

Boys are building on last season



All Photo Credits: Danielle DeFalco Athletes:
Noah Haar and Ethan Kwiatkowski

By Kevin Gordon

LUCKEY — Eastwood's boys are building on last season.

The Eagles were a young team with great senior leadership a season ago.

Now, a year wiser, faster and stronger, they're striving for even more success this season.

Eastwood has 51 athletes on its roster, including 14 seniors and 10 juniors. The Eagles also have 11 sophomores and 16 freshmen.

"I'm excited," said Eastwood head coach Brian Sabo, who is in his 11th season. "It was good to do some indoor work this year, especially for field events. It allows you decent weather. We've already had PRs (personal records) indoors. That's where you want to be."

The Eagles started outdoor practice Feb. 22 in preparation for the first meet March 29 at Oak Harbor. "We've had great workouts outdoors," Sabo said. "It's been a really good start, considering the weather. We've embraced some things. We've done a lot of teaching. We've had a to teach a little less. We were

so young last year that we have a lot more experience this year. The young kids and newcomers have immediately picked things up. The quality has been great."

Last season was a challenging one after the 2020 season was canceled because of COVID. The Eagles had a handful of practices before the season was canceled in early March. The dual-meet schedule never started.

Seniors Devin Good, Nate Heskett, Ethan Kwiatkowski, Jacob Meyer, Xander Ramsey, and Jacob Stonerook; and junior Bryce Koprowski-Kistner are the Eagles' captains.

"We're a lot further along than last year," Sabo said. "Maybe because we didn't have a 2020 season, you felt really, really behind. We've changed some things up. We added some things last year, and we've tweaked them to make them better this year.

"I'm pretty pumped about the year," Sabo added. "It's fun to be around these guys. The young kids and newcomers have immediately picked things up. The quality has been great. I'm excited. It's a fun group. They have energy. You can feel it already."

Among the returnees this season are 12 athletes who competed in the Northern Buckeye Conference championships last season, more than double the previous season when only five Eagles had competed in the conference meet.

"That gets me even more excited. That's the depth," Sabo said. "The depth is so much better. We were so young last year. To have all of those people return says a lot."

The depth and talent are sprinkled throughout all 17 events.



Dalton Hesselbart

Junior Dalton Hesselbart returns in the pole vault after finishing 14th in last season's Division II state meet. Koprowski-Kistner also returns after winning an NBC championship last season in the long jump and finishing 10th in the regional.

The other returnees who scored in the NBC meet last season are:

- Junior Noah Smith, second in the 110 hurdles and third in the 300 hurdles.
- Senior Jake Limes, sixth in the 200 and seventh in the 100.

- Senior Cory Jay, third in the 1,600 and eighth in the 3,200.
- Sophomore Noah Haar, fifth in the 400.
- Ramsey, eighth in the 400.
- Senior Andon Mason, eighth in the 300 hurdles.
- Good, fifth in the 800.
- Hesselbart, third in the pole vault.
- The Eagles also return half of the 16 spots from their four relay teams. The returnees are Good, Ramsey, Koprowski-Kistner, Limes, Kwiatkowski, sophomore Kaiden Sanchez, Smith and Haar. Kwiatkowski, however, is out indefinitely because of an injury suffered last fall in football.

"We will be very solid in every event," Sabo said.

Eastwood finished second in the NBC last season, seven points behind Genoa.

"We return so many people," Sabo said. "We had great senior leadership last year. We return a lot of people, and you can feel what they built last year is resonating this year. The new people and the young people are filling in some areas as well.

"We had the talent last year, but we didn't have the depth," Sabo added. "We have competition. We're back to where it's tough to get on relay teams. When you have people competing to be in spots, it makes your team better."

A talented freshmen class also has made an impact immediate on the team.

Freshmen Hayden Hoelter, Andre Lewis, Kevin Lewis and Jesse Poiry competed in the Division II-III state indoor earlier this month in the 4x400 relay, running a season-best time of 3:46.57 — shaving three seconds off the Eagle's previous best.

The freshmen could play major roles for the Eagles.

"They have so much energy," Sabo said. "They pour in. They blend in. They're excited. They embrace it. They're positive. It's like they've been here for a year or two because they've embraced and adapted to what we're doing.

"That's what our older group has done," Sabo added. "Everyone feeds off each other, and that's what is going to make this year special."

Eastwood's second-place finish in the NBC last season ended the team's streak of winning 19 straight conference championships, spanning the now-defunct Suburban Lakes League and the NBC.



Bryce Koprowski-Kistner

The Eagles won the first eight championships in the NBC after winning the final 11 championships in the SLL.

“No,” Sabo said when asked if there would be an added emphasis on the NBC championship after losing it last season. “We came and competed last year. We just got beat. We treat the league the same every year, including last year. Yes, I told the guys there was a chance we might not win. And there have been other years we’ve known that could happen.

“But we’re going to focus on the positive,” Sabo added. “We’re going to move forward. We’re going to compete and if we get beat, we’re going to shake hands and move forward. We’re going to

figure out where do we need to get better, where did we err, how do we improve and then we’ll move forward and that’s what we did.”

Sabo said 80 percent of the team had at least one PR last season.

“The philosophy is the same, give uncommon effort, pour into the team spirit, pour into your teammates, don’t be afraid and things will happen the way they happen,” Sabo said.

“Our goals don’t change — win the NBC, get as many people to the regional, and then get as many people as we can to the state meet. Some years, you know you have a little bit more. Some years, you’re scratching and clawing.”

Hesselbart was Eastwood’s only state outdoor qualifier last season, and they only had four regional qualifiers. Hesselbart and Koprowski-Kistner are the Eagles’ only returning regional qualifiers.

All four regional qualifiers for the Eagles advanced in a field event as Eastwood had no regional qualifiers in a running event for the first time in recent memory.

“That will be different this year,” Sabo said. “We’ll get people to the regional, and we’ll get people to the state meet this year in those (running) events.”