

Shank wins district pole vault; Hoelter, 4x8 relay also advance

By Kevin Gordon

OAK HARBOR — Cullen Shank wasn't exactly thrilled with his performance Thursday night.

But the Eastwood High School track and field sophomore wasn't going to turn down his district championship in the pole vault.

Shank cleared 13-0 to finish first in his specialty and junior teammate Hayden Hoelter jumped 12-6 for fourth place in the same event.

Shank and Hoelter both qualified for next week's Division II regional at Lexington High School, near Mansfield, by finishing in the top four during the first day of the district meet at Oak Harbor High School.

They'll be joined at the regional by the Eagles' 4x800 relay team of Austin Miller, Henry Howard, Ben Buehler and A.J. O'Brien, which finished third.

The top eight finishers in each event at the district scored points for their team.

The finals of the 4x800 relay, long jump and shot put were held Thursday, along with the preliminaries of the 100, 200, 400, 110 hurdles, 300 hurdles, and the 4x100, 4x200 and 4x400 relays.

The district concludes Saturday with the remainder of the field events at 10:30 a.m. and the running finals at noon.

"It was a solid day, but we faced some really, really good competition," Eastwood head coach Brian Sabo said. "We stayed consistent. We gave effort and good things happened. Everybody wanted it."

Shank, Hoelter finish 1-4 in pole vault

Shank earned a regional berth for the second straight season by clearing 13-0, edging Clyde senior Lance Laughlin and Oak Harbor freshman Ayden Gaskalla, who tied for second place at 12-6.

"I'm not too happy, but I still won," Shank said. "I'll take a victory when I can. The big positive from today is I'm vaulting next week. I just need to work on my technique."

Shank entered the district meet as the No. 1 seed, based on his best regular-season jump of 14-1. The jump of 14-1 is sixth-best in Eastwood history.

"My goals today were to get to next week and try to win," Shank said. "I accomplished both of my goals, but I didn't jump as well as I should have. I was nervous and in my own head a bit. I was too worried about getting over the bar, instead of just getting back in line and getting ready to vault again."

Shank finished 13th in the regional last season, clearing 13-6.

"That's made me more comfortable this season," Shank said of last season's regional experience. "I've been here before, and I've been in this position before. I knew what to expect."

Hoelter matched his PR of 12-6 to finish fourth Thursday.

"Today was tough because I took a few more attempts than usual, but I'm glad I qualified for the regional," Hoelter said. "That was my goal. I matched my PR, so I'm happy with that. Now, I'm looking to keep on improving next week."

Hoelter was tied for third in the district seeding.

"I loved how (Hoelter) jumped," Shank said. "He jumped really well. "I'm glad he moved on with me. He deserves it because he's had a really good season. He's dialed in on his form and putting everything together."

"I knew I could qualify for regionals," Hoelter said. "It was just a matter of putting a plan into action."

4x800 relay finishes third

The 4x800 team of Miller, Howard, Buehler and O'Brien ran a brilliant race, posting a season-best time of 8:20.33 — blistering its previous best of 8:30.14 at the Oak Harbor Invitational May 3.

The relay is the first running event of the meet, and the team's sizzling time energized the Eagles' entire team and coaches.

"We've been aiming for this time all season," Miller said. "I'm really glad we finally hit it here, and we have an opportunity to break it again at the regional."

Miller, Howard, Buehler and O'Brien all ran PR splits on one of the best weather days of the season. The meet was held under sunny skies with temperatures in the lows 70s and little wind.

"We all wanted to give that kind of effort," Buehler said. "Everybody took it out really hard. Everyone was in the right mindset to do that. Our goal was to make to regionals, so we could run together one more week."

The Eagles were in the top four most of the race, and were even leading the race on the sixth lap of the eight-lap race.

"That was awesome, seeing us in first place," O'Brien said. "This is amazing. I thought it would be a fight just to get to the regional, but we actually were in first place. We did what we had to do which was make it to regionals. That's all we wanted to do. I'm so happy. We were all shooting to go out hard and run a PR. We totally did that."

Clyde won the race in 8:11.87, while Oak Harbor was second in 8:18.64. After the Eagles, Lake was fourth in 8:21.95 and Toledo Rogers was fifth in 8:37.62.

"I didn't know if I could catch the guys ahead of me, but I tried, and there was no way I was going to let anyone pass me," said O'Brien, who also is a two-time state qualifier in swimming.

Eastwood was seeded fifth for the district with its 8:30.14 time, but the Eagles still are headed to the regional.

"They laid it on the line," said Eagle assistant coach T.J. Tuttamore, who works with the team's distance runners. "They got out hard like we asked them to do, be competitive and run our own race."

"They did exactly what we asked of them ... to take it out hard, and they did," Sabo said. "They responded against some great competition."

The four ran consecutive races of 8:41.70, 8:42.60 and 8:42.78 during the second half of the season before lowering their best to 8:30.14 and again Thursday night to 8:20.33. The team also ran a time of 8:45.11 for third place in the Northern Buckeye Conference Championships.

"They've learned how to run the race," Tuttamore said. "The 800 is a tough race to learn. They're doing the things you need to do early in the race and that's huge. They've gotten their legs back. They've put in a lot of hard work. Now, it's time to show the fruits of that, and they're comfortable with going out hard. They know they can do it."

An even faster time at the regional could put the Eagles on the school's all-time Top 10 list. A time of 8:12.04 is needed to earn a spot in the Top 10, and the Eagles are within eight seconds of that.

Eastwood hasn't had a 4x800 team earn a spot on the Top 10 since 2018.

"We're running for each other," Miller said. "Obviously, we want to run well for ourselves. But the idea of being able to run together a little longer is amazing. It's hard to tell how much faster we can go, but we definitely can run faster. We'll give it all we have next week."

"They definitely have more left in the tank. They can still drop even more time," Tuttamore said.

District placers

Eastwood athletes who placed in the regional by finishing in the top eight were:

- Long jump: 5) junior Kevin Lewis, 20-9; 6) junior Dayquan Oliver, 20-7.
- Shot put: 5) senior Ian Sibbersen, 47-7½; 7) sophomore Hunter Lauer, 44-7¾.

District finalists

Eastwood athletes who advanced to the district finals were (the eight fastest times in each event qualified, regardless of heat):

- 100: 7) senior Caleb Souder, 11.54; 8) senior Kaiden Sanchez, 11.56.
- 200: 6) Sanchez, 23.38.
- 400: 1) Oliver, 50.19.
- 110 hurdles: 4) junior Jesse Poiry, 15.79.
- 300 hurdles: 4) junior Andre Lewis, 42.01; 6) Poiry, 43.15.
- 4x100 relay: 2) team of Andre Lewis, Oliver, Sanchez and Kevin Lewis, 43.61.
- 4x400 relay: 5) Andre Lewis, Oliver, Kevin Lewis and Poiry, 3:33.98.

OAK HARBOR DISTRICT INFORMATION

<https://oh.milesplit.com/meets/607611-ohsaa-division-2-district-oak-harbor-2024>

OAK HARBOR DISTRICT RESULTS

<https://www.baumspace.com/tf/nw/2012/oakharbor/2024/Results.htm>

LEXINGTON REGIONAL INFORMATION

<https://oh.milesplit.com/meets/568342-ohsaa-division-2-region-6-lexington-2024>