

Kiefer seeks even more success in the throws



By Kevin Gordon

Ava Kiefer started throwing in middle school.

The seventh-grader at Eastwood back then tried the shot put the discus because she thought she might be good at it.

Turned out, she was right.

The senior ranks second in the shot put and third in the discus on Eastwood's all-time Top 10 list, and she's within striking distance of the school records in both.

Kiefer's personal records are 39-1½ in the shot put and 126-9 in the discus. The record holder is Eagle assistant coach Whitney Recker, who threw 43-5¼ in the shot and 141-2 in the discus as Whitney Hartman in 2004.

Jena Jacoby ranks second in the discus with a throw of 128-6 in 2012.

Kiefer also holds the school record in the hammer throw (126-1).

Most recently, Kiefer won the shot put for the

second straight season and finished third in the discus at Saturday's Northern Buckeye Conference Championships at Memorial Stadium in Fostoria.

"The school records have been a goal for me since I was a freshman," Kiefer said. "I'm trying to push myself to get those. Even if I don't hit them, I'm still pretty proud of how far I've gotten during my career."

Kiefer and Recker said they rarely discuss the shot and discus records.

"The other kids give me a hard time about it all of the time, but Ava doesn't bring it up," Recker said. "I think one time in the three years I've known her, she says, 'I'm going to catch you coach,' and I said, 'Please do.'"

"It only comes up when one of the other throwers on the team brings it up," Kiefer said.

Looking ahead

Kiefer likes the way she's throwing both implements going into the district meet Thursday and Saturday at Oak Harbor High School. Her goal is to qualify for state in one of her events. She throws the discus Thursday and the shot Saturday.

She's PR'd five times in the discus this season, most recently May 4 during a dual meet at home against Elmwood and Rossford. Her season started with PRs in the discus during team's first two meets, March 29 at Oak Harbor and April 1 at the Liberty-Benton Invitational.

Her PR entering the season was 102-3.

"I'm definitely throwing with a lot more confidence this year," Kiefer said. "From the first meet, I saw the potential I had, throwing a PR my very first meet. That showed me I can get up to those distances, and I still think can throw even farther."



"I'm proud of how far I've been throwing the discus," Kiefer added. "The distances have finally kicked in. I'm finally putting it all together. I want to go as far as I can in the tournament."

Kiefer's PR in the shot came last season. Her best this season is 38-6½ during the Eastwood Throwers Invitational May 8. She also threw 38-2½ at Liberty-Benton and 38-0 in the Eastwood Relays April 22.

"I'm hitting 38 consistently, and I still think I can throw even better," Kiefer said.

The top four finishers in each event at the district qualify for the regional meet May 26 and 28 at Lexington High School. The top four regional finishers in each event earn berths to the state meet June 3-4 at Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium.

"That's part of being a senior, being a leader in the throwing area and teaching others what she knows," Recker said of Kiefer's increased confidence this season. "That's helped her confidence tremendously.

"She's a hard worker, and she has a lot of natural strength," Recker said. "As a freshman, you could see the natural strength she has, and that really helps her. With the weather we're getting now and her getting even more confident, her distances have to go up."

Kiefer qualified for the regional in the shot last season. She finished ninth with a distance of 38-5 ½, but she fouled on all three of her throws in the finals.

"She's so much stronger mentally this year, much more confident," Eastwood head coach Nikki Sabo said. "You see this sense of determination in her. Regionals last year didn't go the way she wanted. That definitely gave her motivation for this season to really go after it."

Kiefer also finished second in the NBC shot as a freshman. Her sophomore season was canceled because of COVID. She won the NBC shot championship as an eighth grader and finished third in the discus.

"I came out for middle school track to try it because I had never tried it before and I thought I might be able to be good at it," Kiefer said. "Being good at it in middle school made me want to keep doing it in the future. I'm glad I did.

"I didn't really know a lot about it, but as I had success and learned the techniques, the fundamentals, I got to like it a lot," Kiefer added.

Leadership/Cheering on her teammates

Kiefer is one of Eastwood's seven captains, and one of its seven seniors.

"Reading through what the girls said when they were voting for captains, was how encouraging she is and supportive of them as they're throwing and as they're competing," Sabo said of Kiefer.

"I've witnessed it," Sabo added. "She gets so much more excited about how well her teammates do than she ever does herself. She's a very humble person, and that's a



reflection of who she is. She doesn't like the spotlight on her, and she wants others to do well. She's the first to broadcast their news."

"I try to set a good example. I try to lead through my efforts," Kiefer said.

Kiefer is one of the team's biggest cheerleaders. When she's done throwing, she heads to the other field event areas and the track to cheer on her teammates.

"I love cheering on my teammates," Kiefer said. "We're one big family."

Eagle athletes, like Kiefer, who

help spread good news during the meet, are a big help to Sabo. She doesn't see a large part of the team's meets because she's coaching the Eagle long jumpers. The same is true for the other field event coaches.

"That means a lot, especially where you have 17 events, and you're spread out so far from each other," Sabo said. "I try every meet to get over to the throws, but when you're a field event coach, that's hard.

"To know there's someone over there, trying to take on that role, obviously, our coaches are trying to talk to the athletes, but the behind the scenes, encouragement and uplifting statements, is very important," Sabo added. "It helps us as a coaching staff that there are athletes taking on that role when we're busy. She'll make her way around to all of the other events and check in with everybody, and offer her encouragement, and that's huge."



Kiefer prefers to provide information on her teammates, instead of herself. She's usually tight-lipped about her own successes.

During Eastwood's junior varsity invitational May 9, Kiefer quickly informed Sabo of junior Jay Johnson's PR throw of 91-0 which took first place.

"When Ava saw me, that was the first thing she said to me," Sabo said. "Whenever she has good news about herself, you literally have to pull it out of her. She brings that positive environment to our team, and it's not just the throwing area.

Kiefer is part of a terrific senior class which has been a major contributor to the team

since it joined the program. The other seniors are Megan Graham, Aubrey Haas, Mikayla Hoelter, Marina King, Maisy Stevenson and Addy Young.

"Just the effort that is given by everyone, and how hard they go after things and do the best they can for the team," Kiefer said when asked which of the Eagles' many

accomplishments she's most proud of as a member of the senior class. "I'm also proud our team has a fun, positive and encouraging environment."

What's next

Kiefer will throw collegiately at the University of Findlay where she'll major in the school's animal science program. She has a 4.2 grade-point average

She hasn't decided on a specific career, but it'll be animal related. Kiefer volunteers at the Wood County Humane Society.

She's also a member of the Northwestern Ohio Tractor Pullers Association, which annually puts on the National Tractor Pulling Championships at the Wood County Fairgrounds in August.

Kiefer said the older generations in her family were involved in farming before selling their land, adding she might start her own farm someday.

"My dad was a Blue Shirt (an NWOTPA member), and I remember first going to the pull with him," Kiefer said. "It was really cool to see everyone come together and watch something that was really cool. I really enjoy it."