

Boys 4x400 relay finishes sixth at state indoor meet



By Kevin Gordon

GENEVA — Noah Smith delivered a series of impressive performances Friday.

Dayquan Oliver, Andre Lewis and Caleb Souder — Smith's running mates on the 4x400 relay team — added to Eastwood High School's list of gems.

The four finished sixth and earned All-Ohio honors in the 4x400 relay during the Division II-III state indoor track and field championships at SPIRE Institute.

They had a time 3:33.48, eighth-fastest in school history and easily improving their season best of 3:44.28.

The top eight finishers in each event at the state meet received All-Ohio honors and were honored on the awards stand after their event.

The meet is conducted by the Ohio Association of Track and Cross Country Coaches.

"(Smith) got us out hard to start, and everyone else followed and finished it off in a great way," Souder said. "That was four great legs."

Smith is a senior, Souder is a junior, and Oliver and Lewis are sophomores.

"This is a checkpoint for us to see where we're at with the outdoor season coming up," Souder said. "We have a chance to be a really good team. This gives us

a lot of confidence going into the outdoor season."

The 4x400 has long been the signature event for Eastwood, a tradition started by retired head coach Gary White. The Eagles love the race since it requires a mix of mental and physical toughness and because it's the last event of the meet.

The All-Ohio finish in a running event at the state indoor meet was Eastwood's first since 2019. The 2021 meet was canceled because of COVID.

"They thought they could run seven seconds faster than what we entered," Eagle head coach Brian Sabo said. "I thought it would take 3:37, 3:36 to place, and to run 3:33, oh man. I told them, 'I don't care if you place, I want to see the intent that we want to place.' I don't mind if we die in the end or somebody beat us in another heat, I want the intent to place. Being on the awards stand is great for them."

The race was run in three heats. Eastwood easily won the second heat and had to watch the third heat before knowing it was officially on the awards stand. Cleveland Glenville won in 3:33.20.

"They took it out hard, and the handoffs for this early were good," Sabo said. "Those little things I appreciate, and it's a blessing for them they did place, but I appreciate the intent they wanted it. I'm super pumped, and really, really excited for this group."

Oliver, Lewis and Souder all ran PR splits, and Smith ran back-to-back 51-second 400s in a 105-minute span. Smith ran in the open 400, posting a time of 51.28 for ninth place — missing All-Ohio honors by one place and 15 one-hundredths of a second.

Smith's split in the relay was 51.4.

Smith's open 400 time was a PR, beating his season-best of 53.43. He missed tying for second place on Eastwood's all-time list by .04.

"The whole team ran great. Our goal was 3:34, 3:35, and we ran 3:33, that's all we can ask for," Smith said.

Smith also ran in the 60-meter dash to start the meet, posting a time of 7.18 to just miss his PR of 7.18 earlier this season. He finished 18th.

Smith didn't feel well after running the open 400 at 5:10 p.m. after the 60 prelims at 2:15 p.m., but he was ready to go for the 4x400 relay at 6:55 p.m. He laid on the infield for a while after running the open 400.

"Maybe for like two seconds," Smith said when asked if he ever felt he wouldn't be able to run the 4x400. "Once I threw up, I was fine and I knew I'd be ready to go. You get that out of your system, and it's go time again. That long break helped a lot."

Smith even enjoyed some post-race pizza after the 4x400 relay.

"(Smith is a) strong runner," Souder said. "I knew he'd recover. I knew he'd run with us."

Also competing for Eastwood in the meet were senior Bryce DeFalco in the long jump and the triple jump, senior Dalton Hesselbart in the pole vault, and Oliver and Lewis in the high jump.

"I just enjoy this group," Sabo said. "It sets us up for a great outdoor season. We have some good young kids, and we have some good senior leadership. I'm excited."

Even more Smith

The open 400 was won by Columbus Bexley senior Mason Louis in 47.00.

"That was a strong race for me," Smith said. "It felt pretty good. I probably could have gotten out of the blocks a little bit faster. I PR'd by over a second, and I finished ninth, so I can't be upset about that. It was a good race."

Smith, however, said he didn't run well in the 60.

"I thought too much about it," Smith said. "I focused too much on getting a perfect start, instead of running the race. In the 60, you have to just run. There's no time to make up for a slow start."

Smith ran the 60 just once last season, but ran it regularly this season. He's also the team's best hurdler.

"I wanted to improve my speed, and I've been able to do that with all of the practices we've had," Smith said. "Now that I've improved my speed, I know I can compete in the hurdles and the open races, at least at a high level."

DeFalco finishes 11th in long jump

DeFalco finished 11th in the long jump with a distance of 19-10½, missing a spot in the finals by only ¾ inches.

The jump, however, was a PR as it beat his previous mark of 19-10¼.

"I'm disappointed I wasn't able to squeak into finals and at least place ninth," DeFalco said. "I was right there, so I know I have it in me."



The 22 state qualifiers were split into two flights for the preliminaries with the top nine jumpers advancing to the finals where they received three more jumps in an attempt to better their mark.

DeFalco won the first flight and still was in one of the top nine spots until the second flight attempted its final preliminary jumps.

"This is a good start," said DeFalco, who is healthy after struggling as a junior,

the result of a broken fibula suffered during the football season.

"It's night and day difference from my junior year," DeFalco added. "I didn't feel this good at all last year, even for triple jump. Now, I feel that extra pop and being back to normal. I'm confident and excited for outdoors. I'm definitely focused on jumping every single day now."

DeFalco also was 16th in the triple jump with a distance of 37-6. He was a three-time state indoor qualifier in the event.

"Today didn't go so hot," said DeFalco, who had a significant break between the end of his flight in the long jump and the start of the triple jump. "It was hard to get warmed up again, and my legs didn't feel great.

"I was coming in trying to warm up again, and it was very awkward because I landed weird on my heel and my shin and that killed the momentum for my last two jumps," DeFalco added. "I really didn't feel like there was any momentum I could get off the board."

Hesselbart competes in pole vault

Hesselbart cleared 13-0 to finish 18th in the pole vault where he was competing for the second time. He also was 18th last season, vaulting 12-6.

He was using bigger poles for the first time and had adjusted his steps on the runway.

"I could have had a better height," Hesselbart said. "It was a good practice, not necessarily a good meet. The different poles and the different steps, those are things I can control and get better at; something I'll keep working on."

Hesselbart already is a two-time Division II state outdoor qualifier, finishing 11th last season at 14-0 and 14th as a sophomore at 13-0. He finished his indoor career seventh on Eastwood's all-time last at 13-3.

"I'll get the timing down in practice, and everything will be all right," Hesselbart said. "I'm excited for the outdoor season. Everything I've been doing is fairly new. Hopefully, I'll get my form down and the jumps down, and build confidence. I'm not worried about the outdoor season. It's just new stuff I have to get used to."

Oliver, Lewis take part in high jump

In the high jump, Oliver cleared 5-8 to finish in a three-way tie for 19th place, and Lewis didn't clear the opening height of 5-8.

"It wasn't the best day today, but it's still the indoor season, and I have a lot of room for improvement," Oliver said. "I know coach Corken will help me get better."

Eastwood assistant coach Jack Corken works with the team's high jumpers.

Oliver's PR of 6-0 earlier this season is good for a four-way tie for seventh on Eastwood's all-time list.

"The reps are the biggest thing about indoor because that's the most important thing I need," Oliver said. "I need to fix my form a bit, but it's just a matter of reps. The more reps I get, the more chances I'll have to get better. I'm very excited for outdoors."

Lewis' PR earlier this season was 5-10.

"It's neat how you get to the prepare for the outdoor season during the indoor season," Lewis said. "My PR gives me some confidence for the outdoor season. It shows what I'm capable of. I'm confident I can jump higher, and I know coach Corken will teach me what I need to know so I can jump higher."

Results and videos of the meet of the meet are available at:

<https://oh.milesplit.com/results?month=3&year=&level=hs>