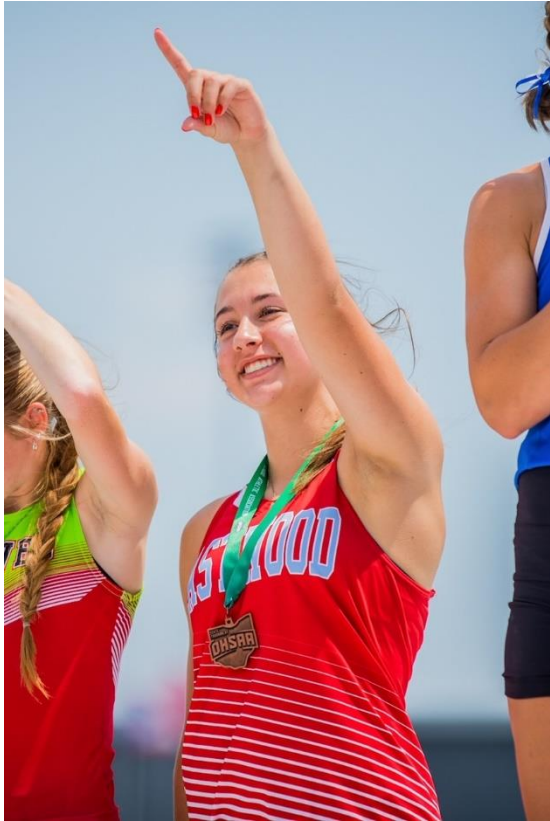


Sabo ties for fourth in state pole vault



All photo credits: Danielle DeFalco

By Kevin Gordon

COLUMBUS — Julia Sabo returned to one of her favorite places early Saturday afternoon. The Eastwood High School senior was back on the awards stand with a fourth-place finish in the pole vault during the Division II state track and field championships.

Sabo cleared 11-10 to tie for fourth place and earn a spot on the podium at Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium. The top eight finishers in each event at state earned All-Ohio honors and were recognized on the awards stand.

Sabo had a chance to break her Eastwood record of 12-0, but she went out of the competition after missing her three attempts at 12-2.

The Eastern Michigan University signee was a three-time state qualifier. Sabo also tied for fourth as a sophomore when she cleared 11-6 to break the school record for the fourth time that season. She jumped 11-0 at state last season and finished 11th. Her freshman season was canceled because of COVID.

"I felt really good today, and this was a great way to finish my high school career," Sabo said. "I attempted a (personal record), and I was on the podium. All of that is great. I'm definitely happy with the way today went."

Preparation fuels success

Although Sabo jumped consistently well Saturday, Eastwood coach Brian Sabo said his daughter's preparation during the week and Saturday morning prior to the competition played a large role in her success at the meet. He estimated Julia Sabo used 8-10 poles for her 11 vaults, including two new poles she had only used in practice, but never in a meet.

"I was more proud of her preparation, her warmups," Brian Sabo said. "When we were on a pole she had never been on, that told me she was dialed in and just how she handled everything and the mindset. Things didn't bother her.

"She suggested going up a pole at a time," Sabo added. "That's when I knew things were going well. Then, it's a matter of hoping the jumps line up, and they did."

Even during the warmups, Julia Sabo easily cleared the bungee cord at 12-0.

"She had good jumps in warmups, and that made me think we were going to have a good day," Brian Sabo said.



Sabo entered the state meet after sharing a Lexington High School regional championship with a height of 11-4 in hot and windy conditions. The state meet also was held on what was easily one of the hottest days of the season with the high temperature north of 90 degrees. "I really focused on myself and how I competed, to know where I was and not let anyone's else vaults tear me down or ruin my day," Julia Sabo said. "I prepared myself for the heat, and I handled that a lot better than I did last week. I felt really good coming in."

"I'm proud of her for a lot of things," Brian Sabo said. "The fourth-place finish and the podium, that's for her. I'm just proud of her for her preparation."

Quality competition

The 18 state qualifiers treated the huge crowd watching the event to an outstanding competition. The top eight finishers all cleared 11-10 or better, and the next five finishers all cleared 11-2.

Springfield Greenon senior Tru Buddenberg was the state champion by clearing 12-6. Buddenberg finished fourth at state as a junior. Gallipolis Gallia Academy senior Callie Wilson was second and New Concord John Glenn sophomore Brayden Snider was third. Both cleared 12-2, but Wilson had fewer misses.

Sabo tied Circleville Logan Elm senior Tayla Tootle for fourth.

"It was a great day for Julia," Eastwood coach Ethan Downey said. "The competition was excellent."

After passing the opening height of 9-0, Julia Sabo cleared 10-0, 10-10, 11-6 and 11-0 on her first attempt, and 10-6 and 11-2 on her second attempt. Julia Sabo changed poles after her misses at 10-6 and 11-2 and cleared those heights on her second try.

"You want to make a height on the first attempt, but sometimes you need two or three attempts," Julia Sabo said. "If I miss the first attempt, I'll know what I did wrong or what I have to do differently. I knew I had to go up a pole. I was able to work through everything."

Sabo said being confident with a new pole is important.

"I try to be as confident as I can," Julia Sabo said of using a





pole for the first time in a meet. “After the first time, I’m usually confident and know what I have to do. Getting on a pole the first time is hard, but after you use it once, you know everything will be OK.”

Even though Sabo didn’t clear 12-2, she made three good attempts at the height. On her final try, she appeared to be over the bar, but she brushed the bar on her way down and the bar fell off the standards.

“That was a good attempt,” Julia Sabo said. “I definitely saw myself over it, but the bar didn’t stay on. I’m proud of my height today. There were a lot of great athletes and vaulters here today. The competition was crazy good.”

Downey expected it would take a big day for Julia Sabo to place or even win the state title. Her regional jump of 11-4 was good for an eight-way tie for fourth-place among the state qualifiers and her PR of 12-0 would have put her second going into the state meet. Buddenberg had the best regional jump at 12-4.

Many of the state qualifiers had cleared 12-0 or better during the spring outdoor season or the winter indoor season.

“I thought 11-6 clean (no misses) would have a chance to place, and it would probably take 12-6 to win it,” Downey said. “We were close to winning it. I knew the competition would be good, but it was even better than I expected.”

Experience pays off

Sabo said competing at state the last two years enabled her to do well this year, especially last year when the competition returned to Jesse Owens Stadium. The Division II state meet in 2021 was held at Pickerington North High School.

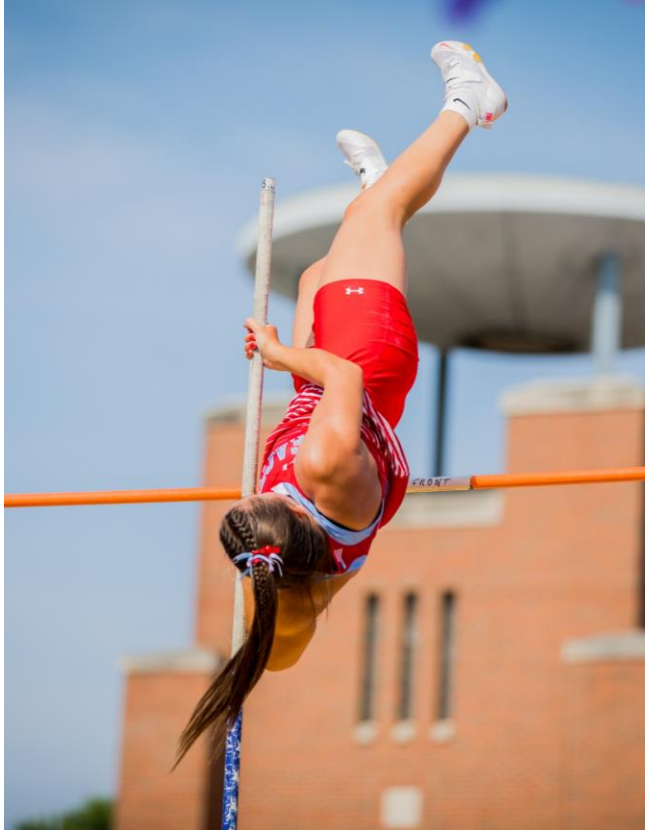
The three state meets in 2021 were held separately at three high schools in suburban Columbus.

“Being here last year really helped me because you know how to handle things,” Julia Sabo said. “It can be overwhelming, but being here last year, I knew how to handle everything, and I knew what to expect.

“The atmosphere, the huge crowds, you have so many fans and the cheering was great,” Julia Sabo said. “I knew I had to take that in and let it help my energy, and it kept me going. The best of the best are here, and that really motivates you and energizes you. It’s amazing to watch and to be a part of.”

Comeback season completes outstanding career

Saturday’s podium finish capped a comeback season for Julia Sabo, who rebounded from what she called a “disappointing, challenging and frustrating” junior season.



Most of her issues were health related, primarily an iron deficiency. Her health has significantly improved, thanks to dietary changes, and she jumped consistently well this season. Sabo jumped 10-6 three times during the winter indoor season and qualified for the Division II-III state indoor meet. Then, during the outdoor season this spring, she jumped 11-0 during the team's second meet against Swanton and Genoa April 4 and broke her Eastwood record with a vault of 11-7 the following week against Woodmore and Elmwood. Sabo broke the school record twice against Otsego and Lake April 25 with jumps of 11-9 and 12-0. Her best jump as a junior was 11-0. "I came into this season a lot more positive than last season," Julia Sabo said. "I worked on myself and competing how I wanted to compete and the

season ended the way I hoped it would, compared to the end of last season. It's a great feeling to see what I accomplished after last season."

Sabo won her third straight Northern Buckeye Conference championship this season as well as a third straight district championship.

"Once I cleared 11-0, that showed me I was a lot further ahead of last year," Julia Sabo said. "As I kept attempting bigger bars, I knew the old me was back."

"I wanted to get 11-0 during indoors, but then to get that height early during the outdoor season, I knew I had progressed a lot and that helped," Julia Sabo said. "Coming into the season I was a little nervous, but after I cleared 11-0, I knew I was ready to go."

Sabo broke the school record seven times during her career, the first four coming as a sophomore.

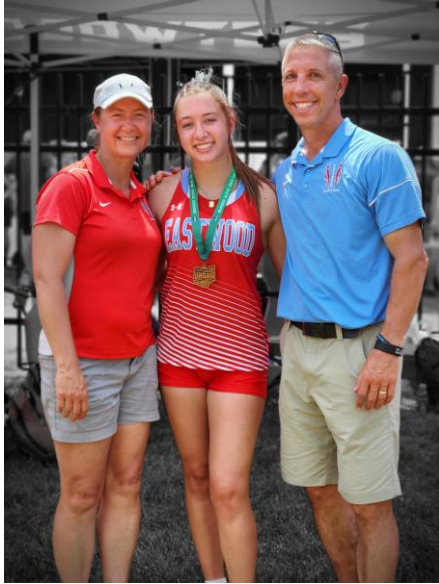
"You could tell early on this season, she had the energy," Downey said. "We cleared 11-0 right out of the gate, and I knew we were where we needed to be."

"When we cleared 11-7 midway through the season, I knew we were on a good path," Brian Sabo said. "There were many times during the season, she had to clear a height to advance and she did. She's been in a lot of pressure situations, and she's had a good mindset."

Julia Sabo's improved physical health helped result in her better mindset.

"We were confident and she had a great mindset for the year," Brian Sabo said. "Once we cleared 11-0 and cleared it again, that's when I thought we were going well. She kept building on her success all season."

Julia Sabo also was a three-time qualifier to the state indoor meet and holds the Eastwood indoor record with a vault of 10-6.



Keeping score

Julia Sabo leads her parents in state meet outdoor appearances with three, while her mom, Eastwood coach Nikki Sabo, has two, and her dad, Brian, has one. Julia Sabo also moved into a tie with her mom for the most podium finishes at state with two, one more than Brian.

Nikki Sabo, the former Nikki Litz, was a two-time Division II All-Ohio long jumper at Perkins. She finished fourth in the state meet in 1992 and fifth in 1993. Brian Sabo pole vaulted at Canton GlenOak, finishing fifth in the Division I state meet in 1992.

Nikki and Brian Sabo both competed collegiately at Bowling Green State University.

STATE MEET RESULTS

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