

Hesselbart, Kiefer, Newsome and Sabo ready for state meet

By Kevin Gordon

Dalton Hesselbart, Ava Kiefer, Olivia Newsome and Julia Sabo will represent Eastwood High School in the Division II state track and field championships this weekend.

Hesselbart and Sabo, both juniors, will compete in the pole vault, while Kiefer will compete in the shot put, and Newsome will compete in the discus. Kiefer is a senior, and Newsome is a junior.

The events for Newsome and Hesselbart are Friday morning at 9:30. Kiefer and Sabo compete Saturday morning at 9:30.

The state meet for all three divisions return to Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium for the first time since 2019. The 2020 state championships were canceled because of Covid, and last year's state meets were held separately at three high schools in suburban Columbus.

Following is a look at the Eagles' state qualifiers:



Dalton Hesselbart/Julia Sabo

Sabo is seeking a spot on the awards podium for the second straight season, and Hesselbart is aiming for the podium for the first time. The top eight finishers in each event at state are recognized on the podium and earn All-Ohio honors.

Sabo tied for fourth at state last season, and Hesselbart tied for 14th.

The best way to most likely earn a place on the podium is to PR, said Eastwood boys head coach Brian Sabo, who works with the vaulters in the boys and girls programs.

"You have to go there to PR, a PR gets you on the stand or higher on the stand, or at least you're going to leave there saying it was my best and this is where I fell," Brian Sabo said. "That's what counts the most.

"You go down there, get a PR, and you have to leave there happy, regardless," Brian Sabo added. "Usually, good things happen when you PR. If we go down and PR, we're going to be on the awards stand. How high, I'm not sure."

Julia Sabo's PR and Eastwood record came last season at state where she cleared 11-6. Her best this season is 11-0, a height she's cleared three times, most recently at last week's Lexington High School regional.

Hesselbart's best this season of 14-3 came at the Oak Harbor High School district meet. It also was the fifth-best vault in Eagle history. He jumped 13-0 at state last season.

"I'm looking for the mind-set to PR," Brian Sabo said. "Whether we do it or not, and we jump pretty well, I want the intent to PR. That means you're coming in pumped, you're coming in ready, I'm here to attack, and I'm here to PR. Wherever that places me, it places me. That's what I'm looking for.

"It's not a failure if we don't PR," Brian Sabo added. "To me, it's a failure if we didn't come in with the intent to PR. That is more important to me than the actual personal best. It's about them and the bar. Sure, it'd be nice to say if I clear this bar, I'm going to be a state champ. But the goal is to PR and wherever that places you, it places you."

Julia Sabo finished fourth in the regional, clearing 11-0 on her third and final attempt to clinch her berth at state. After clearing 11-0, she attempted 11-4.

"I want to keep getting better," Julia Sabo said. "I'm feeling more confident, now that I have a ticket to state. I can prepare better this week, and get done in practice the things I need to do to help me get over the higher bars. Tying my season best and attempting 11-4 at the regional helped my confidence.

"I know the things I need to fix, and that's what I'm working on in practice this week," Julia Sabo added. "Once I get there, I'll focus on me, and what I need to get done, and, hopefully, get on the podium again."

Julia Sabo is a two-time Division II-III state indoor qualifier, advancing in 2020 and earlier this year. The 2021 state indoor meet was canceled because of Covid.

"We want to clear bars," Brian Sabo said of Julia Sabo. "We want to clear 11-6 and give ourselves a chance. 11-6 would be a season best and tie our PR. I believe that will be on the awards stand. 11-10 will be on the awards stand.

Hesselbart also was an automatic state qualifier, beating Liberty-Benton freshman Stefan Kolan in a jumpoff — track and field's version of sudden-death overtime.

Hesselbart and Kolan were tied for fourth place at the regional after both missed all three attempts at 13-10. In the jumpoff, both received a fourth attempt at 13-10. Hesselbart made his attempt after Kolan went first and missed.

Both were credited with clearing 13-6 at the regional. Kolan eventually advanced to state as an at-large qualifier.

"(Hesselbart is) getting things dialed in," said Eastwood assistant coach Ethan Downey, who also works with the program's vaulters. "He's figuring out the technique, figuring out the 15-foot poles. There's a confidence there we didn't have last year.

"He's definitely a different jumper than he was last year," Downey added. "He's definitely taken more ownership of the vault. He recognizes when to change poles, what feels right. He's now communicating that back to us. He's owning the event, instead of asking what do I need to do? That's important."

Hesselbart, who said his goal this season was to clear 14-6 or 15-0, also qualified for the state indoor meet this year.

"I feel pretty good right now," Hesselbart said. "I'm jumping better than I did last year. I'm rotating the 15 pole the way I'm supposed to which should help me maximize my height. I'm more aware of what I'm doing when I'm jumping. I can tell what I'm doing wrong and what I need to do to fix it."

"Our best jump has us in the top eight," Brian Sabo said of Hesselbart. "We're jumping well, and there's more left in the tank; that's exciting."

Julia Sabo and Hesselbart are part of strong fields in their respective competitions. The best girls regional height was 12-0 by Westfall senior Peyton Proffitt, who was eighth at state last season. The next 14 vaulters cleared between 11-9 and 11-0, including seven at 11-0.

The best boys regional height was by Indian Valley senior David Adams, who jumped 16-1. He was fifth at state last season. Four others cleared at least 15-0, and five more cleared at least 14-0.

Eighteen vaulters will compete in both the girls and boys events.

"It's an honor for both of them to make it two years in a row, and that's important," Brian Sabo said. "That's a tough battle to get there. Now, it's another meet of competing and enjoying the sport of pole vaulting."



Ava Kiefer

Kiefer likes the way she's throwing as she heads to the state meet. She's been close to or over the 38-foot mark in each of the last five meets, including a season-best throw of 38-6½ May 8 at the Eastwood Throwers Invitational.

"I feel good where I'm at, but I'm trying to work on a few things technique wise because my throws lately have been a little bit lower in terms of distance," Kiefer said.

Even though Kiefer was an at-large state qualifier with her sixth-place finish with a throw of 38-1½ at Lexington, she ranks 11th among the state qualifiers, based on regional marks. The top regional throw was by defending state champion and Norton sophomore Morgan Hallett, who threw a regional record 47-6½ at

Lexington.

"I want to get a PR, but I haven't gotten close to that this season, yet," said Kiefer, whose PR of 39-1½ came last season. "I want to do my best. Seeing the other girls throw far makes me want to throw far. We all push each other to throw our best."

Like Hesselbart and Julia Sabo, Kiefer is no stranger to state meets. She competed in the state indoor meet in 2019, 2020 and 2022, qualifying in the weight throw and the shot put in 2020 and 2022, and the weight throw in 2019.

"She's thrown pretty consistently, and, hopefully, that continues this weekend," said Eagle assistant coach Tyler McCrory, who works with the throwers. "She looks good right now. We'd like to see her make the finals, stay consistent and get one of those 38-plus throws."

The 18 state qualifiers are divided into two flights. They'll receive three throws each during the preliminaries, with the top nine distances advancing to the finals. The top nine receive three more attempts in the finals in an attempt to improve their marks.

The top seven throwers during last week's regionals all threw 40-3½ or better.

"We'd like her to PR, and she wants to make the podium," said Eastwood assistant coach Whitney Recker, who also works with the throwers. "She's going to need a bomb to make the podium, so we're going to practice bombs all week. She's been wanting to break the 40-foot barrier. If she did that, she'd be thrilled."



Olivia Newsome

Newsome has thrown consistently well of late, posting a PR in four of her last five meets and hitting the 120-0 mark or better in the last three meets. She qualified for state with an at-large berth, throwing a PR of 125-7 for fifth place at Lexington.

Yet, Newsome ranks ninth among the 18 state qualifiers, based on their regional throws.

“I’m excited to compete this weekend,” Newsome said. “I’m not looking for first place or anything like that. Being there and experiencing the atmosphere, I’m excited, so maybe if I get back there next year, I’ll know what to expect. I’m going there to have fun.”

Hallett also had the best regional throw in the discus with a mark of 157-1, while defending state champion and Liberty-Benton senior Izzy Granger was second at 148-0. Hallett also broke the Lexington regional record in the discus and was third in the state meet last season.

Five of the top nine regional distances in the state came at Lexington, including four of the top six.

“There definitely will be some good throwers there, and that’ll be fun to watch,” Newsome said. “When you see other throwers do well, it definitely helps you do well because it pushes you to improve and throw even better.”

Newsome’s PR entering the season was 115-1, and it stands at 125-7 going into the state meet. She’s third on Eastwood’s all-time Top 10.

“The last month, that’s as well as I’ve thrown,” said Newsome, who has thrown 116-3, 117-5, 125-4, 121-4 and 125-7 in her last five meets. “I’ve been more consistent. Being consistent is helping my confidence because I know I can throw well.

“I focus on myself and what I have to do, not the other throwers,” Newsome added. “It’s more about bettering yourself from one meet to the next, and not focusing on what others are doing. I take care of myself and see what happens after that.”

But Newsome threw only 107-9 in the first two meets this season.

“Towards the beginning of the year, I was still kind of nervous, so I knew something needed to change,” Newsome said. “At that point, I decided I needed to go out there and do my best, and if nothing is great, that’s okay.

“I’ve been telling myself it’s all right if you don’t do well because last year I was so focused on doing well, and getting better every single meet,” Newsome added. “That ended up not happening. This year, I’ve been easier on myself and not put so much pressure on myself, and it’s paid off.”

The more relaxed approach is reaping huge dividends.

“I’m a lot calmer this year than I was last year,” Newsome said. “Last year, I was a mess when I showed up to meets. I got really nervous, and that affected my throws. This year, I’ve tried to calm my nerves when I get to meets, and it seems to be helping.”

Newsome also was a state indoor qualifier this year, competing in the weight throw and the shot.

“She’s a lot stronger and a lot more aggressive this year, that’s really helped her,” McCrory said.

“We’d like to see her PR again, that would be a really good state meet for her with the competition around her,” Recker said. “She’s been rising to the level of the competition the last few weeks, and it’s been fun to watch her.”

Information on the state meet, including tickets, parking, schedule of events, heat/flight assignments, results and streaming, can be found at:

<https://www.ohsaa.org/Sports-Tournaments/Track-Field/2022-State-Tournament-Coverage>