

## Hesselbart, Sabo ready for state meet



*All Photo Credits: Danielle DeFalco*

### **By Kevin Gordon**

LUCKEY — Dalton Hesselbart had to wait an extra 48 hours before learning his spot in the state high school track and field championships was official.

Now that the Eastwood High School sophomore is in the meet, he's planning on capitalizing on the opportunity.

Hesselbart will compete in the pole vault during the Division II state meet at Pickerington High School. He's one of two Eastwood athletes who qualified for state, joining classmate Julia Sabo, who will take part in the girls pole vault.

The boys pole vault is Friday at 10 a.m., while the girls pole vault is Saturday at 10 a.m.

The goal at state for Hesselbart and Sabo is to clear a personal record. Hesselbart's PR is 13-6, and Sabo's is a school record 11-0. Should they achieve the goal, they'll have a chance to place in their event and earn a spot on the awards stand.

The top eight finishers in each event at state earn All-Ohio honors and be recognized on the podium after their event.

"We want to clear a PR," said Eagle boys head coach Brian Sabo, who works with the program's boys and girls pole vaulters.

Eastwood assistant coach Ethan Downey also instructs the vaulters.

"If you end the state meet with a PR, that's how it should be," Brian Sabo said. "That's a great way to end the season. There's nothing like ending the year with a PR at state, and the place is what it is. That experience is really valuable, along with the experience at the regional."

The two have consistently improved this season.



Hesselbart opened the season with a vault of 12-0, and improved to 12-6 in his second meet. He then cleared 13-0 in three of his next six meets before jumping his PR of 13-6 during a dual meet May 4 at Elmwood.

Julia Sabo cleared 10-0 in Eastwood's first meet to rank third on Eastwood's all-time list, and broke the school record April 9 with a vault of 10-7 at the Whitmer Invitational. She extended the record to 10-9 at the Napoleon Invitational April 17 and 11-0 at the Northern Buckeye Conference championships May 15.

Brian Sabo also said Hesselbart and his daughter have excelled this season because they "own their event."

The two are polishing their skills this week, not making any changes to their fundamentals. "The thing I appreciate about them is they're students of the event," Brian Sabo said. "They work hard. They want to improve. They want to see the videos of their vaults, and they watch those videos. They give us feedback right away. If you give us feedback and have a decent idea of what you should be doing, that helps us as coaches."

The two saw their freshmen seasons canceled by the COVID-19 pandemic, although they both advanced to the state middle school championships as eighth graders. Hesselbart jumped 11-6 to finish third in his meet, while Sabo cleared 8-9 for sixth place in her competition.

They also vaulted in the New Balance Outdoor Nationals in the summer of 2019 in Greensboro, N.C. Hesselbart was fourth at 10-8½ in the boys junior high division, while Sabo was 11<sup>th</sup> at 9-1 in the girls junior high division.

"Even when they were in middle school, I thought both of them would have a chance to qualify for state," Brian Sabo said. "You generally know what heights make it to state most years and you know what they're clearing, so that gave me a pretty good idea they'd make it."

### **Hesselbart's wait for state**

Hesselbart finished fifth in the regional Thursday at Lexington High School with a height of 13-0 — one place shy of an automatic state berth. The top four finishers in each of the four regionals advanced to state, along with two at-large qualifiers, regardless of region.

Junior Blake Sifferlin of Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary earned one of the at-large berths with a jump of 13-4 at the Austintown Fitch regional.



Hesselbart was one of three vaulters to clear 13-0 for the second at-large berth. Hesselbart and sophomore A.J. Ary of Miami East shared the other at-large berth, and both advanced to state. The Ohio High School Athletic Association didn't announce the at-large berths in the pole vault, instead opting to release the information on its web site and Baumspage.com when it posted the qualifiers and heat assignments.

Sabo had been checking Baumspage.com regularly Saturday while coaching during the final day of the regional. He eventually saw the state information Saturday night around 7, took a screen shot of the info and sent it to Hesselbart.

"It's going to be a good experience," Hesselbart said. "I'm excited about it, now that I know I'm going. It was kind of hard waiting to find out. My season was going downhill the last few meets, so if I didn't make it to state, I was all right with that because I had a good regional. But now I'm definitely happy to be moving on to state."

Hesselbart jumped just 12-0 at the NBC and districts before coming back to clear 13-0 during the regional. He also had a pole break during one of his attempts at the district meet.

"I was getting in my own head, watching other jumpers and the heights they were clearing," Hesselbart said. "They were going just as high as me, if not higher, and I wasn't used to that. I freaked myself out a bit. Now, I have my confidence back. I'm just worrying about myself, nothing else. It's just me and the bar."

"It excites me to have him for two more years," Brian Sabo said. "Those frustrations are all good. That's how you grow as a vaulter. He does a really good job of when you tell him something. He tries to do it right away. He will try new things."

The top regional height in the state was posted by Baltimore Liberty Union senior Jimmy Rhodes, who went 15-4. He was second in the state as a sophomore two years ago. Six other vaulters cleared at least 14-0, and the remainder of the 19 state qualifiers went at least 13-0. Sabo expects the opening height at state to be 13-0.

Ranking the state qualifiers by their regional height isn't an exact science because the weather at all four regions wasn't the same, it doesn't show the consistency of each vaulter, and it doesn't show their PR..

"I'm proud of the way he competed at the regional," Brian Sabo said. "Talent had something to do with it, but there's a mental side to it, too, and I'm proud of the way he handled that. He's jumping well. We'll iron some things out this week, and we'll have to be at our best right away, and that's fine."

"We'll be ready," Brian Sabo added. "We'll come in and do our best. I would be willing to bet 14-0 will place, 14-0 with no misses will place for sure, 14-0 in general will probably place. If he PRs, I think we'll place. Our goal will be to in a good mind-set coming in at 13-0."

Hesselbart, who also plays football and wrestles at Eastwood, believes competing in the state middle school state and the New Balance Outdoor Nationals will help him this weekend.

"That really helps in terms of experience," Hesselbart said of the national meet. "That was definitely the biggest meet I've ever been to. There were more people there than I've ever seen at a meet, and there were college coaches there. It gave me a taste of the big leagues, to know what the big meets are like, and I'm sure that'll help me this weekend."

### Julia Sabo aims for more success



Julia Sabo is jumping well heading into the state meet. She finished third in the regional with a height of 10-8 on a day the vaulters faced chilly and windy conditions, along with a mist during portions of the meet.

Sabo was cleared 10-7 to win the district championship after winning the NBC championship with her vault of 11-0.

"She's right in the mix," Brian Sabo "Our goal is clear a PR. Our belief is 11-0, 11-0 no misses. 11-6 gets us on the podium. Looking at last week, if the timing is right, those were good jumps. Those are 11-6 jumps. That's our goal."

"We're going to try to fix a couple things to try to get better and put ourselves in

position for that," Brian Sabo added. "She's jumping well and has been for a while. She's pretty focused right now."

Julia Sabo is tied for eighth among the state qualifiers, based on regional heights. Alexis Rickenbacher, a senior at Liberty-Benton, had the best regional height at 12-0. She also has the best vault in Division II this season with a jump of 12-5.

Six of the other 18 state qualifiers jumped at least 11-0 in the regional.

Sabo also has competed this season against Margaretta junior Kenna Stimmel, who is fourth nationally and leads Ohio Division III with a vault of 14-1.

"Once I set the school record, I realized there's more height I can keep going for," Julia Sabo aid. "When I watch my videos, I realized there are things I needed to keep working on. When I look at Alexis' and Kenna's videos, I saw they did this better or I do that, too. I watch other people's vaults just to see where I'm at, and what I need to work on to improve."

Julia Sabo, who also competes in gymnastics at Eastwood, believes her experience at the state middle school meet and the New Balance Outdoor Nationals will aid her this weekend.

"Any time you get big meet experience, it helps, Julia Sabo said. "I'll see a lot of familiar faces, and that helps when you see people you know. The outdoor nationals was very big. The state

meet won't be as hectic, so it helps having that big meet experience. You know what to expect to expect in terms of the atmosphere."