

Monday, September 18, 2006

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Former Walton standout Sam Bryfczynski competes during the Clemson Invitational on Sept. 2. Bryfczynski won the race and, as a result, was named the ACC s top cross country runner that week.

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By Greg Oshust

Marietta Daily Journal Sports Writer

Sam Bryfczynski was used to winning cross country races during his outstanding high school career at Walton, where he won both a state title and a region crown as a senior in 2004.

It appears the Bryfczynski is returning to his winning ways on the collegiate level as the Clemson sophomore claimed the first victory of his young college career at the season-opening Clemson Invitational on Sept. 2.

As a result, Bryfczynski was named the Cross Country Runner of the Week by the Atlantic Coast Conference last week.

For Bryfczynski, the win and the subsequent award were both a surprise to him.

"It definitely was a good way to start the season, but it was quite a bit surprising," Bryfczynski said. "It wasn't that big of a meet, it was supposed to be more of a good training run, so (winning an award) was the last thing on my mind."

Bryfczynski won the men's title in the four-team Clemson Invitational with a time of 25:54.30 on the 8K (5 miles) course, edging out runner-up Bryce Iverson (26:01.7).

"I was running with a couple of teammates and we took turns in taking the lead," Bryfczynski said. "With over a mile to go, I pulled in front and the guys in my pack didn't stay with me, so I kept pushing."

The win in the Clemson Invitational showed that Bryfczynski has come a long way since a freshman season last year that he spent mainly getting used to the increased competitive level and training demands of NCAA Division I cross country and track.

Bryfczynski not only had to adjust to a dramatically higher level of training mileage, but to a longer race distance as he moved from the high school 5K (3.1 miles) distance to the 8K distance of most college races.

"In my senior year of high school, I averaged 55 miles a week, but my first year in college, I was running 75 miles a week, which is a pretty big increase in one year and it took a lot out of me," Bryfczynski said. "I was training for an 8K distance instead of the usual 5K distance I was used to in high school, so I was doing longer training runs."

Exhausted from the increased training he did during the cross country season, Bryfczynski cut short his track and field season in the spring, competing in only two meets for Clemson.

However, Bryfczynski did show flashes of the promise last year as a freshman that he displayed on the high school level, finishing 55th at the ACC Championships with a 8K personal best of 25:29.2 and a 178th-place finish at the Pre-NCAA meet (26:03).

"(The ACC meet) was definitely a strong race," Bryfczynski said. "A goal that I set for the season was to run 25:30 and I was able to achieve that goal at the ACC meet. It was definitely the highlight of my season."

Admitting he wasn't fully prepared for the rigors of college cross country and track as a freshman last year, Bryfczynski made sure he would be much better prepared for his sophomore with a rigorous summer training program.

"I've put in more mileage that I've ever done this summer," Bryfczynski said. "I put in 70-80 miles a week, so I've built up some good base mileage."

Clemson track and cross country coach Bob Pollock is encouraged by the progress Bryfczynski has made since arriving at Clemson last year.

"From his freshman year to his sophomore year, he's shown great improvement," Pollock said. "I'm extremely happy for him with his first collegiate victory last weekend. He worked hard this summer and came back in great shape. He possesses great leadership qualities as well. I believe the hard work and effort has immediately translated to success and hopefully it will continue to do so throughout the year. He is much more prepared for this season than he was a year ago as a freshman."

With a year of college competition under his belt, Bryfczynski is now ready his performance to the next level, as he aims for the spot in the NCAA Southeast Regionals that he narrowly missed last year, as well as a spot in the NCAA national meet.

"I want to run a sub-25 flat," Bryfczynski said. I finished eighth on my team at the ACC meet, so I missed out on qualifying for the regionals. I think I can improve on that this year and make it to regionals and hopefully to nationals."

goshust@mdjonline.com



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