

## Stevenson a leader on and off the track



### By Kevin Gordon

Maisy Stevenson is pleased with her contributions on the track and in the field.

She's just as proud of her impact as a leader on Eastwood High School's girls track and field team.

The Eagles are seeking their 21st straight league championship this season, the last two coming with Stevenson and the team's other six seniors on the roster. Their Northern Buckeye Conference titles in 2019 and 2021 surrounded a Covid-canceled 2020 season.

The other seniors are Megan Graham, Aubrey Haas, Mikayla Hoelter, Ava Kiefer, Marina King and Addie Young.

"It's been amazing the last four years," Stevenson said. "I love all of the girls so much. All of the seniors are special in our own ways. We do all of the events, and it helps our team come together. We're a diverse group.

"We've had a lot of fun, and made a lot of great memories," Stevenson added. "We've had a lot of success, but, over time, we'll remember the relationships

we've built, the fun we've had the most."

This season's senior class is small with only the seven members, but all seven have had an impact on the team since they were freshmen.

"I try to lead by example," said Stevenson, who is one of the team's captains. "When I was younger, my freshman year was so scary for me. Coming in, I knew I wasn't a bad runner. But being younger than the other girls, they made me feel welcome and helped me fit in more.

"I try to be welcoming, encouraging, kind. That can go a long way," Stevenson added. "That can help them on and off the track, and it creates a great atmosphere and environment for the team."

Their leadership also helped the Eagles transition to the 2021 season after Covid wiped out the previous season. Eastwood competed during the 2020 winter indoor season and had a handful of spring outdoor practices before the outdoor season was canceled in early March. The Eagles then practiced during the 2021 indoor season, but didn't compete in any meets.

"They went to all of the big meets as freshmen," Eagle head coach Nikki Sabo said of the seniors. "They knew those expectations of not only the team, but the different meets we go to. They can bring that experience. They



can explain to the younger athletes those expectations or what to do about a specific meet.

“Those things have been good, just keeping alive some of those traditions we’ve done over the years because they did live it during their freshmen year,” Sabo added. “They were very adamant, along with last year’s senior class, to model those expectations and uphold some of those traditions we’ve had over the years.”

The canceled season meant the 2019 freshmen and sophomores became the leaders of last season’s team as juniors and seniors. The Eagles’ roster of 57 athletes last season included 19 freshmen and 16 sophomores.

“Losing a year because of Covid was hard, but we knew we had to step up,” Stevenson said. “We had to show everyone what was expected, how to do things. We had a lot of traditions we wanted to keep going.”



### **Follow me**

Stevenson is a leader in her events, whether it be the high jump, the 400 or the 800, or the 4x200, 4x400 and 4x800 relays.

“She’s a great leader, and it’s not always by what she says, but by what she does, how she acts, the effort she puts out, her demeanor,” said Eastwood assistant coach T.J. Tuttamore, who works with the team’s distance runners.

“Her experience, the good leadership, her drive, her competitiveness — you put all of those together, and she leads by example,” Sabo said. “She’s also very verbal, very uplifting to her teammates. Those are qualities you want in a

captain and a teammate. I appreciate the effort she provides in both of those areas.”

Stevenson’s presence is helping a young group of Eagle high jumpers, too.

“She’s matured a lot from a scared little freshmen to leading the group,” said Eagle assistant coach Jack Corken, who works with the high jumpers. “We have a lot of younger high jumpers, so she takes over and takes them, both boys and girls, under her wing and she says this is the way we’re going to do things, and we’re doing do them together.”

### **Multiple events**

In addition to the high jump, Stevenson can be used in multiple events to do what is best for the team. She has the team’s second-best time in the 400 (65.50), the best time in the 800 (2:33.45), and has run the team’s best 4x400 split (63.0).

The 400 and the 800 races are separated by only the 300 hurdles. The 4x400 is the last event of the meet, while the 4x800 relay is the first event. Stevenson also has run the 4x800 and 4x200 relays this season.

The NBC meet a week away, May 14 at Memorial Stadium in Fostoria. The Division II district meet is May 19 and 21 at Oak Harbor High School.

“I feel good about the way I’m running right now, but I still want to keep improving,” Stevenson said.



Stevenson helped the Eagles' run the ninth-fastest 4x800 time last season with a 10:02.75 clocking.

The Eagles already have eight 4x800 members who have run in the 2:30s this season, including five at 2:35.4 or better.

"That's really good for right now, considering the weather," Stevenson said. "We're really excited about that race, and think we could do something really special. All of us push each other to improve, and we're excited to see how it plays out. We're all running with a lot of confidence."

Stevenson entered the spring outdoor season after running well during the winter indoor season. She was a member of the 4x200 and 4x400 relay teams which qualified for the state indoor meet. Eastwood ran a school-record time in both races at state.

"The indoor season gave me a lot of confidence, and it's carried over to the outdoor season," Stevenson said. "Since all of the girls who run the 4x8 are back this year, we all came in with a lot of confidence, thinking we can do it again, and we can do it better than we did last year."

Stevenson's best in the high jump is 5-0. She finished fourth in the high jump at the NBC meet last season and was a state indoor qualifier this year.

"She's really focused," Corken said. "She takes every jump seriously. She doesn't say it's a lower height, so I'm just going to jump it. You watch her when she gets into her stance before she takes off, everything is centered on what she's doing. You can tell she's focused on every little thing."

Stevenson placed in all four of her events at the conference meet last season. She also was fourth in the 400, and helped Eastwood win the 4x400 relay and finish third in the 4x200 relay.

### **Cross country, improved mental attitude help**

Stevenson ran cross country during her junior and senior seasons, aiding her improvement. She helped the Eagles win the NBC championship and qualify for the Division II state meet last fall, earning second-team all-conference honors by finishing 11<sup>th</sup> in the NBC meet.

"Cross country has done so much for me," Stevenson said. Stevenson joined the cross country team at the encouragement of Tuttamore, who is an assistant coach for the team.

"I really didn't want to do it because of the volume of workouts, but I'm so glad I did," Stevenson said. "It's really





helped my endurance and my speed. I don't think I'd be where I am today if I hadn't run cross country." Stevenson also said she's improved because she's become more positive about herself. She said she's always been negative, dating back to gymnastics where she started competing at around age 6.

"Before I started running cross country, I was so hard on myself," Stevenson said. "That's how I've always been. I've started to find my confidence and realized I can do this. I'm not a bad runner. I'm actually pretty good. That's helped me a lot."

"I was in my own head a lot," Stevenson added. "I've started to have a more positive outlook on things, not only running, but life in general. I started realizing I was so miserable and negative all of the

time, and said I can't do this anymore. This isn't helping me. I can't make progress this way. I'm a lot more confident."

Stevenson isn't the only successful distance runner in her family.

Her dad, Jim, was a first-team Division I All-Ohio cross country runner in 1989 and 1990 at Whitmer High School. Jim Stevenson finished seventh in the state meet in 1989 and 11<sup>th</sup> in 1990. He helped Whitmer finish sixth in the Division I 4x800 relay at the state meet in 1991. He went ran collegiately at Ohio State and Toledo.

"She was positive towards everyone else, but she was negative towards herself," Tuttamore said. "But she's a lot more positive about herself now, and her confidence has really increased. She is very critical of herself, but she's trying to learn from her mistakes."

"She's really matured over the last four years," Corken said. "She's learned over the four years this is what I need to do to be better, and I want to keep keeping better."

Stevenson praised Hoelter for her success: "She's been right next to me all four years, through the good and the bad. She's one of the reasons I'm where I'm at today."

### **What's next**

Stevenson, who has a 4.3 grade-point average, will attend Miami University in the fall. She's planning to major in early childhood education. She's also a member of Key Club at Eastwood and is a coach at Acceleration Gymnastics Center in Toledo.