

Now healthy, Ward running well, serving as a leader for Eagles



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By Kevin Gordon

LUCKEY — Amelia Ward finally is healthy following two fatigue-plagued seasons.

She's running well again and is enjoying her final season as a member of Eastwood High School's track and field team.

The senior is as an important member of the Eagles' 4x800 and 4x400 relay teams, and one of the team's best 800 runners. She's also one of Eastwood's captains.

She's no longer suffering from an iron deficiency which left her feeling fatigued during her sophomore and junior seasons after she ran well as a freshman. Ward is popular with her teammates and coaches because she runs consistently well and competes hard every meet. Even though she's a fierce competitor, she has a great personality away from the track and is a wonderful human being with a great sense of humor.

"Amelia is the most thoughtful and caring person I have ever met," said Eagle assistant coach T.J. Tuttamore, who works with the team's distance runners. "To see her happy, healthy and running with confidence, truly brings joy to my heart. She deserves it."

"Amelia is not only running strong this season, she ... has energy, and is an amazing teammate," said Eastwood assistant coach Laura Buehler, who also works with the distance runners. "I'm really happy for her and excited to see the end of her season."

Two difficult seasons

Ward's impressive freshman season included a second-place finish in the 800 with a career-best time of 2:27.23 in the Northern Buckeye Conference Championships where she also helped the Eagles win the 4x400 relay and finish second in the 4x800 relay. She then was a member of Eastwood's first-place relay teams in the 4x400 and 4x800 relays in the Division II district meet, and finished fifth in the 800.

Ward still felt healthy entering her sophomore season, but she quickly knew something was off during the early weeks that season.

Her times were slower, explaining she felt like she was running in sand with a weighted vest on while wearing a COVID-style mask. But she still helped Eastwood win the 4x800 and finish second in the 4x400 in the NBC meet.

Shortly after Eastwood competed in its district and regional meets, Ward visited her doctor in early June and learned she suffered from the iron deficiency.

“I knew something was wrong, but I didn’t know what was going on,” said Ward, who broke her thumb in basketball earlier this season. “I thought it was me and something I was doing.”

Ward was further frustrated because the issue didn’t affect her in soccer and basketball, explaining those sports featured shorter runs, like sprinting, not like the distance running she does in track each spring.

Ward has overcome the iron deficiency by taking supplements and eating more iron-filled foods. She’s improved her sleeping habits, too.

“I was relieved to find out it was an iron deficiency because that was changeable, and it’s not something that’s going to affect me forever,” Ward said. “I can manage it.

“A lot of it was adding spinach to a lot of things,” Ward added. “I don’t like hamburgers, so I never eat red meat.”

Her health has gradually improved, and she feels “100 percent.” Her iron level is back to normal.

“I’m feeling better. Even after races, I still feel good, even if my times aren’t exactly what I want,” Ward said. “I had to be patient and accountable to take my medicine and eat right. It was frustrating because you want results right away.

“It was so eye opening,” Ward added. “As an athlete, my perspective changed, knowing I would watch film from my freshman year and try to mimic everything I did, and I couldn’t do it. It was so hard, very challenging. I was so frustrated. I would go home and blame myself for it.”



Running well again

Ward is one of the team’s workhorses, running the 800 and the 4x800 and the 4x400 relays. She can also run the 200 and the 400, if needed.

She’s been steadily dropping her times, and she ran a gem in the 800 during a tri-meet at Otsego April 30 when she posted a time of 2:29.81 — her first sub 2:30 800 since her freshman season when she ran her personal record of 2:27.23.

“That time brings me back to happy place,” Ward said. “It’s a fresh start. It’s nice to know all of the all of the hard work I’ve been putting in the last couple of years is paying off. It’s great.”

Ward followed that three days later with a time of 2:31.98 in the Oak Harbor Invitational May 3.

“I feel great,” Ward said. “I feel really confident, and I know I can run faster. I know I can drop even more time and I want to chase my PRs. I have a lot to look forward to.”

Ward is hoping to earn a spot on Eastwood's Top 10 all-time list in the 800 where a time of 2:26.28 is needed. She's also aiming to lower her PR to 2:25.

"I've felt this coming for the last couple weeks and now I've done it," Ward said of running the 800 in under 2:30. "It's going to help my confidence grow so much. I know I can still run even faster."

Her best split in the 4x800 this season is 2:26.9, a drop of eight seconds from earlier this season, and she's hoping the split will be closer to 2:25 by the end of the season. Her fastest split in the 4x400 relay is dropping, too. Her best this season is 62.9, down three seconds from earlier this season. Her PR in that is 62.2 from her freshman season.

Ward ran well in the NBC Championships this season. She helped the Eagles win the 4x800 relay in 10:13.16 and finish second in the 4x400 relay in 4:20.52. Individually, was fourth in the 800 in 2:33.42.

"We expect Amelia to continue to be a huge part of our 4x8 and 4x4 relays, and we'll see how low she can get in the open 800 as well," Eagle head coach Nathan Howard said. "She has gotten a lot of her speed back this year, which has made her really valuable to the team because she can run anywhere from 200 to 800 meters for us."



2021 Season: Addie Young, Avery Bowman, Talia Baum, Amelia, Maisy Stevenson, Jamie Lahey

Heading to state?

The 4x800 relay is aiming for a trip to state after finishing sixth in the regional the last two seasons. The top four finishers in each regional and the next two fastest times, regardless of region, qualify for state.

Ward has been a contributor to the Eagles' 4x800 team throughout her career, although she wasn't on the team at the regional last season when it ran the seventh-fastest time in school history, 9:57.32.

Ward, freshman Camille Foos, senior Haley Sponaugle and junior Leah

Emch have run consistently well this season, and they're preparing for another run at stat.

They posted a time of 9:56.43 at the Oak Harbor Invitational, beating last season's regional time and moving them into seventh-place all-time at Eastwood.

Emch and Sponaugle ran on the 9:57.32 team.

"Qualifying for state would be magical," Ward said. "We've worked so hard. We've had some close calls. I wasn't on it, but I was an alternate and I still cheered them on. We've been so close and our region is so difficult, but hopefully this year we can do something new. It would be a great way to end my career."

Prior to the Oak Harbor Invitational, the quartet's best time in the 4x800 was 10:11.92 during a home dual meet against Oak Harbor April 23.

"I love relays because everyone is so supportive and I have something to chase," Ward said. "In an open event, it's easy to get disengaged because you don't have that baton

in your hand, that spark to get to the finish line. The energy is super high in a relay. It's a family bond. We're so supportive of each other."



Mixed 4x4 at Eastwood Relays: Kevin Lewis, Andre Lewis, Amelia, Reilly Might

Going first

Ward often is running the first leg when she runs a relay and always gives the Eagles a strong effort. "Amelia would be a great relay runner running any leg, but we've used her a lot running first because we trust her to set the tone for the rest of the team," Howard said. "No matter how fast the competition is, Amelia is going to give the race everything she has, and her experience helps her to trust herself and not panic, if someone else takes it out too hard. There's a lot of trust in

Amelia from the coaches and her teammates, which translates really well for the opening runner of a relay."

Tuttamore said Ward never wanted to be the first runner on a relay until this season. "She came into this season with a much different perspective," Tuttamore said. "Her consistency and her willingness to go out hard early in the race makes her a great leadoff runner. Her mindset this season is to get back on the line and see what happens, a much-needed approach when she is being asked to run multiple mid-distance races."

Team leader

Ward leads as a captain with her actions and her words. She's one of the team's hardest workers every in practice and in the meets.

"Amelia pretty much checks every box when it comes to leadership," Howard said.

"There's a reason that she's been a captain of every team she's been a part of — she leads by example, she's comfortable speaking up whenever necessary, and she's great at building relationships with her teammates.

"Everyone trusts her moral compass, and she truly wants to serve her teammates and leave the program in a better place," Howard added. "She also has a perfect temperament for a leader — she can be competitive and fiery when she needs to be, but she is also confident enough in herself to be vulnerable and personable with her teammates."

Ward was a three-year captain in basketball and was a soccer captain during her senior season.

"Servant leadership is one of the most important characteristics anyone can possess," Ward said. "A lot of people think leadership is making the freshmen carry the balls in from practice, but for me, I want to be the person to carry the ball bags in. I want to be the person to help my teammates. I want to be the person to hold blocks for some

random kid. There's so much more about being a good person as a leader, like trust and honesty. I know a lot of kids are looking up to me as a captain, so I need to make sure I'm being a good role model at all times."

Buehler has a unique perspective, having known Ward since she was a youngster. Buehler's daughter, Kayla, is a senior on the girls team this season. Her son, Ben, runs on the boys team.

The Buehler and the Ward families are close friends, in part, because Kayla Buehler and Amelia Ward have played basketball and soccer together since the fourth grade. "I am so proud of her choices and how she has grown as a person and athlete," Laura Buehler said. "She's a natural leader in her praise and encouragement for her teammates and is very dedicated. She will do anything she is asked enthusiastically and is the type of kid who could have a broken leg and still tell you she can run. Her hard work and consistency are qualities her teammates admire about her."



Amelia celebrates with Aubrey Haas, Mikayla Hoelter, and Maisy Stevenson (616) in 2021 when their 4x4 qualified for regionals.

Mama Bear pays it back

Ward is especially good mentoring the team's younger athletes, just as Aubrey Haas, Jamie Lahey, Maisy Stevenson and Addie Young did with Ward when she was a freshman.

"They were very supportive and really helped me a lot," Ward said. "You try to help them reach their potential by telling them things, showing them how to do workouts like race strategies. Just keeping them locked in and focused during these next couple of weeks is really important to me."

Ward and Sponaugle are the Mama Bears for the team's distance runners.

"(Sponaugle) knows a lot about the workouts," Ward said. "I'm there to bring the laughs and the good times. I love that role. I

want to be someone who sparks the energy and excitement because practice is hard when you're doing a hard workout. Nobody wants to do it, so you have to get through it somehow."

In the future

Ward, who has a 4.3 grade-point average, will attend Ohio State University in the fall. She'll major in exercise science and eventually pursue a career in sports medicine, although she hasn't decided on a specific career path.

"As an athlete, I want to stay connected with athletics somehow," Ward said. "Even if it's not me competing physically, I can still help people who are competing."

The center/back on Eastwood's soccer team was a first-team all-conference and first-team all-district selection this season, and was a second-team All-Ohio honoree. In basketball, the point guard was second-team all-conference and second-team all-district.



With her parents Katie and Lucas Ward

In addition to her three sports, Ward is a member of Eastwood's Future Farmers of America, Key Club, National Honor Society and Student Council. She's also involved in 4-H where she's served as a camp counselor and is a junior fair board member.