

Eagle athletes benefit from work in weight room



By Kevin Gordon

During almost every weekday after school, Eastwood's high school and middle school athletes are working hard to become bigger, faster and stronger.

The school's traditional weight room and auxiliary weight room at the east end of the gym are full of activity. The work in the weight room is one of the major reasons for the success of Eastwood's boys and girls track and field teams, as well as the school's other teams.

Kevin Gordon talked to Brian Sabo, Nikki Sabo, Andy Friess, Emma Downs, Addie Young, Mikayla Hoelter and Bryce Koprowski-Kistner about the weight room and its impact on the Eagles' athletic teams.

The Sabos are Eastwood's head track coaches, while Brian Sabo and Friess oversee the weight room. Downs, Hoelter and Young are track and field, and soccer athletes, and Koprowski-

Kistner is a track athlete and plays football. Young and Hoelter are seniors, while Downs and Koprowski-Kistner are juniors.

Q: What do you want the athletes to get out of using the weight room ... Friess estimated 50-60 athletes use the weight room after school during the academic year, while 75 use the weight room daily during the summer?

BRIAN SABO: "It depends on the age. If you're younger, you're a novice, you're in middle school, the first thing we're going to try to build is neuromuscular coordination. We're going to make you more coordinated, in the movements we do, the body weight, some might be just with the bar or light weights. We want to improve coordination through movement. If the movement is good, we're going to load the movement, and we're going to make the movement more efficient. Therefore, we're making you stronger in the long run. Once we get you more coordinated with the movements, we can load it more and, in theory, you're getting stronger. If you've been lifting for a little while, now we're going to go to different rep schemes or more specific movements. Now, we'll try to gain strength and power, which is moving the weight with a time component."

FRIESS: "Ultimately, our goal is to build a fun environment where they commit to a work ethic, commit to showing up, commit to working hard, being self-disciplined. This isn't osmosis where you can touch the bar and immediately become stronger. You have to work at it. They can see the progress they're making because the results are tangible."

Q: Do you have specific programs for each individual sport?

BRIAN SABO: "I'm always open to that, and I'm always doing research on lifting weights, in general, for the different sports. I don't believe there's one specific program, and

everyone should do it. If you're really consistent in what you're doing, kids will improve all of those things I mentioned before. There are certain things that can make you successful. But you're always going to see gains if kids are coming in consistently and doing something. The overwhelming majority of middle school and high school athletes need roughly the same things from the weight room. After a couple of years, some sports might be more specific. Volleyball, it might be improving their vertical jump. Football, it might be increasing their strength and 40 time. Baseball, it might be rotational power for the core. Cross country, you might want to be more fit, so you break down less from the all of the running. But for the most part, everything is pretty well rounded, and every kid should get the same thing."

Q: And you're exposing the athletes to a healthier lifestyle in the long run?

BRIAN SABO: "We'll show them a number of lifts so they'll feel comfortable to be in a weight room or a room where there's weights. There's exercise for a healthier lifestyle, so they're not intimidated by the weight room. They can, hopefully, go any place and see the equipment they have and utilize it and use it because they're familiar with it. We expose them to a lot of different things here — strength training, fitness, weight training."

Q: Does the weight lifting help prevent injuries?

BRIAN SABO: "If we're doing the right things, there's less likelihood of non-contact injuries. When there's contact, you stepped on somebody's foot or somebody collides with you, you hit the ground, that has very little to do with what we're doing in the weight room or how somebody warmed up. If we can do movements right and things that have injury prevention to it, that should take care of itself. The better you move, the stronger you are. You're going to break down less. You have less chance of being injured. And if you're injured, you're going to recover faster."

Q: How do you get athletes interested in the weight room?

BRIAN SABO: "We provide an environment that is extremely positive, extremely welcoming. The weight room has become its own social hangout, but we want you to work hard first, and then some people will hang out for a while, and sit on the boxes and chat, or foam roll and chat for a while. We're okay with that. That's down time for us to maybe talk to the kids when they're done. It's just an all-welcoming place where you can work hard and be a part of a group, a culture."

NIKKI SABO: "It has to come from their peers. Success, whether it's been on the court, on the track, on the field, the generations coming through Eastwood now have seen the benefits of the previous generations. Basically, they know this is what we do. If you want to be good, you work out in the weight room. We need to get there on a consistent basis. A lot of it is positive peer pressure, from their teammates, the entire coaching staff. When track is over, they're immediately back in the weight room for soccer, for volleyball, for cross country, for football, it's an expectation of all the programs, not just track and field. The weight room also helps them mentally because it makes them more confident. It lets them know when they're facing a challenge, they've already met challenges before in the weight room, and they can do it again, whether it's on the court, on the track or on the field."

“The weight room provides a positive atmosphere for the athletes. Just seeing the older athletes helping the younger athletes and seeing them being helpful is great. They can build friendships.”

Q: What has been the result of your time in the weight room?

KOPROWSKI-KISTNER: “I’m in here four, if not five days a week, especially after school. After practice. In the morning A lot of your foundation is built in the weight room, and it’s the key to getting better at your sport, no matter what sport it is. There are so many different aspects to the human body, and everything in here will help some aspect of your body in some way for whatever you want to do. It definitely helps your confidence. If you’re doing something you’re not sure about, on the football field or with track. I know I’m capable of doing it because of more explosive movements I’m able to do with weights that generate more force going into it.”

DOWNS: “The weight room has really helped me develop more explosive movements I can incorporate into my sports. It’s awesome we have coaches who are so knowledgeable about everything. They can help every single athlete individually with their event or sport. They have different workouts for each sport to help you get better. It helps with all of your sports. It helps with speed. It helps with strength. It makes your confidence sky rocket when you know you can compete physically. I used to be really insecure with how I performed strength-wise. But when I see myself getting (personal records) in the weight room, I know that’s going to reflect in how I perform in track and soccer, so it’s a big confidence booster.”

YOUNG: “It helps all of your sports, especially because they cater workouts to all of the different sports. That really helps. Physically, you know you can compete and win those one-on-one battles in soccer or you can increase your speed in track. Being able to compete physically changes your mind-set. If you go into it, thinking you can’t compete with everyone else, you’re not going to do well. Getting that confidence in the weight room helps in your sport.

HOELTER: “It really helps you physically. They do a really good job of making workouts specific for each sport. Not everyone is doing the same thing, and the coaches are great about pinpointing specific things.”

Q: Friess’ presence has played a major role in the success of the weight room. Why do the athletes enjoy him?

BRIAN SABO: “The kids love him because he loves them. He gives first. He’s euphoric when they succeed or do well, says hello/goodbye to them, calls them by name. He goes to a lot of different athletic events to see them compete in their sports. He dives in first and then gives feedback, and they enjoy him. He brings a lot of ability and loves being around the kids.”

NIKKI SABO: “He has an outgoing personality. He wants everyone to improve. He brings a lot of experience, a different perspective. He’s here all year long. He’s so positive, and he wants every single person to improve. He has knowledge of the different types of lifts and communicates that to the different athletes.”

Q: Why do the athletes enjoy being around Friess?



KOPROWSKI-KISTNER:

Coach Friess and Coach (Brian) Sabo are the weight room. There's no Eastwood weight room without them, and the foundation they've laid is truly special. It's great seeing alumni come in and do group workouts with them. It builds a family here at our school."

DOwnS: "They've created a really awesome environment. They help everyone to give the best effort they can. They go around to each person to make sure they know how to

do the correct form."

YOUNG: "The attitudes of Coach Friess and Coach Sabo are so infectious. They create such a great environment. You want to keep coming back. Even after I graduate, I think I'll keep coming back to visit and get a workout in. It's a great place to make friends, especially for the younger kids, and the coaches really work to develop that atmosphere. Even when I'm having a bad day, I always come to the weight room because I always feel better after being here. Just having a place for kids to gain confidence is great. When we weren't in school because of COVID, I still made sure I came to school to get a workout in. You feel so much better getting a workout in, and you just feel better mentally."

HOELTER: "The environment is really good and it makes you feel comfortable, whether you have a bunch of athletic experience in the weight room or you're brand new. They'll accommodate everyone. The coaches make it so much fun. They'll talk to you. They'll joke around with you. They get to know you personally. It's a good friendship you develop with them because they'll talk to you about more than weightlifting, see how your day is going, school, We'll tell them about a test we had. It's just a lot of fun."

Q: Besides the weightlifting itself, what keeps the athletes coming to the weight room daily:

DOwnS: "The atmosphere and intensity are great. Everyone really gets after it. It's a lot fun. The coaches and athletes keep pushing you to do better. I was a little nervous at first when I started because I didn't have the knowledge of how to do things. I didn't know how to lift, but I quickly got excited about it because they showed me how to lift. They didn't make you feel guilty about not understanding how to lift. The social atmosphere is great. Everyone is so kind and encouraging. They keep pushing you to get better. If you're going for a PR, it seems like there's 10 people around you pushing you and cheering for you. It's really awesome. The first day I came, I felt welcome and the coaches were helping me right away."

HOELTER: It's so welcoming and so friendly, more and more people are coming. The number of middle schoolers coming seems to be the most since I've been here, You love

the intensity, especially when people are going for a PR. People are going to be cheering them on.”

KOPROWSKI-KISTNER: “The atmosphere, by far, is the attention grabber. It makes you want to keep coming back. People pour into each other, and there’s so much energy in here when someone PRs. You get high fives, jumps for joy, all sorts of reactions from Coach Sabo and Coach Friess. During the summer, there’s a lot of incoming freshmen from all sports, and you have the returning athletes who are constantly working out here. That helps with team building and getting to know someone, and you make a lot of new friends or get to know people even better or who you’ve never even talked to before.’

Q: Friess’ House of Pain Challenge is popular with the athletes. The competitions are difficult, and will push the athletes to improve and work as a team ... how does making the weight room fun help attendance?

FRIESS: “The kids become your best advocates. If you give positive vibes, positive attitude out, they’re going to respond to that. When you show the attitude and bring it, and (Brian Sabo) and I both still like to lift with the kids, it’s reciprocated from the kids. I’ve never considered the weight room coaching. When you’re coaching, there’s always that little bit of separation between the coaches and the athletes. In the weight room, I’ve never felt that. You can talk to the kids. You can lift with the kids. You can get to know them on a totally different level.”

HOELTER: The House of Pain Challenge is great ... loud music, team building, college type exercises that really push you and your team. There’s a lot of cheering. It’s just a fun way to lift.”

Social media is used to help generate interest in the weight room. How has that helped? Videos of athletes are posted to the weight room’s social media accounts.

BRIAN SABO: “It’s a good way to show what we’re doing, a good way to promote the kids. We want to promote the kids. I’ve always said I’m not going to apologize for celebrating the successes of our kids. If somebody has worked hard, and they’re seeing some real gains and they’re really happy with the weight they’re cleaning or squatting, we want to promote that, and their successes as well.”

Q: Sabo and Friess have spent more time incorporating speed work this year. What is the reason for that?

FRIESS: “We’ve really, really researched it. We need to have a good foundation of lifting. Now, we tend to see more with football, girls soccer and track with the speed aspect of it. Girls soccer seemed to out run every team they played this year. They saw a lot of growth in speed. Speed is important in football and track. We also brought a sprint mechanic for the distance people in cross country.”

Q: During the last year, Brian Sabo and Eastwood guidance counselor Andrew Hemminger coordinated a fundraiser for the weight room, which Sabo said generated about \$28,000.

FRIESS: “The response from the community was phenomenal. It just shows how many kids the weight room touches. They’re still active. The sheer response and people giving gladly for knowing the equipment was getting old and people who come in knowing what

we do, realize a lot of wear and tear.” Friess added Hemminger also was improved the visuals in the weight room with his painting of the walls and adding signs.

Q: What were the donations used for:

FRIESS: “A lot of it was for equipment, and it was pretty evenly divided between new equipment and replacing old equipment.”

Sabo added a wide range of equipment and accessories were purchased, both for the experienced lifters and for the inexperienced/younger lifters. A four-station lifting structure was purchased. The structure also has several pullup bars. Nine VMaxPro devices were purchased. The device is attached to the bar and will measure bar speed, peak velocity, power and rate of force development. The device connects to iPads and phones.

Q: Do athletes who aren’t involved in a sport use the weight room?

BRIAN SABO: “The weight room is open to everyone. In the past, we’ve had band kids. Kids who have never done a sport eventually come out for a sport because they felt more confident after being in the weight room and wanted to give it a try. That’s happened many times. Some kids come in for their physical education and strength training classes. Some just like lifting. A lot of times, we see kids coming out for a sport because they felt more confident lifting after being in the weight room.”

The weight room is a place where Eastwood alums can work out when they’re home for the holidays or during college breaks. Do you enjoy seeing them return?

FRIESS: “The alums coming back, that’s my favorite. I love the holidays because the alums always come in. I hope they know and they should know, it’s a place they can always come back to, at least to come in and say hello.”

BRIAN SABO: “We love it when they come back. It makes you proud you provided them with an environment they want to come back to and at least say hello. But it provides them with an opportunity to work out, if other places are closed. It’s really exciting to see them, and they’re always welcome.”