

Henline excels, leads Eagles despite injuries



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By Kevin Gordon

Kyrie Henline's final two seasons with Eastwood High School's track and field team haven't been easy.

And far from it.

Even through all of her injuries, frustrations, anger, disappointments and challenges during the season, Henline's still had a positive impact on the Eagles.

Henline is the Eagles' best pole vaulter, contributes in the sprints and the sprint relays, and is one of the team's leaders as one of its captains.

She's excelled even though she's had four knee surgeries — two on each knee — during her first three years in high school, and a late-season

ankle injury in basketball earlier this year.

Henline's been healthy enough to compete this season, but she hasn't been fully healthy since her sophomore season, and she still deals with daily pain in both knees. She's looking forward to a successful final month of the season.

"It's been frustrating, but I try my best to keep a positive attitude because I know what the team environment is all about and what Eastwood's culture is all about," Henline said. "Track is my happy place. There's where I find all of my joy. Coming to practice every day is what I love to do, and I enjoy being around my teammates, my friends and my coaches.

"Track's always been my favorite sport," Henline added. "Being outside every day, being with a huge group of girls who are amazing and having amazing personalities across all different types of backgrounds. It's an amazing place to be. Eastwood track makes it so much better because of the way our team is and the things to do within our team to make us the team that we are."

Battling back

Henline's steadily improved after the ankle injury which limited her practice time and ability to compete in meets in the pole vault and the sprints. Now, she's aiming for a shot at her personal record of 10-0, which is fourth-best in school history.

Her best vault this season is 9-0. She missed three of the team's first four meets because of the ankle injury.

"Kyrie's speed and takeoff are improving quickly," said Eagle assistant coach Ethan Downey, who works with the team's pole vaulters. "She can be in the 10-foot range and attempting PRs over the next couple of weeks."

"Her athleticism helps her tremendously in vault," Eagle head coach Nathan Howard said. "Kyrie's played a lot of sports in her life, and pole vault requires a combination of



speed, power, and control. She is also very smart, which helps her to analyze each of her jumps in order to figure out ways that she can improve.” Henline’s still aiming to clear at least 10-6, if not 11-0, this season. The school record of 12-0 was

set by Julia Sabo in 2023. Allison Abke (2017) and Elise Wolff (2014) are tied for second place at 10-6.

“I’m working as hard as I can to improve as much as I can,” said Henline, who praised Downey and boys head coach Brian Sabo for her success in the pole vault.

Henline ranks sixth indoors all-time at Eastwood with a vault of 8-9 earlier this year.

“The pole vault is an event that requires dedication and time,” Downey said. “Most successful vaulters have been jumping for a long time. Kyrie is very dedicated and has put in a lot of hard work and time. Even in the face of adversity, Kyrie has pushed through and worked tirelessly to improve her jumps.”

In addition to the pole vault where she is sixth, Henline ranks fourth in the triple jump with a distance of 31-2¾ earlier this year at the state meet where she also qualified for the 4x200 relay. She was a state indoor qualifier in the 4x200 and 4x400 relays in 2023.

The past

Henline’s sophomore season was a gem. In addition to finishing third in the NBC pole vault, she advanced to the Division II regional meet at Lexington High School with a third-place finish in the district at Oak Harbor High School. She also had the eighth-best triple jump in school history that season, 30-3.

She cleared her PR of 10-0 during the Northern Buckeye Conference and district meets.

Also at the NBC meet, she was seventh in the long jump, second in the 4x100 relay and third in the 4x200 to help the Eagles win the conference championship.

“It’s been frustrating,” Henline said. “This season feels like a battle to get back to where I was my sophomore year. That was my best year. It’s hard looking back, thinking that was how good I used to be. Now, I’m struggling and trying to get back to where I was.

“But it wasn’t as terrible as I thought because our team is so great to be around,” Henline added. “I still



had fun at the meets. I was missing the competing part of it.”

Henline’s first surgery came during her freshman year when she tore her right meniscus during first day of volleyball tryouts. Twelve days later, she had emergency surgery to stop internal bleeding on the right knee.

She then tore the meniscus in her left knee during her first basketball game of the season of her junior year. Her final knee surgery was last year, two days after the NBC Championships.

“She has had to battle a lot with injuries over the course of her high school career,” Howard said. “Despite that, she’s continued to work hard and do everything in her power to be the best athlete and teammate she can be.”

Henline competed in track last season, but was limited to the pole vault.

“I’ve had the help of so many coaches, and Tony has been a great help, too to get me back to where I am,” she said, referring to Eastwood trainer Tony Costello.

Henline said she had genetically misshaped meniscuses called discoid meniscuses that could have been in one or both knees, but she wasn’t aware of that until the tears. That made her more prone to the tears.

She treats the knee pain with Ibuprofen and Biofreeze.

“I try to put the team’s positives above mine,” Henline said. “We have an amazing team this year. We have so many great things going for us. That’s always something fun to look up to because it’s motivation I’m on a good team. We’re going to be doing big things, and I’m just a little part of that. Even if I’m not living up to my expectations, I know the team is going to do great things.



“It’s hard not be able to compete and practice every day, watching the sport you love so much and watching other people do the thing you love to do while sitting on the side is frustrating,” Henline added. “But it’s motivation to come back and its motivation to get better than you were before. I did hours of PT. I was in the weight room. I was trying to do all of the pole vault drills I could do while I had a bad ankle.”

Despite the torn meniscus last season, Henline competed in the NBC meet where she cleared 8-6 for fifth place in the pole vault. Her knee final gave out on her third and final attempt at 9-0, causing her to faceplant into the pit.

“My goal was to get our team points at NBCs in the pole vault. and then my surgery was two days later,” Henline said. ““I started crying instantly because I knew surgery was in two days. Everything came into perspective, that it was just not a healthy me.”



Relays

Henline is a member of Eastwood's sprint relays, and she's hoping they can have a long run in the post-season tournament. The Eagles have great competition for spots on their relay teams in those events.

"I want to do what's best for the team, and I want to see our team succeed," Henline said. "It's so much fun at the end of a relay, to look back and say we did that together. It's so much fun to be a part of a team. It's fun to warm up with a group of people and cheer on our team as we're competing. Our relays can go far."

Team leader

Henline is popular with her teammates and coaches because of her positive attitude and work ethic.

"Kyrie is a natural leader, and having been chosen to be a captain in three different sports proves it," Howard said. Henline also was a basketball and volleyball captain.

"She gets along well with all of the different groups on our team, and she is frequently amongst the first to step up when a leader is needed. She can be vocal when she needs to be, but more than anything else, she is positive and encouraging to her teammates, which is exactly what a captain needs to do."

"Kyrie is excellent at maintaining a positive attitude and has a tremendous work ethic. She encourages teammates and helps younger vaulters with technique," Downey said. "Kyrie demonstrates this on a daily basis through her words and actions."

When Henline isn't running or jumping at a meet, she's cheering on her teammates at their events.

"My big thing is I try to make it to as many events as I can to cheer people on, and be the person people can come up to," Henline said. "I know every year I've been on the team, we've had captains who I looked up to."

Henline said Julia Sabo was a big influence on her as a freshman. Sabo is vaulting collegiately at Eastern Michigan. Sabo ranks sixth all-time at Eastwood in the 100 and seventh in the 200.

"Julia did so much for me," Henline said. "She was like my big sister on the team. I wanted to be like her to the freshmen, sophomores and juniors on this year's team as they learn the ways of Eastwood track."

Henline loves this season's team as it prepares to contend for an NBC Championship May 14 and 16 at Eastwood.



Kyrie with Julia

The Eagles have consistently improved this season, and they have a great mix of talent of depth in every event. They've also benefitted from having all four classes contribute to the team's success which has created great team chemistry.

"This team has a lot of good things going for it," Henline said. "This is the strongest team we've had since my freshman year. It is definitely so much fun. The freshmen aren't shy like freshmen often are. They're very outgoing and fun people to be around. Everyone has bought into the program, and that makes it easy to be a team and to succeed.

"We have a very good chance of winning NBCs, but we have to keep getting better, and we can take a lot of our athletes to districts and regionals," Henline added. "We have a lot of very good things going for us, especially if we continue to put in the work that everyone has been putting in.



Kyrie with Dalton and Julia

How it started

Henline's seventh-grade season was wiped out by COVID, and she finally started pole vaulting in the eighth grade.

She practiced with the high school vaulters during the summer prior to her eighth-grade year. Julia Sabo and 2023 Eastwood graduate Dalton Hesselbart were among the vaulters at those practices.

"(Julia) opened her arms to me and said come try this," Henline said. "She ran me through everything. Julia and Dalton made it such a fun environment to be around. They both helped me be the best I could be, and they did everything in their power to make me the best pole vaulter I could be."

Hesselbart was a state qualifier in 2021, 2022

and 2023, and is tied for fourth all-time at Eastwood with a vault of 14-6.

"It was scary at first ... there's no way these people are going 12-0 upside down, but it became a passion of mine; I wanted to get better at it, Henline said. "I saw how good they were at it and I wanted to be like them. It's such a fun event that has so many different aspects to it. It's so much fun to do and the pole vault group we have is so much fun and so tight. I loved it from the start. It's my favorite sport."

In the future

Henline, who has a 4.219 grade-point average, will attend Ashland University and compete in track and field in the fall. She's planning on major in exercise science with a goal of becoming an occupational therapist.

In addition to playing basketball and volleyball, she is a vice-president of the National Honor Society, and a member of Student Council, Key Club, Senior Executive Council, Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Pep Club.

"Being in so many things has allowed me to open up a whole, wide variety of friends," Henline said. "It's fun to see the perspective of so many different kids. That's also what



makes track so special. There are so many different kids on the team from all of those different clubs, all those different sports, and some people I don't get to talk to during basketball and volleyball are on this team. That diversity makes it so much fun."

Henline switched from libero to setter on the volleyball team this season, and set the school's single-season assist record. She also was second-team all-conference and all-district, District 7 all-academic and was named to the district all-star game.

Henline, a guard on the basketball team, was named honorable mention all-conference and all-district all-academic.