

## Three-sport athlete Haas excels in multiple roles



### By Kevin Gordon

Aubrey Haas didn't compete in track and field until her freshman season at Eastwood High School.

The late start didn't deter her from faring well.

The senior is the defending Northern Buckeye Conference champion in the 300 hurdles where she also was a Division II regional qualifier last season. Haas added a second-place finish in the 100 hurdles during the NBC meet last season.

Haas is striving for even more success during her final season with the Eagles.

She's already on Eastwood's Top 10 lists in both races, ranking fourth with a time of 16.17 in the 100 hurdles and seventh in the 300 hurdles with a time of 48.14. She ran both times last season.

"With her work ethic, she'll continue to improve," said Eagle assistant coach Ethan Downey, who works with the team's hurdlers. "She comes prepared every day, wanting to do her best in practice and meets. She wants to know how she can improve."

### The start

Even though Haas has excelled in the hurdles, she only ran the 100 event four times as a freshman because the Eagles had junior Shelby Getz and senior Shaunna Jubenville to fill that race.

Haas showed promise in the 100 hurdles and then added the 300 hurdles to her résumé as a junior after COVID canceled her sophomore season.

"I wanted to try the hurdles," said Haas, who didn't run track in middle school. "I have long legs, so I thought I'd be a good hurdler. I was okay at it when I was a freshman. Everything was new then, so I figured, 'Oh well, I might as well try it.'"

Haas' season debut last year saw her run the eighth-fastest time in school history (48.41) in the 300 hurdles and a personal record of 17.51 in the 100 hurdles. The times came during a dual meet at home against Oak Harbor.



“The team needed someone to do the 300 hurdles last year, so I said, ‘Oh sure, why not?’ Haas said.

The Eagles were working on their individual goals for the Oak Harbor meet during one of their team meetings leading up to the meet. Haas said she had no idea what to write down for the 300 hurdles since she was new to the event.

“Coach told me put down about 52 (seconds),” Haas said referring to girls head coach Nikki Sabo.

Haas then beat the 52-second mark by almost four seconds.

“I think that was a surprise to everyone,” Haas said. “From there on out, that’s been my thing. I liked the hurdles from Day 1. There are days it’s easy to get frustrated. But at the end of the day,

it’s a race of who can jump over the obstacles the quickest. I really do enjoy them, but everyone has bad days.”

Haas went on to run a personal record seven more times in 300 race and added two PRs in the 100 race last season.

“I thought she’d be pretty good,” Downey said. “Whatever event she wanted to do, she’d be successful at. She’s got the drive. She’s got the athletic skills. She could have picked any other event, and she would have excelled at it.

“She has speed and strength, and the strength is really important,” Downey added. “She has the ability to have a bad hurdle, but still maintain a race.”

Ironically, Haas said she didn’t feel totally comfortable running the hurdles until she fell during the 300 race last season at Whitmer’s Gold W Invitational. Haas fell going over the next-to-last hurdle, but still won in 50.68. She was running a terrific race and might have bettered her OH time of 48.41 before falling.

Haas also helped Eastwood win the 4x100 shuttle hurdles race at Whitmer with a time of 1:12.30.

“I had a really good race in the 100 and the 300 race was falling into place,” she said. “I was running a really, really good time. To fall and win the race, it put things in perspective. I knew I had to change some goals and go after some new goals the rest of the year. I had proven to myself I was running good times, and quicker times were attainable.”

Haas was sixth in the regional last season in the 300 hurdles. This season, she’s hoping to return to the regional and earn a trip to state. The top four finishers in each event at the regional qualify for state.

“It would have been really cool to make it to state last season, but my goal is to make it there this year,” Haas said. “I ran really well in the regional, and I was seeded fourth coming into the finals and I was projected to go to state. But things happen, I still ran well. But this year, my goal right away is to make it to state.

“The hurdles are a technical event, and she’s picked it up well,” Sabo said. “I see her times improving even more. “She’s more confident in terms of her form, her stride patterns, how to approach meets with prelims and finals.”

Haas’ success is even more impressive because of her COVID-canceled sophomore season.

“For the 100 hurdles, that set me back because that was a whole year of experience I lost, growing, learning, getting better, dealing with adversity, the good, the bad and the ugly,” Haas said.

The Eagles had a handful of outdoor practices before that season was canceled.

“For the first couple weeks, we were doing workouts at home that the coaches were sending us,” Haas said. “When things got shut down, that meant a whole year of not doing track. Eventually, you got back into your groove last season. It was a missed opportunity for everyone, not just me.”



### **More than a hurdler**

Haas’ speed enables her to run on Eastwood’s 4x200 and 4x400 relay teams.

The Eagles qualified for the regional in both relays last season, finishing eighth in the 4x200 and 13<sup>th</sup> in the 4x400. Eastwood returns a wealth of experience in both relays.

Haas was a member of Eastwood’s 4x200 team that posted the ninth-fastest time in school history, 1:47.35.

Haas believes both relays are capable of qualifying for state. Eastwood’s best time in the 4x400 this season is 4:18.24, and Haas believes the Eagles can break the 4:09 mark in the event by the end of the season.

“It’d be really cool to go to state with a relay team,” Haas said. “The more people at state the better. That

would be huge. The relays, you’re running for the team, not just yourself.

In an open event, you’re the only one competing.

“When you have a relay team, you don’t want to let them down,” Haas added. “You have them encouraging you, and you have their energy helping you. In the relays, you want to perform well for the girls who are also on the team.”

As a freshman, Haas was third in the 800 at the NBC meet.

### **A captain and team leader**

Haas is one of Eastwood’s captains, leading by example with her consistent, never-ending hard work and vocally by encouraging her teammates during practice and in meets.

“I was in their shoes,” Haas said. “When I was an underclassmen, I know it was easy to get frustrated and look at the older girls and want to run their times, comparing yourself to other girls, it’s where I have to step in. This is your first meet, the weather isn’t great. When the time is right, things will all fall into place. You have to worry about yourself, your



events. You can't worry about the noise around you. You have to tune all of that out, but it's easier said than done. It takes experience. Once they start seeing success, they know they can do it, and it makes it so much easier."

Haas wants to be someone her teammates can come to, if they have questions about how something should be done or what to expect.

"Leading by example is huge," Haas said. "When girls are confused about something, just show them. I want to be the mentor, the person they can go to if they have a question, anything. They know they can come to me. That's been huge this year because a lot of our hurdlers are still underclassmen. There's where I have to step up, be calm for myself and be prepared for myself, and help them get prepared for their races so they can succeed."

Haas said her freshman season was helped by the mentoring of Getz, who won both hurdles races in the NBC as a junior. Getz qualified for the regional in both races, too, but her senior season was erased by COVID.

"When I watched her hurdle, I knew that's what I wanted to do," Haas said. "Having her to mentor me and lead by example was the role I wanted to fill. I knew my freshman and what could have been my sophomore season, I was always going to be after her. I knew she was going to be the main hurdler. I knew to watch her and shadow what she does, so I could be just as good as her when it was my turn to step up."

And the Eagles love her leadership.



1,000<sup>th</sup> point shot

"The one thing I really appreciate about her is how she's been a vocal leader, encouraging other kids, younger kids, demonstrating what good technique looks like and what good effort looks like," Downey said. "As a coach, that's great. It's great having that leadership where the kids can see what it looks like, and she's a positive example of them how to act, not only on the track, but off the track."

### **Three-sport standout**

Haas' athletic success isn't limited to track. She was a four-year standout on the soccer and basketball teams.

The forward/outside midfielder was a first-team all-district selection in soccer as a senior after earning second-team honors in 2019 and 2020. She had 103 goals and 37 assists for 243 points in her career. Her goals and points both rank second on Eastwood's all-time list.

Haas finished her basketball career with 1,347 points, the third-most in school history. The 5-foot-8 power forward also holds the school record for career free throws made with 314. She was a third-team All-Ohio selection as a senior.

"I loved doing everything," Haas said. "A lot of times, it's prevented injuries. I'm a firm believer that over

using, doing the same motions, you're just going to overuse the muscles that are going to help you be successful. Getting in those different movements from different sports, it's helped me become more athletic, quicker, faster, a lot more versatile athlete. If you're doing more things, you're going to become better."

Haas was a captain on the soccer and basketball teams. "She's one of the most competitive athletes we've ever had," Nikki Sabo said. "She's just determined. She goes after it. She gives it her best every time. It's fun to watch. Her hard work is paying off.

"The three-sport athlete is a dying breed it seems like, but she has shown you can do it, and you can do it at a high level," Nikki Sabo said. "She works out in the weight room all year around. She's an all-around good athlete."

### **All in the family**

Haas comes from a family of athletes.

Her dad, Gary, played football, basketball and baseball for the Eagles. Her grandfather, Gary, played baseball at Eastwood. And her mom, the former Chrissy Phillis, played softball and volleyball at Genoa High School.

"It was normal for me to play sports," Aubrey Haas said.

"I never felt the pressure of not playing a certain sport or not being supported for the sports I played. My parents always told me, do what I want to do, do what I want to be successful at, do what I want to be better at."

Aubrey Haas said her main sports were soccer and basketball, although she didn't hesitate to play in pickup basketball and volleyball games in her Luckey neighborhood growing up. She was the only girl on her T-Ball team, and she played youth softball.

"I've always loved sports," Aubrey Haas said.

### **Joining the track program**

Haas admitted she was "on the fence" about joining the track team as an eighth grader, but she eventually decided to try the sport as a freshman.

And, in reality, the decision to join the track program eventually became a bit of a no-brainer for Haas.

She only had to look out of the front window of her home to see two of her coaches and one of her best friends — Nikki Sabo and her husband, Brian, who is the Eagles' boys head coach; and their daughter, Julia, who is a member of the girls track team.

The Haas and Sabo families live across the street from each other. The track team includes many of Haas' soccer teammates. She also chose track, so she and Julia Sabo could be teammates.

"How could I not run track? How could I say no to my neighbors?" Aubrey Haas said.

"Track was so different because it would have been new to me. But with the Sabos being my neighbors, growing up with Julia, always being at their house, it was a sense of





comfort. I knew it would be a different group of girls, and I'd make new friends and have new coaches, who I already knew and trusted.

"They really are my second family and so is track. Track is my second family, too." Aubrey Haas added. "To have that bond is a sense of comfort. I know they want me to excel, and they're going to celebrate my success. I will do the same for Julia. I can go them for anything if I have questions. They're very approachable. If I ever need anything, I know I can always go to them."

Aubrey Haas added track would help

her speed and stamina for soccer: "I knew track would benefit me in soccer, and it did. I've really fallen in love with track, the sport itself, the environment of our team, my teammates, the coaching staff, everything about it. I look forward to coming to practice and meets. When I come to track, there's nothing else on my mind, just track."

Aubrey Haas and Nikki Sabo both recalled a conversation they had when Haas was an eighth grader. During their talk, Sabo asked Haas to try track the following spring, and Haas said she would.

"Knowing she came from a baseball and softball family, I assumed she'd play softball," Nikki Sabo said. "I wasn't sure if she was serious about giving track a try, but she was serious."

Now, Aubrey Haas and Julia Sabo are aiming to compete at state as teammates. Julia Sabo tied for fourth in the pole vault at state last season. And a trip to state as relay teammates would be even sweeter.

"Julia and I want to run at the state meet together. That's, by far, my biggest goal, getting better every meet so I can run at state," Aubrey Haas said.

### **An even better person**

Even though Aubrey Haas is an outstanding athlete, she's an even better person. Haas is well-liked and well-respected by teammates, coaches, other students at the school and Eastwood's teachers and staff.

"I've heard from coaches all the time when they meet up with players years and years later, when they have their own families and kids, they could care less about the wins and losses," Aubrey Haas said. "It was about the memories they created with their teammates, the relationships they had with their coaches. I would say the same thing about myself. I want to be remembered as someone who was uplifting and encouraging, someone they knew they could go to, someone they could trust.

"Those are the expectations Coach Sabo has taught us from Day 1," Aubrey Haas said. "Treat people with respect, have respect for your coaches and teammates, that's exactly what I want to embody and what I want to leave here. Someone you know who wasn't so serious, someone who could joke around. Make you laugh on a bad day. That's what I





always looked forward to do. When I was having a rough day, practice wasn't going well and I was frustrated, someone would ask how I was doing or make me laugh. Just those little moments that I would remember. Comforting someone in track, telling them you're proud of them. Those words of affirmation go much farther than you think."

And Nikki Sabo has had the enjoyment of knowing Aubrey Haas as a long-time neighbor in addition to their coach/athlete relationship.

"She's a great person," Nikki Sabo said. "She's like a second daughter to me. I've watched her

grow up. She's very helpful. She's always been a good friend to our daughter. She's fun. She has a fun, outgoing personality.

"We've played board games," Nikki Sabo added. "We've laughed. There's been a lot of laughs over the years. It's been fun to be her coach as well. When practice is done and you don't have to play the role of coach, we get to be neighbors and friends."



### **What's next**

Haas will run collegiately at Purdue University Fort Wayne where she plans to major in biology said. She has a 4.1 grade-point average, and is a member of Senior Executive Council, which helps with the planning of prom and graduation.

"I'm far enough away, but I'm close enough if I need anything," Haas said of her university choice. "It's a pretty area. The downtown is really nice. I really liked it."

Haas enjoyed her recruiting visit, especially the girls on the track team.

"I was impressed with how uplifting and encouraging everything was," Haas said. "They played music during practice. Everyone is focused on their goals. They want to be better. They always want their team to be better. That was symbolic to what we do here. We're all one family, we all want to do our best and we want our teammates to do their best and give our best effort while we're doing that."

Her current plans include becoming a genetics counselor, who meets with families to discuss their baby's genetics and if the child will have any disorders. Haas said PFW has a "really good" genetics program.

Haas said her love of biology resulted from her classes taught by Keith Madaras and Karen Smoyer.