

Hoelter thrives in utility role



By Kevin Gordon

Mikayla Hoelter is Eastwood High School's athlete for seemingly every event.

The track and field senior has competed in seven events this season, and eight events during her career.

And she does all of them well.

Most recently, Hoelter and the Eagles qualified to run in the 4x200 and 4x400 relays at the Division II regional at Lexington High School. The semifinals are Thursday, with the top two finishers in each heat and the next four fastest times overall advancing to the finals on Saturday. The top four in each event at the regional qualify for the state meet June 3-4 at Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium. The state meet also includes two at-large qualifiers in every event, based on the next two best time/height/distance, regardless of regional.

"She will give you everything she has," Eastwood head coach Nikki Sabo said. "If you told her to run through a wall, she would. Mikayla is so coachable, so determined, she will do anything, anything to help our team.

"She steps up to every single challenge we've given her," Sabo added. "She understands her role. She knows she's a utility person, and understands we can put her in eight events with the talent she has."

Hoelter scored in four events at the Northern Buckeye Conference Championships May 14 at Memorial Stadium in Fostoria. One of the events she scored in was the 200, a race she had run only a handful of times, either as an individual or in the 4x200 relay.

But Hoelter still finished fifth to help the Eagles win their 21st straight conference championship. She placed fifth in the long jump, and ran on the Eagles' 4x400 relay which finished second the 4x200 relay which placed fifth.

"When we told her we were putting her in the 200 to get some points, she said, "I've got it," Sabo said. "Last year, we needed points in the 400, and she ran it. This year, we need some points in the 200, and she's running it.

"She's one of those people when we sit down and say what's our lineup, she's one of the first people we talk about just because of her diversity of what she can do field event wise, running wise," Sabo added. "We know she'll give her best effort every single time."

Utility role

Hoelter's competed in seven events this season, including five running events — the open 200 and the open 400, and the 4x100, 4x200 and 4x400 relays. She's also competed in the long jump and the high jump, and ran the open 100 earlier in her career.

"That's super nice," Eagle assistant coach Nicole Schmeltz said of Hoelter's versatility. Schmeltz works with Eastwood's sprinters.



"If we need in her in a field event, we can put her in a field event," Schmeltz added. "If she needs to be in a relay, we can put her in a relay. I have vivid images of her running as a freshman, and she runs with the same tenacity now as a senior, if not more. She's always had that. We can rely on Mikayla to be in any event which is so nice when we have low numbers with some events, and we know we're going to get her best effort every time."

And Hoelter thrives in her utility role.

"I enjoy it," Hoelter said. "The fact the coaches trust me and feel they can put me where they need me, I like it. It gives me a good variety of races. I don't do the same events every single meet. It's fun to always have a different combination of events to go after each meet."

Hoelter also competed in the maximum four events during the NBC meet last year. She won the long jump and helped Eastwood win the 4x400, while finishing third in the 400 and fifth in the high jump.

She placed in four events in the 2019 conference championships, tying for second in the high jump and finishing fifth in the 400. She also helped the Eagles finish

third in the 4x200 and the 4x400. Her 2020 sophomore season was canceled because of Covid.

"I'm really thankful the coaches see me as someone who will always give my best effort every time I compete," Hoelter said. "They know that even though I might not have the fastest seed or the best jump coming in, I'll still put everything I have into that event and try to improve myself and do what's best for the team."

"I never really had my individual events," Hoelter added. "Even as a freshman, I was in some relays and some individual events. The fact I changed every meet, I never really got into a set schedule. I enjoyed having the different events."

"Sometimes, it does get tough to remember the practice schedule, say I'm in three relays, three different steps and exchanges to remember, that can get a little overwhelming," Hoelter added. "But I've learned to adjust and take each relay one at a time."

The relays are Hoelter's favorite events. She helped the Eagles qualify for the regional in the 4x200 last season and the 4x400 as a freshman.

"I really like the relays," Hoelter said. "It's really fun to have a group of three other girls with you. The individual events can be intimidating because it's you going



against others. When you have a relay, you rely on the other people, and they rely on you. There's also a bond, a great feeling among you. It's fun to be in the relays."

Hoelter enjoys her field events, too.

"I really like the long jump, the field events," said Hoelter, who plays on the Eastwood soccer team. "Soccer has a lot of running. The high jump has the bar, but the long jump, you get to run and jump into sand, so that's fun.

"The long jump is challenging," Hoelter added. "There's a lot of different aspects to it, a lot of fundamentals, a lot of technique stuff to learn. You learn how to adjust things to get better results. You can get PRs in it, and you can see big improvements in it. High jump, you have the bar, so it's hard to get big PRs. The improvement doesn't come as quickly in terms in of PRs."



Senior pride

Hoelter is part of a terrific class that has contributed to the team since it entered the high school. The other seniors are Megan Graham, Aubrey Haas, Ava Kiefer, Marina King, Maisy Stevenson and Addie Young.

The seniors have impacted the team with their performances and their leadership.

"That's a long list," Hoelter said when asked which of the team's accomplishments she's most proud of. "Something so cool about us (the seniors) is our depth. We have throwers. We have sprinters. We have distance runners. We have hurdlers. We have jumpers."

The seniors helped Eastwood continue its streak of conference championships.

"It's really cool we were able to grow up in this environment and being on this team, and continuing the 20-some years of championships, that we're able to keep it going," Hoelter said. "We're very thankful to be on a team like this, and to be a part of something so big.

"This is my favorite environment to be in," Hoelter added. "When you're here, people genuinely care about you. There's a lot of genuine people in this group who can help lift you up. It's easy to give it back to them because they're always supporting you."

More than a sprinter, jumper

Hoelter is one of the team leaders, serving as one of Eastwood's captains.

"I'm a lead-by-example person," Hoelter said. "I don't like to be overly verbal and tell people what to do. I just do it, or if they ask, 'Mikayla, can you do this drill first?' I have no problem doing that.

"I like to mess around, too, but I know when it's time to be serious and when to get things done," Hoelter added. "But it's fun to make a lighter atmosphere or things not so serious." Her coaches and teammates have noticed.



"She's really encouraging and positive with her teammates," Schmeltz said. "The way she leads on the track with her performance sets a great example."

Hoelter is a hard worker, starting in the weight room and then continuing with the same work ethic in her events during every practice and meet.

"Mikayla works hard," Schmeltz said. "You can say somebody is a hard worker, but her actions and her words match. She wants to be the

best on the track, and that shows on the track every single day in the way she acts, walks, talks. She is a good example of what a hard worker is.

"She's in the weight room every day, and she's always done that since I've been here," Schmeltz added. "She's made it a point to be in the weight room. Whenever other people leave, she still lifts. She strives to be at the top of the pack when she works out. It seems like she never takes a rep off which is a great character trait to have."

Sabo said when Hoelter's soccer season ended last fall, she headed to the weight room after only a handful of days off to start lifting for the track and field season.

"She was a mainstay in the weight room this winter, and it paid off," Sabo said. "It helps your endurance. It helps with injury prevention. She's a prime example that if you get after it in the weight room, it's going to pay dividends come track season."

What's next

Hoelter, who has a 4.88 grade-point average, will attend Ohio State University in the fall and major in biology/pre-med. Her goal is to become a physical therapist. She also was president of Eastwood's National Honor Society and Key Club, and helped with the school's blood drive.