

Girls are striving for even more success



All Photo Credits: Danielle DeFalco Athlete: Mikayla Hoelter

By Kevin Gordon

LUCKEY — There's plenty to like regarding Eastwood High School's girls track and field team this season.

The Eagles have talent and depth. They have quality leadership. They work hard. And the athletes are developing excellent team chemistry.

Eastwood has 50 athletes preparing for the team's first dual meet of the season March 29 at Oak Harbor.

"It's gone very well," Eastwood coach Nikki Sabo said of the team's early practices. "There's always going to be teaching and explanations that need to be done at the beginning of the year. It's nice we have three grades who are veterans this year."

The Eagles have the benefit of being two seasons removed from the COVID-canceled 2020 season.

The senior, junior and sophomore classes all have had at least one season of varsity competition, and the freshmen class had an eighth-grade season.

Seniors Aubrey Haas, Mikayla Hoelter, Ava Kiefer, Maisy Stevenson and Addie Young; and juniors Emma Downs and Julia Sabo are Eastwood's captains.

"The start of the year doesn't seem so overwhelming with having to teach everything," Sabo said. "You have a lot of athletes who are serving as role models, examples, who also are explaining how certain techniques need to be done or being able to show a certain technique. I feel we are ahead of where we were a year ago, and that's very nice." Eastwood has a strong senior class, completed by Megan Graham and Marina King. The seniors didn't have a sophomore season because of COVID.

"Our senior class is very small, but they're a good class of seven, that's for sure," said Sabo, who is in her 14th season. "They were the glue that held this all together over the course of the last two years. They had their freshmen season. Most competed at the regional as freshmen. All of them competed in the conference meet. They were able to bring that experience, that confidence to the entire team last year. They've been the group which has helped hold this team together through the adversity of a COVID year.

"They brought leadership last year, and they're bringing leadership this year," Sabo added. "They're continuing traditions that have been going on for numerous years. They've held this program together, there's no other way to put it."

The seniors also are successfully academically, and have a grade-point average of approximately 4.5, Sabo said.

"They're great role models within our sport and outside of our sport," Sabo said. "Many are involved in numerous extracurriculars. They're great all-around kids. They're fun. They're positive. They're energetic. They're fun to be around. It's definitely a class I'm going to miss. I'm glad we have them for another season."

Eastwood's roster consists of seven seniors, 11 juniors, 16 sophomores and 16 freshmen.



Maisy Stevenson

“They interact very well with each other,” Sabo said. “Many have been teammates between soccer, basketball and track, between cross country and track. A lot of them have been around each other in a previous sport. It’s nice to see that blend. There’s already a chemistry between them.”

The Eagles are striving to win their 21st straight conference championship, spanning the Suburban Lakes League and the Northern Buckeye Conference. Eastwood won the final 11 SLL championships and has earned all nine championships in the NBC.

Eastwood returns 128 of the 149 individual points it scored in the NBC meet last season, and returns 13 of its 16 relay members. The Eagles return 14 athletes who scored in last season’s conference meet.

“It’s going to be tough,” Sabo said of the NBC. “It’s going to be a challenge. It is every year. Every team improves. Our conference is improving across the board. We have a lot of conference coaches who care about the sport of track and field, and they’re getting better. It’s going to be a challenge, just like every year. It’ll be a puzzle we’ll put together, and we’ll give it our best effort come May 14 and see what happens.”

The Eagles return individual NBC champions Kiefer in the shot put, Hoelter in the long jump, Sabo in the pole vault, and Haas in the 300 hurdles. The winning 4x100 relay team of sophomore Saylor King, Sabo, Downs and sophomore Reilly Might also returns; as does the first-place 4x400 team of Hoelter, sophomore Amelia Ward, Haas and Stevenson.

Other NBC scorers returning are:

- Shot put: junior Olivia Newsome, fifth.
- High jump: Stevenson, fourth; and Hoelter, fifth.
- 100 hurdles: Haas, second; and Might, fifth.
- 100: Sabo, second; and Downs, third.
- 1,600: Baum, third; and sophomore Haley Sponaugle, fourth.
- 400: Hoelter, third; and Stevenson, fourth.
- 800: Ward, second.
- 200: Downs, fourth; and Julia Sabo, sixth.
- 3,200: Sponaugle, third; and sophomore Z Ramsey, fourth.

Also in the relays, junior Talia Baum and Ward return from the 4x800 team which was second; and Stevenson, sophomore Lila Kiefer and King return from the 4x200 which was third.

“We have good competition across the board, and that only helps make the team better,” Sabo said. “When you’re pushing each other every day in practice, people are going to rise to that challenge. When they do that, it makes themselves better, and it makes our team better. That’s what we want.”



Addie Young

Eastwood has approximately 10 team goals this season, covering its dual meets, weekend invitationals, the conference and then the district, regional and state meets. The team goals are decided by the athletes, who also have individual goals.

“We’ve talked about team goals, and we’ll dive into individual goals,” Sabo said. “As the coach you need to support all of the goals of each athlete and realize they’re going to be different. Everyone has a different reason for being a part of the team and as a coaching staff we will support what they’re trying to accomplish,” Sabo added. “With having such a large coaching staff, we’ve been able to help the athletes do that and give them the attention and encourage them to go after the goals they’ve set for themselves. Then, collectively, it makes the success of the team.”

One team goal Sabo was most proud of was the athletes wanting to maintain “a positive and encouraging atmosphere.”

“That’s awesome. That’s one of their main goals,” Sabo said. “That makes you feel good as a coach because that’s what it’s about. To have a fun, uplifting, encouraging environment for all and when the athletes come up with that, that’s pretty cool.”

Julia Sabo tied for fourth in the pole vault at last season’s Division II state outdoor meet after a second-place tie at the regional.

Eastwood’s other returning individual regional qualifiers last season were: Baum, 800; Haas, 100 hurdles, 300 hurdles; and Kiefer, shot put.

Also from last season’s regional are Baum, Ward and Stevenson in the 4x800 relay; Saylor King, Downs, Hoelter, Sabo and Stevenson in the 4x200 relay; and Hoelter, Haas, Stevenson and Ward in the 4x400 relay.

“We have a lot of experience coming back,” Nikki Sabo said. “A lot of people who have competed in the regional meet and who experienced districts last year and they know what to expect at those meets. They can take that confidence and experience into this upcoming season.”