

State indoor meet produces a day to remember for girls team



By Kevin Gordon

GENEVA — Leah Emch and her teammates on Eastwood High School's girls track and field team had a day to remember during the Division II-III state indoor championships Saturday at the SPIRE Institute.

Emch finished sixth in the 3,200 with her best time of the season. And then following a quick 20-

minute recovery, Emch ran the anchor leg on the Eagles' 4x400 relay team where she joined Reilly Might, Amelia Ward and Avery Bowman to break their own school record en route to a 16th-place finish.

Emch's day began with her running the first leg of the 4x800 relay, an event where the Eagles ran a school-record time for an 11th-place finish. Ward, Z Ramsey and Haley Sponaule followed Emch in the race.



4x400: Emch, Ward, Might, and Bowman

4x400 relay sets school record

The 4x400 team of Might, Ward, Bowman and Emch fashioned a time of 4:24.51, lowering their record of 4:25.54 earlier this season. There are no semifinals in the 4x400 relays, with the 24 state qualifiers divided into three 8-team heats. The heats are seeded by time, with the third heat being the fastest heat. The Eagles were in the second heat.

"I knew we were going to be close to the record, and I just went as hard as I could," Emch said of breaking the record by over a second.

Runners can see a clock at the finish line as they come down the front stretch.

Might, Ward and Bowman are seniors, and Emch is a junior.

"The four kids who ran it were all competitors," Eastwood head coach Nathan Howard said. "They all wanted to run it, and they were all looking forward to running it which I love. That's what we were looking for.

"(Might) went first because we knew she'd be competitive," Howard added. "(Ward) had two great races. She fights hard and keeps us in there, and (Emch) hung in there at the end. (Bowman) is getting faster every race. That's what a 4x4 is, a bunch of fighters. That was awesome. It's a good group."

Might and Bowman are running track again this season after neither ran as juniors last season.

"This was my second 400, and I had to push through everything to get to the end and get the baton to the next person," Might said. "That's what all of us did. We pushed through and ran hard to the very end.

“We’re all really happy.” Might added. “We got the school record again, and we’re going to keep feeding off that energy and see what we can do during the outdoor season.”

Fairfield Union won the race in 4:08.56, while Gilmour Academy was second in 4:08.80 and Madeira was third in

“Running against such great competition was a lot of fun, and it brought out the best in us,” Bowman said. “It was a lot of fun to run at state. We knew we could run that time based on what we did before. We’re ready to keep on lowering our times.”

The relay was capped by Emch’s final leg. Emch began the day running the 4x800 at approximately 2:15 p.m., followed by the 3,200 at 6 p.m. and the 4x400 at 6:25 p.m.

“What she did in the 4x4, that’s pretty special stuff. There’s not many kids who can do that,” Howard said.

“I had just run 10 2/3 laps in the two-mile (3,200), so this was a like a cool down lap,” Emch said of the 4x400. “I knew it was my last race, and it was only a 400. I just went out hard and had fun with it.”

Emch finishes fifth in 3,200

Emch earned All-Ohio recognition in the 3,200 with her sixth-place finish. The top eight finishers in each event earned the all-state honors and were recognized on the awards stand.

Emch had a time of 11:22.01, lowering her season-best of 11:34.24. She set the school record last season with a time 11:16.97 when she also finished sixth at state. She also qualified for state as a sophomore, finishing 18th in 12:16.50.

Sponaugle, a senior, also ran the 3,200 Saturday, finishing 22nd in 12:40.03.

“I felt good, even though I was six seconds slower than last year,” Emch said. “But I felt I ran a smarter race, and it was a lot more competitive this year. It was a lot of fun, especially against that kind of competition. I wanted to be on podium again.”

Emch started the race in the back of the 23-runner field, but worked her way into a group battling for the fifth through eighth positions halfway through the event.

“I knew some of the girls were going to go out fast and they were going to die from going out fast,” Emch said. “I’ve been training since cross country and I knew I had to stick to my plan and run my race. I didn’t freak out being in the back, and I kept going and going and got myself to the front.”

“Then, I could feel the other girls slowing down, and I just had to keep up my pace.”

Emch added. “I knew I could do it because I had beaten some of those girls in cross country and track. When you start in the back, you still have to run your race and keep your rhythm and not let anything effect you. I also try to keep a good running form. My form gets really bad sometimes, but then I fix it, and I’m fine for the rest of the race.”

Emch and Heartland Christian sophomore Rebecca Geiss battled for fifth place on the final lap, but Geiss eventually edged Emch by 1.07 seconds.

“That last lap was really competitive,” Emch said. “I put a little more energy into it. It was really physical and you can’t get mad about it because it’s going to happen. You just have to compete and keep on grinding. The competition was really good. I needed that because I don’t get it enough.”

Athens sophomore Sophia Szolosi won the race in 10:45.14, while New London senior Reese Landis was second in 10:52.05 and Canal Fulton Northwest sophomore Madelyn

Begert was third in 11:18.85. Waynesville senior Samantha Erbach was fourth in 11:22.01

“(Emch) ran a smart race,” Howard said. “She stayed where she needed to be and moved up. She made little moves when she needed to and put herself in a good spot with three laps left and fought hard at the end. It was her best run of the year, by far, which was great to see. That was awesome.”



4x800: Emch, Ward, Sponaugle, and Ramsey

4x800 relay sets school record

Emch, Ward, Ramsey and Haley Sponaugle broke the school record in the 4x800 relay. The quartet had a time of 10:20.30 to break the previous record of 10:21.18 set by Hannah Sponaugle, Meagan Kaminski, Sarah Bettinger and Maddie Jackson in 2014. Emch, Ward, Ramsey and Sponaugle finished 11th in their race.

“We’re really happy. We were aiming for the school record, so that’s a plus,” Haley Sponaugle said. Haley and Hannah Sponaugle are sisters.

“It was a good race,” Ward said. “It was great to get the school record. We had the drive and mind-set to get that.”

Salem won the race in 9:36.48, while Carroll was second in 9:44.18 and Woodridge was third in 9:46.12.

“We ran well. We all felt good today,” said Ramsey, who is a senior.

The team’s previous best this season was 10:21.46, second-best in school history.

“We knew we could break the school record after running that time.,” Emch said. “I’m proud of the way everyone ran their heart out.”

“Everyone laid it on the line early, and that’s all you can ask,” said Eagle assistant coach T.J. Tuttamore, who works with the distance runners. “I’m excited for them breaking the school record. That was their goal coming into the meet.”

The 24 state qualifiers were divided into two heats, with the 12th-fastest qualifiers running in the second heat with Eastwood.

“We knew going in we were in the fast heat, so we knew a lot of the teams were going to run faster than their seed time,” Sponaugle said. “The goal was to get out there and run, and we did that. We did pretty well overall.”

“The competition helped us,” Ward said. “Having people with more speed was nice because we had people to run with instead of running by ourselves.”

Ward was running the 4x800 for the second time this winter. Her indoor track season was limited because she plays on Eastwood’s basketball team. She also plays on the Eagles’ soccer team in the fall.

“I’m running better than last year, and I’m looking forward to the outdoor season,” Ward said. “Running with people who are faster me than is easier, so I get to see more people

in front of me. I don't want to get passed, so that keeps me going hard. I know I'm not in track shape, but I don't view that as a negative."

Eastwood qualified for the state indoor meet for the third straight season. Emch, Sponaugle and Ramsey helped the Eagles finish 19th last season in 10:30.10, and Emch and Ramsey ran on the 2022 team which finished 17th in 10:54.20.

The Eagles now direct their full attention to their outdoor season. They're starting their third week of outdoor practice in preparation for their first meet of the season, March 28 at the Liberty-Benton Relays.

Last spring, Eastwood advanced to the Division II regional where it finished sixth in 9:57.32 — the seventh-fastest time in school history. Emch and Sponaugle return from that team, while Ward also ran the relay in a number of meets last season.

"For this point in the season, we're pretty far ahead of where we were last season," Haley Sponaugle said. "We have a lot of improvement to make this season, and we're stronger than we were last year.

"We want to pick up where we left off last year, and then go even faster once we get into the outdoor season," Emch said.

"It was a good day for the relays," Howard said. "We had two relays here and both had school records. Where they placed, who cares? They came out and got better. They're going to have really good seasons."