

Girls earn 20th straight conference championship



By Kevin Gordon

LUCKEY — There aren't enough superlatives to describe how well Eastwood High School's girls track and field team performed Saturday.

But in a word, the Eagles were terrific.

Eastwood recorded 19 personal records, two season bests, three additions to the school's all-time Top 10 list and two improvements to already Top 10 performances en route to winning its 20th straight conference championship at Freedom Field.

The Eagles scored in all 17 events, including six first-place finishes, and totaled 183 points to easily win the Northern Buckeye Championship. Woodmore was second with 123½, while Elmwood was third with 83½.

Eastwood had won all eight NBC championships after winning the final 11 titles in the Suburban Lakes League. The SLL rebranded into the NBC for the 2011-12 school year with Fostoria and Rossford replacing Lakota and Gibsonburg.

"It's pretty incredible to think about 20 years, two decades. It's unbelievable," said Eastwood head coach Nikki Sabo, who is in her 12th season. Prior to that, Sabo was an assistant coach under head coaches Richard Morgan and Gary White.

"When I inherited this program, the streak had already started, and there was a great program in place. We're trying to continue that tradition and continue to build on that from what was started a year ago. It's hard to wrap your head around that."

The Eagles' 183 points were the third-most scored by any NBC team — girls or boys — in the conference meet. The Eastwood boys scored 221 points in 2017 and 197 points in 2015.

"It really hasn't hit me yet that this streak is older than me, and we're making history," said Eagle senior Jamie Lahey, who is 18-years-old. "It's history we're still making, and we're still going down in the history books."

“I hope it keeps going and going and going because it’s very meaningful and helps keep our team atmosphere going every single season. Every single year, winning the league is on our goal list. We make it a big deal to win NBCs, and that keeps us focused.”



All Photo Credits: Danielle DeFalco, Athlete: Jamie Lahey

Quality leadership

Although Eagles have performed well track on the track in every meet this season, quality leadership off the track has been vital to their success, too. The Eagles have 16 sophomores and 19 freshmen on their roster of 57 during the sport’s first season after the 2020 campaign was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This season’s freshmen barely had three weeks of practice before last season ended.

The team’s captains are seniors Lahey, Hannah Friend, Cordelia Howard and Emily Keiser; and junior Mikayla Hoelter. Eastwood has 12 seniors. “They have been amazing in terms of leadership,” Sabo said. “They’ve answered so many questions, and they’ve taken the lead on things. They’ve continued traditions we didn’t know if they’d get lost. They’ve had so much positive energy. I really respect what they’ve done for our program.”

In addition to answering the questions and learning the names and interacting with their

young teammates, the captains have led by example.

“Hopefully, we’re approachable to them when they ask us questions, and, if we don’t know the answer, we’ll ask around and get back to them,” Friend said. “This group is a big family. We care about each other and know about each other. It’s a genuine concern and that makes you want to perform well every single time.”

“I don’t want to say I raised them, but some of the girls say I’m the mom to them,” Friend added. “Seeing all of the hard work go into everything, it’s just an exhilarating feeling today.”

With no 2020 season, the Eagles almost have two freshmen classes this season.

“We’re competing for each other, so we want to do our best every single meet,” Lahey said.

“We’re so energetic, and it feeds into each other. Our attitude and atmosphere helps us to do our best.

“All of the events, we made it a point to connect with the underclassmen and really teach them and guide them about what to do,” Friend said. “Coming into the season, we tried to show them our atmosphere and our culture. They caught on so fast. We couldn’t have asked anything better from them.”



Aubrey Haas

Rock stars

The 4x800 relay team of sophomore Talia Baum, freshman Amelia Ward, Lahey and freshman Avery Bowman was second in 9:57.40, the seventh-fastest time in school history and the first time Eagles broke the 10-minute mark since 2014.

The four also ran Eastwood's first sub-11 time in several years April 17 at the Napoleon Invitational with a 10:16.57 clocking.

"Our times are crazy now. We've just kept going and going," Lahey said.

All four ran PR splits of at least two seconds.

"Making the Top 10 list was a goal of ours internally, but it wasn't a big deal," Lahey said. "I looked at the clock when (Bowman) was at the

600 mark, and I knew we were going to break 10 minutes. Whether we were first or second, to get second is nuts. We all felt good. What a great race."

Woodmore won the race in 9:50.47 to break the NBC record of 9:58.51 set by Otsego in 2014.

The Eagles also ran faster than Otsego's record.

"They were awesome," Sabo said. "To start off the running events with that was great. That was an awesome race. They really went after it."

Recap

Eastwood won with depth and talent. The Eagles won six events, and added five second-place finishes and five third-place finishes. They also had two of the top eight finishers in 12 of the 13 non-relay events, and were no lower than third in the four relays.

"It was a 100 percent team effort," Sabo said. "That's what special about this group. They got a ton of points in all three areas from the field events to the sprints to the distance. When we talk about it, it takes 17 events, all 17 contributed, and it was a 100 percent team effort."

The Eagles won three of the five field events — sophomore Julia Sabo won the pole vault, junior Ava Kiefer won the shot put, and junior Mikayla Hoelter won the long jump. Eastwood totaled 61 out of a possible 90 points in the field events.

Sabo won the pole vault with a jump of 11-0 to set an NBC record and increase her own school record. Her previous best was 10-9 at Napoleon. After clearing 11-0, Sabo moved the bar to 11-3 and made one unsuccessful attempt at the height before passing on her final two tries to concentrate on her remaining running events.

The NBC record of 10-6 was set by Elise Wolff in 2014.

Sabo was named the girls field event athlete of the meet.

Kiefer threw 39-1½ to win the shot and improve on her best of 39-1. Her mark of 39-1 already ranked as the second-best in Eastwood history.

Eastwood's other winners were: Hoelter, long jump, 15-10¼; junior Aubrey Haas, 300 hurdles, 48.71; the 4x100 team of freshman Reilly Might, Sabo, sophomore Emma Downs, and freshman

Saylor King, 52.19; and the 4x400 team of Hoelter, Haas, Ward and Stevenson, 4:15.75 (season best, down from 4:15.96). Haas and Stevenson ran PR splits during the 4x400.

Friend and Haas both had Eastwood all-time Top 10 performances on the way to second-place finishes in the discus and the 100 hurdles, respectively.

Friend threw 121-0 in the discus, the fifth-best distance in Eastwood history. It also was a PR, improving on her mark of 113-5.

Haas had a time of 16.54 in the 100 hurdles, the 10th-fastest time in school history. Her PR going into the meet was 16.84, and she PRd twice. She also had a time of 16.62 during the semifinals. The Eagles had two other second-place finishes — Sabo in the 100, 13.24; and Ward in the 800, 2:27.23. Ward had a PR, improving her best of 2:30.31 and coming within less one second of the Eagles' all-time Top 10.

Eastwood had five third place finishes — Downs, 100, 13.29; Baum, 1,600, 5:43.87; Hoelter, 400, 1:03.11; Montag, pole vault, 8-6; and the 4x200 team of Stevenson, and freshmen Kayla Buehler, Lila Kiefer and King, 1:52.44.

Downs ran a PR in the 100 during the semifinals with a 13.29 time, improving her best of 13.61. She then matched her semifinal time in the finals.

Baum had a PR in the 1,600, beating her previous best 5:49.84.

Hoelter had a PR in the 400, lowering her best of 1:04.38.

Montag PRd by six inches in the pole vault.



Emma Downs

Faster and faster

Downs had another solid day. In addition to finishing third in the 100 and helping win the 4x100, she was fourth in the 200 in 27.67. Her time in the 200 was a PR, lowering her best of 28.74.

“She keeps growing and improving in confidence,” Nikki Sabo said. “When she started coming to indoors, she had lots of questions and said, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know.’ But she’s super coachable.”

Downs started the season with times of 14.14 in the 100 and 29.49 in the 200 during a dual meet against Oak Harbor.

“Her times are dropping, and that’s great to see,” Sabo said. “She’s one who fills in so many holes and has really helped our team throughout the entire year.”

Reliable veterans

Stevenson and Hoelter had strong days, competing in four and three events, respectively. The juniors have performed consistently well all season.

Stevenson also was fourth in the high jump at 4-8, and Hoelter was fifth at 4-6. "They were solid," Nikki Sabo said. "They're going to give you great effort every single time. We can always count on them. They're so dependable. Both of them are very coachable, and lead by example. I'm glad we get them for another year."



Complete results of the meet are available at:
<https://www.baumspage.com/track/northernbuckeyeconf/2021/Results%20to%20print%20with%20field%20series.pdf>