman had a huge day, placing 10th with a new personal record. Luke Vander Bie also ran a new PR, and Nolan Stump running a lifetime best was huge for us.

"Keenan and Eli were very solid today, both running top-three lifetime performances. Even with them being a little off, that was still solid. We don't always need to be lights out. If you can consistently keep throwing down top-three times, that's a good thing for the team. I'm proud of all those guys. Jack Boggs and Jadon Flamm also put together top-three lifetime performances."

The Tigers' improvement from a year ago was especially evident when comparing the two NLC Championship races. Warsaw's top seven at last year's meet ran 15:31, 17:20, 17:31, 17:55, 18:12, 18:15, and 18:43. This year, including the JV race, six Tigers ran faster than Warsaw's No. 2 runner from a year ago.

Lehman improved from 17:20 to 16:43, Vander Bie from 19:44 to 16:53, Stump from 17:31 to 17:05, Swinehart from 18:21 to 17:06, Lyons from 18:24 to 17:12, and Boggs from 17:55 to 17:25.

“What a testament to the work these guys are pouring into it,” Campbell said. “We are excited for the postseason, and we hope all of these NLC teams experience success at the Regional level and beyond.”

Dewey Wins JV Championship

Warsaw also placed third in the JV race, finishing behind Northridge and Goshen.

Freshman Brady Dewey delivered one of the biggest breakout performances of the day, winning the individual JV championship by 25 seconds with a personal-record time of 17:15.



"I'll admit, I was ripping into Dewey after his first K," Campbell said. "He was way back, but he came back and negative split that race. He went crazy during the second half, just picking people off."

"I'd still like to see him get out stronger because I think he easily has another 10 to 15 seconds in him, but you can't be upset with the mental strength he showed to bring that race home. He is fit. He just made my tournament roster decisions super difficult, which is a great problem to have. I loved the way he raced."

Sophomore Logan Martin also earned a spot on the podium, placing fourth overall in a personal-record 17:53 during his first season of cross country. "Last year at this time, Logan was wearing football pads," Campbell said. "This year, he is making our competitive tournament roster. What a dude."

Rounding out Warsaw's top seven in the JV race were senior Owen Meerzo in 19th at 18:38, senior Ben Mort in 20th at 18:38, sophomore Rushabh Gorhe in 21st at 18:43, freshman Henry Schotter in 22nd at 18:44, and senior Grayson Waldo in 26th at 18:52.

Meerzo recorded a season-best performance, while Mort and Gorhe each set new personal records. Schotter's 18:44 earned the freshman his varsity letter by breaking the program's 19-minute standard, while Waldo also recorded a season-best time.

The personal records continued throughout Warsaw's JV lineup. Freshmen Chris Sanchez, Teo Petre, Colin Meerzo, Scotty Lyons, Dean Hamstra, Isaiah Powers, Gavin Mort, Luke Macke, and Parker Leeuw all recorded new PRs. Junior Owen Aukeman, sophomore Johnathan Shoue, junior Braden Goshert, and senior Kevin Gough also turned in career-best performances.

For Campbell, one performance in particular represented what the program hopes to be about. “I can’t finish this write-up without highlighting Kevin Gough’s career at the NLC Championships,” Campbell said. “His freshman year he ran 28:47. His sophomore year, 27:12. His junior year, 24:25. Now, as a senior, he ran 20:48.

“I think all coaches are competitive, and you want to compete at the highest level. Sometimes coaching can be frustrating because you’ll get athletes who may have ability but just don’t want to put in the effort. We’ll take anybody and everybody in our program. We just want to see every individual on this team give their best effort.

“Without a doubt, we are proud we got the opportunity to coach Kevin. Running did not come naturally to him when he first came out. He struggled to break 30 minutes for most of his freshman year, but every year he has shown up. He’s been a leader, and he’s busted his butt. To finish his career at the NLC Championships running 20:48 is simply amazing. We are going to miss him.

“Kevin is a kid I’ll be talking about a lot to future runners. His story is a perfect example of what can happen when you keep showing up, keep working, and refuse to quit. What a legacy to leave.”
