

Despite injuries, Smith served as program leader



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By Kevin Gordon

LUCKEY — Noah Smith's season was dampened by three separate hamstring injuries in his left leg. The recent graduate of Eastwood High School still remained a valuable member of the Eagles' track and field program during his senior season.

He contributed as a student coach and was one of the team's biggest cheerleaders, never missing a practice or a meet.

Once he was healthy late in the season, he qualified for the regional in the 400.

Smith's final hamstring pull took place during the Eastwood Relays April 21 — just three weeks before the Northern Buckeye Conference Championships and only four weeks before the three-week run of district, regional and state meets.

Smith was healthy for the Division II district meet at Oak Harbor May 18 and 20. He finished third with a time of 51.49, beating his PR of 53.29 during the Napoleon Invitational April 15, to advance to the regional at Lexington. The top four district finishers advanced to the regional.

He posted a time of 52.58 in the regional, but didn't qualify for the finals.

"Things didn't go as planned this season," Smith said. "My goal was to get to state and that didn't work out, but I'm glad I was able to come back and get to the regional. Getting to the regional was my goal, and I enjoyed every second of competing there."

Smith even called his return to the regional, just prior to the start of the 400 district final at Oak Harbor.

"I told Coach Downey walking through the grass at the pole vault pit I'd see him at the regional," Smith said, referring to Eagle assistant coach Ethan Downey. "It happened, thank goodness. I felt very good that day. I had a lot of fun competing at the regional."

After Smith didn't compete in the NBC Championships May 13, Smith finally returned to practice May 15, just three days before the first day of the district meet. He ran three 60-meter dashes and one 100-meter dash that day and knew he was ready to run in the district.



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“After the Eastwood Relays, I knew we were going to play everything cautiously,” Smith said. “I knew I wouldn’t have time to get into shape and to build the muscular endurance to not pull my hamstring again and allow me to do multiple events.

“It was nice just to be on the track again running,” Smith added. “I felt alive stepping on the track and looking down the lane, that put life into me. I have so much fun when I’m on the track. I’m glad I was able to come back and run in the district and regional meets.”

Smith settled on running only the 400 in the district meet.

“I was going to run no matter what, being my senior year,” Smith said. “I definitely don’t regret coming out here. I would get hurt 10

times over and have this season rather than not have a season at all.”

The injuries

Smith originally pulled his hamstring March 6 — three days after an impressive performance in the Division II-III state indoor championships where he finished ninth in the 400 and helped the Eagles finish sixth in the 4x400 relay. He also qualified for state in the 60-meter dash.

He reinjured the leg during the 100 March 28 in the team’s first dual meet against Oak Harbor and reinjured it a third time when he ran the final leg of the 4x100 relay during the Eastwood Relays. In between, he ran the 400 in the Napoleon Invitational April 15.

“It was really disappointing because I was hoping to break a lot of really good barriers this season,” Smith said.

Smith was one of the Eastwood’s fastest runners, making him a contributor in three or four events at every meet. Although Smith’s events hadn’t been determined, he would have been valuable in the sprints, the hurdles and the sprint relays.

But with the help of rehab under the direction of Eastwood athletic trainer Tony Costello, Smith returned for the district meet — although he had hoped to run in the NBC Championships.

As a junior, Smith was a three-event regional qualifier, finishing fifth in the 200, sixth in the 110 hurdles and sixth in the 4x100 relay. At the district meet, he was third in the 110 hurdles, fourth in the 200 and fourth in the 4x100.



Smith was named the athlete of the meet at the 2022 NBC Championships after winning the 110 hurdles and the 200, and helping the Eagles win the 4x400 and 4x100 relays.

He finished his career sixth on Eastwood's all-time list in the 200 with a time of 22.58.

This season, Smith was hoping to break the 11-second mark in the 100, the 22-second mark in the 200, the 50-second mark in the 400 or the 4x400 and the 40-second mark in the 300 hurdles. He was going to be a major contributor in the sprint relays, too.

"Our record boards have some pretty awesome, pretty major milestones people are always are trying to hit," Smith said. "I'm thinking I would have hit at least four of those and maybe all five, as long as I got the races in. That's definitely disappointing.

"It would have been nice to have my name up there a couple more times, but it's something I have to deal with it, and there will be always that what if. But there are worse things in life that could have happened to me," Smith added.

Staying involved and being a leader

Even though he missed most of the season with the pulled hamstring, Smith remained involved with his boys and girls teammates. He attended every practice and every meet during the season, including a trip to Columbus to cheer for his teammates at the state meet.

At first, it wasn't challenging for Smith to do because he thought he'd be healthy at some point, and he'd compete in the conference and district meets. And perhaps he'd still have a chance to qualify for state as an individual or as a member of a relay team. "I was like at least it's early on and not later in the season, so I have time to get back," Smith said. "It's better to get hurt earlier than later. My main thing is there was still light at the end of the tunnel. I could be around and coach them up a little bit, do my own rehab and I'll be back."

But as the season went on and the setbacks mounted, it became harder and harder for Smith to come to practice. Yet, he continued to be a presence at all team functions. He's popular with his teammates and coaches because of his positive attitude and outgoing personality.

In the past, the Eagles have had athletes stop coming to practice and meets when they've been injured.

"I didn't want to abandon the team," Smith said. "I really enjoyed that time period with coaching. It was a change of pace. When it happened a second time, I knew I still added value to the team.

"I really like the people here," Smith added. "All of the coaches are awesome. I have great relationships with all of them. The athletes, my teammates, are great, too."

Smith, who took college classes at Eastwood, completed all of his course work by late April. By going to practice, Smith was able to hang out with his friends, teammates and coaches.

“Track was the only time I got to see people because my classwork was done,” Smith said. “Our team has a great environment. There are days it’s hard being at home, thinking I wish I could run. When I’m there, even though I’m not running, it’s still good energy. People are always having fun and laughing, and that is contagious. Even when I’m hurt, being at practice puts me in a better mood.”

Smith was one of two Eagles who missed most of the season with a pulled hamstring. The other was Caleb Souder, who will be a senior this fall. Like Smith, he would have been one of Eastwood’s best sprinters this season.

And, again, like Smith, Souder attended every practice and every meet. At the NBC Championships as a sophomore, Souder finished seventh in the 200, and ran on the 4x200 relay which finished third.

“To have them here every single day means a lot because we’ve had a lot of guys injured in the past and they stop showing up,” Eagle head coach Brian Sabo said. “It means a lot to me, it means a lot to the program and it means a lot to the guys on the team. They feel like they’re still a part of the team, even though they’re not running.

“You’re involved as much as you want to be and you add value to the team, even if you’re not competing,” Sabo added. “They emulate that. It’s an action to them. It’s the modeling and their actions, how they compete, how they train and work out. It’s how they treat others. They hold people to a standard, and they do it tactfully. They’ll help because they know what it’s like when they were younger.”

Still, it wasn’t always easy for Smith to attend practice with a happy, smiling face.

“Sometimes, it was a little bit fake, but it wasn’t as fake as I thought it would have to be,” Smith said. “It meant a lot that Coach Sabo talked to

me several times, and said he still wanted me around and that I still added value to the team, even though I wasn’t running. It was a chance to show leadership and show support without all of the accolades.

“When you have the accolades or you’re running a certain time, that respect and leadership comes naturally or people expect it of you. This season really did teach me I had an impact on the team outside of my times. I went into more of a coaching role. The team has given back to me. I thought it was going to be a lot worse to deal with, just the team environment and how people have taken my input, that was cool in its own right. It’s been great seeing people improve and celebrating their successes.”





A career in coaching

Smith enjoyed his role as a student coach. He helped the sprinters and the hurdlers with their block starts, and the relay teams with their handoffs.

"I had a thought a while back that I might want to coach," Smith said. "But this whole process has taught me that I want to come back, probably here at Eastwood, and coach. Coaching, in general, would be fun. But Eastwood has the environment. I don't really want to go anywhere else. I would love to come back here and coach."

Andre Lewis and Jesse Poiry who will be juniors this fall, benefitted from Smith's help. Smith won the 110 hurdles and Poiry was second at the NBC meet, while Poiry won the 300 hurdles and Lewis was third. The two also qualified for the Lexington regional, with Poiry finishing seventh in the finals.

Poiry and Lewis both ran faster times this season than Smith did as a sophomore.

"He's always helping us to improve, pushing us to get better," Poiry said. "He's filming us. He's pointing out things to improve on. He's helping you be the best you can be.

"Noah always motivates me, tells me to hit this time," Lewis said. "He definitely stood out to me because he always runs his heart out for us, and we should give back to him. He's one of us, so he knows our situations 100 percent. He's a talented athlete, and he runs multiple events. This is my first year running four events. He knows there's always an extra spark, and he's always telling us we can still give more."

After each hurdles race at the NBC meet, Smith and Souder were among the first to celebrate with Lewis and Poiry.

"That was great, having them celebrate with us. It was really exciting," Poiry said. "It's nice having them around. It tells you we're a family and they're not ready to give up."

"It shows they truly care, and they have a passion for track and field," Lewis said. "They bring a lot of positivity and energy to the team, and they're just good guys."

Lewis and Poiry steadily lowered their times this season, and both figure to be even better next season.

"It would have been great being able to compete with them this year," Smith said. "But it was still a lot of fun being able to watch them run."

Smith also praised freshmen hurdlers/sprinters, Drew Luidhardt and Zach Mullholand, for their hard work and improvement this season.

Now, Smith is looking forward to coaching at some point in the future.

"Coaching is a chance to help people get better and I love that," Smith said. "My goals have always been to improve myself and be the best at whatever I do, and then to help others improve because you get to celebrate their successes and happiness."

“Sometimes, when you have success yourself, it’s not as much fun by yourself,” Smith said. “There’s like 10 seconds of happiness and then you have no one to celebrate it with. When you help someone else or you’re coaching, you get to celebrate their success and see their joy and happiness. It’s always more enjoyable and more fulfilling when you help someone else and see their joy.”



Smith's family

Eastwood track and field historian Smith also became a historian of the program, with the help of his brother, Jared, and his dad, Marty.

Jared Smith was a member of the Eagles’ 4x100 relay team which finished eighth in the state in 2015 in 45.78. Joining Smith on that relay team were Grant Geiser, Devin Snowden and Brennan Seifert. Those four also ran the fourth-fastest time in school history in the 4x100 that season, a 43.05 clocking.

Jared Smith suffered a pulled

hamstring 60 meters into his leg during the 4x100 final at state with the Eagles in third place, but one of the other teams was disqualified from the race to enable Eastwood to finish eighth. The top eight finishers in each event at state received medals and All-Ohio recognition, and were recognized on the awards stand.

“I wasn’t at that race, but I’ve watched it several times on Hudl,” said Smith, a fourth grader at the time. Hudl is a video/messaging/scouting service used by high school teams. “It’s weird both of us had hamstring injuries our senior seasons. You watch that video on Hudl, he was moving, the best he had ever run. He was like an 11.4 guy in the 100.”

The Eagles finished third in the Division II team standings at state in 2015.

Marty Smith remains sixth on Eastwood’s all-time list in the 1,600 with a time of 4:31.20 in 1987. He’s also 12th on Eastwood’s all-time cross country list with a time of 16:43 in 1985.

Noah Smith began his career as a distance runner during seventh grade cross country, but he had a big growth spurt that fall and grew three inches.

“My knees hurt like crazy, and I really didn’t enjoy the distance aspect of running,” Smith said. “I wasn’t bad at it, but I really loved sprinting. That track season the next spring, I started sprinting.

“My brother helped me a ton during my career,” Smith added. “He taught me a lot of technique, block starts, how to train, volume low, intensity high, quality work, and I was right in line with that. He’s taught me some of the history that I don’t see on our record boards ... He told me what it was like when he was running, and what the team’s togetherness and winning culture were like.”

Smith’s interest in the history of the program started because of his dad’s and brother’s connection to the program, and it increased significantly once he joined the program.

“I enjoyed talking to my brother about the culture they had built, the expectation of excellence for wanting to be the best,” Smith said.

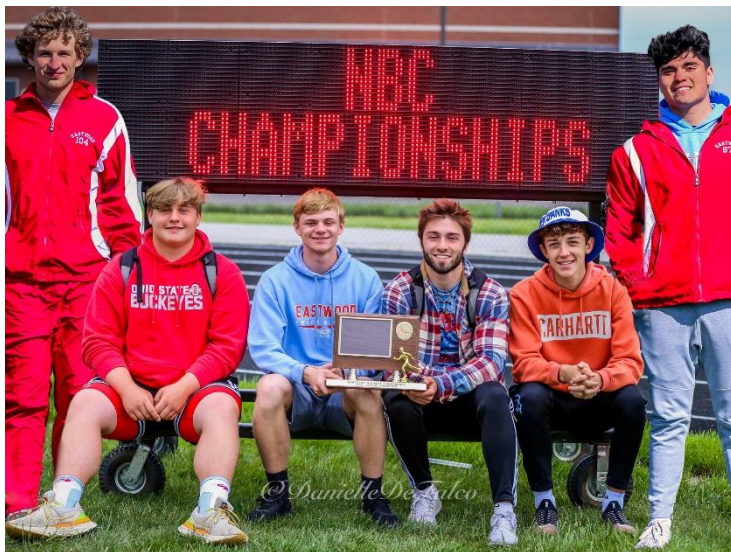
He’s made strong connections with current assistant coaches and former Eagles Logan Baugher and Cody Seifert, and has watched videos of former Eagles Erik Fertig, Issac Emahiser, Crosby Schemenauer and Justin Welch, among many others.

Eastwood boys basketball coach Jason Faykosh, a former hurdler for the Eagles, was Smith’s hurdles coach in eighth grade.

“You see the names on our record boards, and you watch their videos on Hudl,” Smith said, adding he’s watched about 75 percent of the program’s district, regional and state events on video. “I like seeing how those athletes competed. I didn’t get to see them compete in person, but at least I’ve gotten to see video.”

Smith enjoyed continuing the team’s successful culture on and off the track, especially after the seniors’ 2020 season was canceled because of COVID.

“I’ve always loved the winning culture we’ve had at Eastwood, and that’s something I’ve always tried to continue,” Smith said. “The culture was dormant after COVID. We lost a big senior class that was really good. People didn’t know our culture. It wasn’t their fault. “It was a rebuilding year for everyone in the state,” Smith added. “Times were down all over the state. Coach Sabo had to teach some of those core values all over again. Our class and the freshmen class had never competed at the varsity level. Every team in the state was young.”



Do I know you?

Sabo asks his captains each season to learn the names of every athlete on the boys team and as many names as possible on the girls teams.

Smith believes he knew the name of every boy on the team this season and 70-75 percent of the girls team. He explained the girls names were more difficult to learn because he didn’t have any classes with the freshmen, and he only knew them through track and any other sports they

competed in.

Also impressive is Smith’s ability to remember the PRs for virtually every athlete on the team — boy and girl. He’s one of the team’s athletes who seemingly knows everything that happened in a meet.

“I’ve always been a numbers guy, so I like to know people’s marks,” Smith said. “I’ve always tried to make an effort to have at least a general idea of what everyone’s PRs are for their events. If I know this person has a 17-second PR in the hurdles and they just ran a 16.98, you go right up to them after the race and tell them good job on getting a PR.



“There’s that excitement for that individual and the excitement for the team,” Smith added. “People often ask me how did you know that, but I’ve always been a numbers guy and keep them in my head. It helps them feel important to the team.”

Even when Smith was healthy, he usually visited every event area during a meet to see his teammates were doing.

“I try to know the marks of everyone on the team because everyone is valuable to the team,” Smith said. “I try to pour back into people as much as they’ve poured into me.”

One of the most satisfying moments for Smith this season was watching the Eagle boys win the NBC championship for the

second straight season. Eastwood had won 19 straight league titles, spanning the NBC and the Suburban Lakes League, before Genoa ended the streak in 2021.

The Eagles won with 143 points, while Otsego was second with 127, Genoa was third with 117 and Lake was fourth with 106. Eastwood scored in all 17 events and had two placers in 12 of the 13 non-relay events.

“That was really cool,” Smith said. “You score the meet early in the week, and we’re 13 points short. But we get to the meet and everyone was excited. There was good energy going into the meet. Guys were locked in and ready. That’s very important. I loved seeing everyone’s effort and grit, knowing they wanted to keep the league title. They went out hungry. They went out and took it. They knew it wouldn’t be handed to them.

They went out and earned it, and you can tell that with the number of PRs we had.”

Smith said the Eagles had a great week of practice leading up to the NBC Championships.

“You could tell guys were ready and locked in all week. They wanted it.” Smith said.

“Coach Sabo says family and I see that. That’s what helps us compete to the best of our ability and why we’ve had so much success.”

Self-admitted ‘numbers addict’

In addition to knowing he PRs of his teammates, he’s a regular visitor to Milesplit.com, a web site for track and field enthusiasts. The site contains rankings, results, videos, stories and more.

“That site is so addicting and I love numbers,” Smith said. “I’m on it a lot, even hours at a time. Then, the next thing I know, I’ve been on it way too long and my homework gets done late at night.”



Smith seemingly knows the times, distances and heights of every athlete in the state, and their ranking within their individual leagues, districts and regionals. He also knows how those athletes rank in the state.

"I usually start by looking at the rankings and then I get hooked," Smith said. "I get into the rankings, then I'll dig into certain people's profiles and then I'll watch their videos, and the next thing I know it's been an hour when I only planned on being on the site for a quick glance.

"It's much so fun to see what other athletes are doing," Smith added.

What's next

Smith, who finished his career with a 4.5 grade-point average, will attend Ohio State University in the fall.

He'll major in computer science and engineering, and is planning on a career in software engineering or data analytics.

Smith is planning on running for OSU's club track and field team, with hopes of eventually earning a spot on the Buckeye varsity.

He was a member of the Eastwood basketball team, playing as a 6-foot guard. He is active in Dayspring Church in Bowling Green.