

MileSplit Ohio to stream Eastwood Relays live



By Kevin Gordon

MileSplit Ohio will stream the Eastwood Relays live Friday night.

MileSplit Ohio is one of the best web sites for track and field coverage. In addition to the streaming and coverage of meets, the site has results, meet registration, and state and national rankings of individual athletes.

The results of this year's district, regional and state meets will be posted on MileSplit, instead of Baumspage.com, Eastwood boys head coach Brian Sabo said. MileSplit recently became a corporate partner of the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

This year's relays will have 13 schools. Joining Eastwood are: Anthony Wayne, Bowling Green, Cardinal Stritch, Clay, Findlay, Liberty-Benton, Napoleon, Northview, Rogers, Southview, Start and Whitmer.

"I reached out to them, and they got it to work out," Sabo said, adding MileSplit does not charge a fee to Eastwood to stream the meet. "I sent them some information about what we do, and they said they'd come. They think it's a good meet to cover, maybe they come back next year. How do you know if you don't ask?"

"Their web site is growing. It's a great place to go out check track and field results. I've always wanted to showcase the kids in this meet. It means a lot that they're coming. Hopefully, we do a good job of running the meet, and they think it's something special or different because they cover some great meets. We have great talent coming in here this year, including some state champions."

Additional changes

The order of events has changed, and the running events will start at approximately 5:15 p.m. Sabo hopes this allows the meet to be over much sooner than it has been in the past, adding he thinks will be finished by 9 p.m.

The running events traditionally have started at 5:30 p.m., with the field events at 4:15 p.m. — 15 minutes earlier than in the past. The distance medley relay (800-400-1,200-1,600) will become the first event.

After the DMR, the first two running events are the 4x100 and the 1,600 sprint medley (200-200-400-800).

“Liberty-Benton did a really good job when they had their 4x1,600 first, other field events can be going on,” Sabo said. “There’s not many kids who run the DMR and do a field event. With the DMR first, you can get the running events going a little sooner and field events can continue on, and then the 4x100 about the same time, 5:30, but you’ve already gotten a 30-minute race done.”

The meet also will try to use all four throwing rings (two shot put, two discus) at the same time. Four rings will help ensure the throws, which include the hammer throw, would be completed before dark. The hammer starts when a ring becomes available.

The meet also utilizes two pole vault and two high jump pits.



A tradition unlike any other

The relays are popular within the program and the track and field community because of the great competition offered, and the amenities and atmosphere offered to everyone associated with the meet.

“It’ll be exciting and fun,” Eagle girls head coach Nikki Sabo said. “We’re really looking forward to it.

“We’ve opened it up and invited more teams over the years,” Brian

Sabo said. “That was one of my goals a while back. I felt if we had the facilities, we could open it up to a few more teams.”

The weather forecast for Friday, according to The Weather Channel, calls for a chance of rain with a high of 61 degrees and a low of 51, and 10-15 mile per hour winds.

“Something out of my control is almost the most important thing,” Brian Sabo said. “It’s the one thing I stress out about more than anything else.”

‘An unbelievable experience’

Brian Sabo’s goal for the meet is to “create an unbelievable experience” for the athletes with the great competition, the great amenities and the great atmosphere. Many of the amenities are aren’t featured during dual/tri meets, or during other large invitationals.

“We want to create an unbelievable experience for the kids, and we want to make it like the state meet for the kids who won’t necessarily qualify for the state meet and just not for our kids,” Brian Sabo said. “It happens to be at our place. We try to do a lot of special things that everyone benefits from, but mainly for our kids. Other teams are here, too, so they get to benefit, and that’s great.”

“We really pride ourselves on making this a great event for everyone,” Brian Sabo added. “We try to make it a celebration of track for everyone involved ... the athletes, the coaches, the fans, the officials and our entire community. We’re lucky to have a lot of people who help us with putting on the event.”

The meet crowns a total program champion, determined by combining each school’s boys and girls points. The champion and runner-up will receive an Eastwood Relays banner. The combined championship started in 2018. The meet then was canceled in

2019 because of inclement weather and 2020 because of COVID, and then returned last year.

“We really have a combined program, and there are a lot of schools that have a combined program,” Brian Sabo said. “I thought it would be cool to have a combined championship, something different and something to bring some camaraderie between the guys and the girls teams. I thought our kids would really like it, and there are other programs who take a lot of pride in having a combined program.”

Amenities

All coaches and athletes on the championship and runner-up teams will receive medals, and the top five individuals in each event will receive medals. The top five finishers in each event will score points for their team.

“We’ve had some great, great events, and the fourth- and fifth-place finishers have run a great time and not placed,” Brian Sabo said. “Now, they’re rewarded. For another \$100, \$200, what’s another medal? I like hearing the kids medal clank around as the meet goes on. That’s really cool.”

For the fifth time, Jesse Squire, a Bowling Green State University graduate and announcer at area high school and college meets, will interview event winners in the mix/media zone. The interviews will be streamed live on a web site to be determined. The top five finishers in each event will receive their medals and have their picture taken on an awards stand. At many invitationals, the awards are placed in a brown paper or plastic grocery bag and handed to the coach after the meet to distribute.

“They put a lot of effort into making the athletes feel appreciated and special. That’s a big, big deal,” said Squire, a BGSU track and field teammate of Brian and Nikki Sabo. “Any time you can make the athletes feel like they are being treated very well, that their efforts are appreciated, that goes a long way. Even just a little bit of that will keep kids motivated for a long time. When athletes are excited, it shows.”

The extras also can help a meet when the weather isn’t perfect.

“Even on a night when it can be cold and wet, instead of thinking I can’t wait to get home and get out of this (weather) and get dry clothes on, you’re thinking I can’t wait to get back here next year and do this all again,” Squire said.

Bringing a meet alive

Among the other extras at the meet:

- The Eastwood facility has a timing board near the finish line, and performance boards at most field events. Jumbo lane markers are used at the starting line.
- The athletes are promoted at the start of each event.

The coaches are asked in advance to provide information about who their top athletes are and what their accomplishments are. Public address announcer Mike Godfrey then reads that information when he introduces each event.

“We’ve come to realize most fans want a lot of information about what is going on,” Sabo added. “Just getting information to the fans really brings a meet alive, and we want to recognize the athletes from every school.”

- Sabo is hoping to have baskets at the starting line for the athletes to put their warmups and other belongings. Meet workers then take those baskets to the finish line for the athletes.

“We’ll see if we have the people do that,” Sabo said.

- Seated events (shot put, 100, 400 and 800) have been held in the past, But as of Tuesday morning, Brian Sabo said he hasn’t been contacted by any seated runners who wish to compete Friday.

The seated events were added in 2016. Many meets don’t have any seated events. And some that do have just one athlete from the host school. Although Eastwood has no seated athletes, the meet often has multiple competitors in each event. Those athletes usually are from different areas of the state, not just Eastwood and its surrounding area. Sabo said he’s willing to have seated events if he’s contacted by those athletes this week. The relays use Fully Automatic Timing, which is required for qualifying for seated events at the state meet.

- Live results of the meet will be available on the Internet through www.baumspage.com.

- Officials will receive gift cards again this year as an additional appreciation to those who work the meet.



Eagles assist as workers

The Eastwood athletes who don’t compete in the relays will serve as meet workers.

“They help make the atmosphere what it is, and their help is so greatly appreciated,” Nikki Sabo said. “They’ll do jobs they’ve never done before to give it that big meet feel with our lane markers and things like that. Their help is very beneficial, and we hope they enjoy being out there and supporting their teammates in two roles.”

The Eagle coaches and athletes also help run Eastwood Middle School’s home meets. The middle school coaches and athletes assist with running of the home varsity meets.

Getting the meet ready

The Eastwood coaching staff has been busy the last two weeks, giving Jerry Rutherford Stadium at Freedom Field an overall sprucing up. In between the projects, they’ve coached their teams. Eastwood has 50 girls and 57 boys on its roster.

And the athletes appreciate the big-time environment and the amenities.

“It makes you run better,” Eastwood junior Emma Downs said. “It’s great competition. You get to see schools we don’t always see, The competition pushes us to get better and run PRs. The Eastwood Relays are really special. It makes you feel confident, worthy of something. It’s a big-meet atmosphere.”

“Every race, every field event is very competitive, and that brings out the best in everyone,” Eagle senior Jake Limes said. The completion pushes you to get better. You don’t always get those extras at a big meet, an invitational, so it makes you feel special.”

Not always a destination event

But the Eastwood Relays weren't always a destination event. The meet had dwindled to only five teams in 2009, the competition wasn't great and the extras were few.

"It wasn't a very good meet back then. We needed a change or it was going to get worse," Brian Sabo said.

The Eastwood coaching staff visited the U.S. track and field championships later that year. When they returned, the staff made a list everything they wanted to do to improve the Eastwood Relays. The Eagles have been crossing items off that list and adding to it ever since.

The Eastwood coaches use ideas they see at other high school meets, as well ideas they see at other college and pro events.

Now, the meet has a waiting list of schools that want to participate, including some schools that left because they weren't happy with the meet more than a decade ago.

Eastwood emailed many programs in Northwest Ohio to see if they were interested in coming.

The meet was moved up a week and to a Friday night, instead of the traditional Saturday afternoon.

"We emailed them and told them what we were going to do, and it's paid off," Brian Sabo said.

Sabo said the meet could expand to as many as 16 schools in the future.

"If it doesn't take up a lot more time, I could see the meet going to 16," Brian Sabo said.

"It depends on how the meet flows. Does it make the meet go on so much longer? I wanted to give it a shot. A 16-team meet brings in more money. It's grown and grown, and we want to keep making this meet better and better in any way we can."

Squire is a distance runner who came to BGSU after running cross country and track at DeVilbiss High School in Toledo.

"The meet is well organized," said Squire, who can be followed on Twitter at @tracksuperfan.