

Girls finish second at Whitmer; Sabo breaks pole vault record



By Kevin Gordon

TOLEDO — Eastwood High School's girls track and field team isn't fazed when it faces quality competition.

Instead, the Eagles embrace the challenge and thrive on it.

They won four events, finished second or third in nine other events, and Julia Sabo broke the school record in the pole vault en route to a second-place finish Friday in the seventh Gold W Invitational at Whitmer High School.

Eastwood totaled 123 points to

finish just two points behind champion Tiffin Columbian.

Whitmer was third in the eight-team meet with 96, followed by Clay 89, Springfield 71, Notre Dame 67, St. Ursula 52 and Bedford 43.

"We had a great night," Eastwood head coach Nikki Sabo said. "They competed. They had some great times and throws. We've never had this many first-, second- and third-place finishes in this meet, and we've never been within two points of the championship. I'm very proud of the effort they gave."

Eastwood fashioned nine personal records, three season-bests and two Eastwood Top 10 all-time performances during the meet. The meet had 18 events.

The other Eagle to qualify for the Top 10 was sophomore Claire Carpenter, who had the eighth-best triple jump in Eastwood history with a distance of 29-4.

"We pushed hard in every event all night and had a great meet. It was a fun meet," Julia Sabo said.

Sabo breaks pole vault record

Julia Sabo cleared 10-7 to break the Eastwood record held by Elise Wolff (2014) and Allie Abke (2017) by one inch.

The sophomore already had tried to set the record in each of Eastwood's first three meets this season, but failed to clear 10-7 each time. She had cleared 10-0 in the team's first two meets and then 10-1 in the Liberty-Benton Relays April 3.

"I knew I was going to break it at some point after attempting 10-7 the first three meets," Sabo said. "Just the feeling of breaking the record is a big relief. I can't wait to get more PRs."

Ironically, Sabo thought she had only tied the school record when she cleared 10-7. The bar usually is raised in six-inch increments, but Sabo thought the bar was at 10-6 after she cleared 10-0.

But Sabo's dad, Eastwood boys head coach Brian Sabo, who works with the team's vaulters, asked the meet officials and got the okay from other schools coaches to move the bar to 10-7. Brian Sabo then told his daughter the bar was at 10-7 after she cleared the height.

"I thought I only tied the record, but it was just an awesome feeling to know I had the record after dad told me I made 10-7," Julia Sabo said. "That made me really happy."

Julia Sabo also holds Eastwood's indoor record with a jump of 9-8 in 2020. She owns Eastwood's middle school record of 9-1, although she first set the middle school record of 8-6 as an eighth grader at the Whitmer Invitational in 2019.

"I vaulted well here two years ago, so I had some confidence coming in," Sabo said. "I feel good vaulting here. I would have liked to have broken the record at a home meet, but it's still nice to break the record."

Whitmer treated the vaulters to a raised runway in the middle of its football field that has artificial turf.

"We were close at the other meets," said Eastwood assistant coach Ethan Downey, who also coaches the team's vaulters. "We just had to be on right pole at the right time against the right competition. Today, it came together. She just did what we asked her to do.

"She's become a student of the sport," Downey added. "She's watching her videos. She's watching what she's doing, and she wants to get better, and it's paying off in terms of PRs."

As the daughter of Brian Sabo and Eastwood girls head coach Nikki Sabo, Julia Sabo has grown up watching and learning from many of the best vaulters in Eastwood history.

"Julia has looked up to Elise and Allie, and both of them have been so supportive of Julia over the years," Nikki Sabo said. "Both Elise and Allie have already sent their congratulations to Julia via text or social media. It means a lot to me that the alumni care so much about what continues to happen in our program."

The next goal for Julia Sabo is to clear 11-0, and the high 11s or even 12-0 aren't out of the question by the end of the season.

"That was a lot of fun," Brian Sabo said of watching his daughter set the record. "She battled. I appreciate that she's really dived into the technical side of things and wants to be better. She's invested in herself and allowed coach Downey to coach her. She's invested in herself and I really appreciate that. I'm very proud of her."

Sabo might have set the Eastwood record as a freshman had last season not been canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her indoor record came before the outdoor season was canceled.

"I'm really proud of her," Nikki Sabo said. "When the season got canceled last year, it hit her pretty hard because she was working so hard in the summer, doing the things in the winter time to improve her vaulting and did well during the indoor season.

"As coaches, we didn't realize the impact the cancelled season had on our lower grades until we saw the impact it had on our own house. The devastation of not getting a freshman season to show what she could do to help the team was hard to witness," Nikki Sabo said. "Now, she has that opportunity. I'm proud, both as her coach and as her mom, that she now has the opportunity and she's taking advantage of that opportunity."

The field events were scored as relays at Whitmer. Each school entered three athletes in each of the field events with the combined height/distance determining the placing.

Eastwood finished second with Sabo, sophomore Hannah Montag and junior Jaylin Dilsaver finishing second with a height of 23-7.

Sabo was the top individual in the event, finishing ahead of Springfield's ReighAnnon Pillarelli at 10-0. Montag was fifth at 7-6.



Photo Credit: Danielle DeFalco

First-place finishes

Eastwood won the three hurdles races and the discus relay.

Freshman Reilly Might was dominant in the 100 hurdles, winning in 17.83.

Aubrey Haas won the 300 hurdles in 50.68. The junior was running a terrific race and would have beaten her best time of 48.61 had she not hit and then fell to the track after hitting the next to last hurdle. But she quickly recovered and still won, despite the fall.

The 4x100 shuttle hurdles relay team of Haas, freshman Kayla Buehler, Might and Carpenter won in 1:12.30, a season-best.

The discus team of senior Hannah Friend, junior Ava Kiefer and sophomore Olivia Newsome won with a distance of 299-3. Friend was second

individually at 100-8, Kiefer was third at 99-9 and Newsome was fourth at 98-10.

Second-place finishes

In addition to winning the discus, Eastwood finished second in four other field events

The shot put team of Kiefer, Newsome and Friend had a distance of 98-2¾. Kiefer was first individually at 36-9, while Newsome was fourth at 31-8½ (season best).

The high jump team of juniors Maisy Stevenson, Mikayla Hoelter and Megan Graham had a height of 13-9. Stevenson was second individually at 4-11 (personal record), while Hoelter was in a five-way tie for fifth at 4-7.

The long jump of Hoelter, Carpenter and senior Paige Woodruff had a distance of 45-3. Hoelter was second individually at 15-11. Carpenter had a PR of 15-0.

Also finishing second were Sabo in the 100, 13.55; and freshman Amelia Ward in the 800, 2:35.19.

Third-place finishes

Carpenter, Woodruff and sophomore Kayden Firsdon were third in the triple jump with a distance of 82-4½. Two of the three athletes were competing in the triple jump for the first time. The event isn't sanctioned by the Ohio High School Athletic Association, but is held during some of the big weekend invitationals and is an event during the indoor season.

The 4x100 team of Carpenter, Sabo, sophomore Emma Downs and Hoelter had a season-best time of 52.38.

The 4x400 team of Hoelter, Haas, Stevenson and Ward had a season-best time of 4:22.51. Hoelter and Haas both had PRs on their legs.



Photo Credit: Danielle DeFalco

Overall and looking ahead

Eastwood has performed well in all four of its meets this season. It finished third at Liberty-Benton, and has beaten Oak Harbor March 30, and Genoa and Swanton April 6 during their Tuesday meets.

“We’ve had a lot of success so far, but we know we still have so much we can do,” Julia Sabo said. “This is a great team. We’re encouraging each other, and it’s so much fun. Good competition makes us a lot better, and pushes us to improve. A lot of us have gotten PRs because we’ve been pushed by better competition this season.”

The Eagles, even though they’re a young team with 16 freshmen and 19 sophomores, have jelled quickly this season.

“The upperclassmen have really helped the underclassmen, and brought them together,” Julia Sabo said. “We’re one big family. We do everything together. We encourage each other.”

Eastwood, based on school enrollment, was easily the smallest school in the Whitmer meet. “A lot of it is the other sports they’re in,” Nikki Sabo said of why the team fares well against quality competition. “Soccer has been to a regional final, and we have a lot of soccer players on our team, and basketball and cross country have been successful, too. They’ve had success in other sports, and they’re building on that. Those experiences transfer over to our team. They gain confidence from their other sports.”

The Eagles have four Tuesday dual meets and three weekend invitationals before hosting the Northern Buckeye Conference Championships May 15.

In the immediate future for the Eagles are a home dual meet Tuesday against NBC rival Otsego, and a trip to the Napoleon Invitational April 17.

“They’re improving,” Nikki Sabo said. “Times are getting faster. Distances are getting longer. Heights are getting higher. But there’s still work to be done. We still have a long road to go. We have to say this was a great meet, and we still have room to improve.”

Complete results are available at:

<https://www.baumspage.com/track/trevent.php?peventid=406&table=C>