

Hoelter hopes daily improvement produces big results



All photos: Danielle DeFalco Photography

By Kevin Gordon

Daily improvement is Hayden Hoelter's primary goal this season.

The Eastwood High School track and field senior believes the approach could result in big results in the pole vault by the end of the season.

He's already matched or bettered his personal record four times this season.

Hoelter entered the season with a PR of 12-6 and matched the height April 1 during a dual meet against Wauseon and Clay, and April 4 at the Liberty-Benton Relays. He then increased his PR to 13-0 at the Whitmer Invitational April 11 and matched the mark eight days later at the Napoleon Invitational. His most recent PR came April 29 when he cleared 13-3 at home during a dual meet against Otsego.

"This year has gone really well," Hoelter said. "I've tried to compete only with myself and not worry about the competition too much. I'm trying to

improve each practice, each meet, whether it be getting a PR, making my technique better or getting faster. I'm focusing each day on getting better in one aspect of the vault.

"With being a senior and this being my last year, I've tried to put everything on the line and have fun, most importantly, and keep chasing PRs and doing my best," Hoelter added.

His success during the spring outdoor season followed a successful winter indoor season.

Hoelter had an indoor PR of 13-0 to place him in a tie for eighth place all-time at Eastwood. His previous indoor PR was 12-0, that coming in 2024.

"Hayden had a really good indoor season and worked hard in the offseason," said Eagle assistant coach Ethan Downey, who works with the pole vaulters. "He utilizes the weightroom which has helped increase his speed and strength. Hayden is very receptive to coaching and gives great effort. He listens carefully and is willing to attempt technical changes to his vault."

Improved technique

In addition to his increased speed and strength, Hoelter has improved his technique in the event.

When Hoelter's high school career began, he said he was only concerned with getting over the bar, not how he was clearing the bar.



Hoelter with Coach Ethan Downey

“At a certain height, that doesn’t work anymore,” Hoelter said. “You can’t just pull yourself up with your arms. I finally realized I had to get my technique down to clear the higher heights.” Now, Hoelter is a student of his specialty and his technique has improved.

“I’ve improved my techniques significantly since I was a freshman when I didn’t really understand what I was doing,” Hoelter said. “I thought I’d never be a good vaulter, but I realized over time that I had to get better at the

techniques to be a good vaulter. I’ve surprised myself.”

He listens to his coaches, watches videos of other vaulters, and reviews videos of his vaults. During the winter indoor season, Hoelter attended a weekly pole vault session at Bellevue High School, and attended the annual National Pole Vault Summit in Reno, Nevada in January.

“The pole vault is a very technical event that takes time and an attention to detail,” Downey said. “Hayden has put in the time and the work. He watches film and listens to coaches to make corrections. He has become very consistent with the technical aspects in both practice and competitions. Hayden has also been more confident with his technique. This has improved over the years.”

“He really matured in understanding the technique of the pole vault and has really tried to improve it in his jumps in practice and meets,” said Eastwood head coach Brian Sabo, who also works with the pole vaulters. “He has really good speed and athleticism. He attacks the runway. He is a hard worker and great kid who is super coachable.”

Hoelter’s goal this season is to clear 14-0 or a higher. Should Hoelter clear 14-0, he’d tie for ninth place on Eastwood’s all-time list.

“He’s a 14-foot-plus vaulter,” Sabo said.

“Anyone who hits those numbers with any consistency has possibly a chance to compete at state.”

The pole vault summit included clinics and competitions for vaulters of all levels.

“That was an awesome experience,” Hoelter said. “Meeting so many different people from all over who share the love of the sport was great. Seeing Olympians was great, too, and seeing vaulters clear 17-0, 18-0 in person was great. Being able to talk to them was really enjoyable, too.”



Hoelter with Coach Brian Sabo



Regional return

Hoelter is striving to return to the Division II regional after he finished 15th last season with a height of 12-0. He earned his regional berth by finishing fourth in the district at Oak Harbor with a height of 12-6. He was one of two Eagles to compete in the regional pole vault, joining junior Cullen Shank, who finished fifth at 13-8.

"It's you versus you in front of a big crowd," Hoelter said of the regional last season. "I definitely felt the nerves going into it. Hopefully, the experience of being there will help calm my nerves and help me relax and not psyche myself out as much and go into with a PR mindset and do my best."

Hoelter is hoping to battle Shank for the

Northern Buckeye Conference Championship this season. Shank is the defending champion after clearing 14-0 last season, while Hoelter jumped 12-0 for second place. "It's great having him to vault with," Hoelter said. "He helps me get better, and I help him get better. We both want to chase higher heights. We can help each in terms of pointing out what we're doing well or not doing well."

More than a pole vaulter

Hoelter is blossoming into a valuable member of the Eagles' sprint relays this season. He ran the open 800 and was a member of the 4x800 relay team early in his career, but those events took much out of him physically to remain a successful pole vaulter.

"I like the sprints and the relays," Hoelter said. "It's something new and the relays are fun because you're running with your teammates."

"I like his versatility and his dependability," Sabo said. "He can and has done so much for us over the years, and he always gives great effort in any event or area in which we put him. I will miss having his consistency, being dependable, and being around a great human being who always helps out."





Even though Hoelter isn't a captain, Downey said he's still one of the team's leaders. "Hayden is a quiet leader," Downey added. "Younger athletes can learn a lot from him by watching his actions. Hayden is dedicated to the weightroom and is willing to put the work in on the track and off. He never complains and maintains a positive attitude."

How it started

Hoelter became interested in the pole vault as a seventh grader, but that season was cut to only a week because of the COVID pandemic in 2020. He first started watching the pole vault when his sister, Mikayla, was competing for the Eagles' track team. She was a 2023 Eastwood graduate.

Hayden Hoelter remained interested in the pole vault as an eighth grader, and Sabo invited him to the team's indoor practices since his sister was a member of the team. "I really liked it from the start," Hoelter said. "It was a lot of fun. There have been times during my career that I've doubted myself, this isn't my thing, but the important thing was to stick with it. You can't let bad days ruin the entire experience. You just have to keep working on your techniques and improving."

Hoelter enjoys the challenge of clearing the bar.

"Going over the bar ...is a very good feeling, even before you hit the mat, especially getting over a big bar," Hoelter said. "It's a big rush, a rush of Adrenaline, especially when everyone is watching and cheering you on."

"There's a bit of fear at first, and a bit of fear when you get on the bigger poles for the first time because they're stiffer and push you back to the runway or don't bend the way you want it to," Hoelter said. "As you progress, you get higher and higher and more comfortable."

Hoelter has enjoyed his four seasons on the track and field team.

"I really like the sense of community, all my friends. We're one big family," Hoelter said.

What's next

Hoelter, who has a 4.0 grade-point average, will attend Ohio University and major in graphic design in the fall. He'll minor in marketing. His goal is to have a career in branding and advertising.

He's a member of Eastwood's Key Club and is secretary of Senior Executive Council. He's also a life guard at Pemberville Community Pool.