

Girls 4x200 relay uses second chance to qualify for regional, team is district runner-up



By Kevin Gordon

OAK HARBOR — Eastwood High School's girls 4x200 relay team received a second chance. The Eagles parlayed the opportunity into a season-best time and a trip to the Division II regional meet at Lexington High School.

Maisy Stevenson, Julia Sabo, Mikayla Hoelter and Emma Downs finished second in 1:47.88 during Saturday's final day of the district meet at Oak Harbor High School.

The top four finishers in each event at the district qualified for the regional meet Thursday and Saturday (May 28) at Lexington High School.

Eastwood also won two district championships as Sabo finished first in the pole vault and senior Ava Kiefer won the shot put. The Eagles finished the district meet with 13 athletes qualifying for the regional in 12 events.

The 4x200 relay team barely qualified for the finals after dropping the baton during Thursday's preliminary. The Eagles quickly recovered the baton and finished their preliminary in 1:52.51 to post one of the eight-fastest times and advance to the finals.

The final was Eastwood's fastest race of the season as it posted a time of 1:47.88 — lowering its previous best of 1:51.90 by over four seconds. The time just missed earning the team a place on the Eagles' all-time Top 10 list by .04.

The previous best came May 14 at the Northern Buckeye Conference Championships.

"That felt amazing after the mishap in the prelims," Downs said. "We squeaked into the finals which was great. I'm glad we had a second chance to show what we can do as a team. I knew in my head and my heart we could it, and today we proved we could do it."

"That was insane," Sabo said. "We killed it. Every single one of us ran hard. We wanted to place and get to regionals, and that's exactly what we did."

Toledo Central Catholic won the race by a healthy 5.08 seconds, but the next six schools were fighting for the final three regional berths.



Emma Downs receiving baton from Mikayla Hoelter

When watching the 4x200, it's challenging to tell where each team is positioned because of the staggered start. Coming out of the final curve, after the stagger is finally eliminated, the next six schools behind Central Catholic were in a virtual dead heat. Downs then took over, running a dominant final leg to give the Eagles second place by one-tenth of a second over Clyde and .15 over fourth-place Lake.

"That was crazy," Sabo said of Downs'

run. "Everyone was right there in a line. You could see (Downs) was a little bit ahead. That's exactly what we wanted. We knew she would come through."

The Eagles ran the race in Lane 1.

"Lane 1 is hard to see because you get the baton so late. You always think you're in last place," Downs said. "But I knew we would be one of the top teams. I love being in Lane 1 because I can see who I need to track down."

Downs' leg starts on the final curve and finishes on the front straightaway.

"As soon as I ripped the curve, I knew I could get second, so I kept pushing and pushing," Downs said. "I knew I was going to be second with about 50 yards left. I felt very determined. This was our race."

"Emma's a great curve runner, and she took off," Eagle head coach Nikki Sabo said.

Once Eastwood learned it qualified for the finals Thursday, it immediately looked ahead to Saturday's final. Eastwood ran in the second heat and had to wait for the third heat to finish before learning it had made the finals.

"We felt discouraged after that happened," Downs said. "But the thing about our team that makes us different, instead of tearing each other down and pointing fingers, we build each other up and encourage each other. Because we encouraged each other, we were able to turn that negative into determination.

"That was a second chance," Downs added. "We knew we were capable of running this time. It really came from our confidence in our ourselves, knowing we can achieve this."

Now, the Eagles are headed to the regional.

"We told them today is a new day, a new opportunity, and it's all about how are you going to take advantage of it," Nikki Sabo said. "That's sports, you need to have a short memory. That's one thing sports teaches you, how to deal with adversity, how to deal with something that didn't go your way, and how to overcome that. It was a fun race to watch."

Downs also finished second in the 200 with a time of 27.12 — the 10th-fastest time in Eastwood history. Her previous best of 27.24 came April 22 during the Eastwood Relays.

The 200 was won by Central Catholic junior Tianna Davis in 26.12. The top three finishers all broke the 27-second mark.

"I got out my blocks faster than I normally do, and I felt more powerful," Downs said. "It was nice being in Lane 3 because I was next to the fastest person in the race. I felt like I was able to push myself into the race.

"Going into prelims, I was seeded eighth," Downs added. "I knew I would make it to finals, but I didn't think I would make it to regionals. Knowing I went up four places, I feel accomplished. Knowing I have my entire team cheering me on, really makes me feel good."



Julia Sabo receiving the Fred Dafler Award

Julia Sabo wins pole vault

Julia Sabo cleared a season best 11-0 to win the pole vault for the second straight season. No other vaulter cleared more than 9-6.

"I felt really good, and I jumped well," said Julia Sabo, who is seeking a return to the state meet in her specialty.

Sabo tied for fourth at state last season, clearing a school record 11-6.

Julia Sabo cleared 11-0 and had one good attempt at 11-6 before running the 4x200. She just missed clearing the bar on her only attempt at 11-6.

"I feel good about 11-0, and the attempt at 11-6 was good," Julia Sabo said. "But the big thing is I'm vaulting next week. I'm not as happy right now in terms of my height overall. I'm hoping to

go higher and do well at the regional, but today was a step in the right direction."

Prior to the start of the running finals Saturday, Julia Sabo received the Fred Dafler Sportsmanship Award from the Northwest Ohio Track Officials Association. The award is named in honor of the Ohio High School Athletic Association commissioner, who also coached track and was an official in the sport.

Also for the Eagles, freshman Kyrie Henline finished sixth in the pole vault, clearing 8-6.

Kiefer finishes first in the shot

Kiefer threw 37-9¼ to win the shot put and edge Rogers junior Mikaylah Marshall by 6½ inches. "That makes me really happy to be going to the regional," Kiefer said. "I feel like I could have done better, but I'll be working in practice this week to get better. I know what I need to work on, and, hopefully, I can throw better at the regional."

Saturday's finish was a reversal of last season's district meet. Marshall won the district last season, finishing 11 inches ahead of Kiefer.

"I'm happy to have won, especially after last year because it was myself and (Marshall)," Kiefer said. "Competing against each other pushes both of us to get better."

Kiefer held the lead after the preliminaries with a throw of 35-9, while Marshall was third at 34-6½.



The 26 athletes were divided into three flights for the preliminaries where they each received three throws. The top nine distances advanced to the finals where they received three more throws in an attempt to improve their distance. The top eight finishers scored points for the team.

“Ava rose to the occasion,” Nikki Sabo said. Kiefer also bounced back from Thursday’s discus where she didn’t make regionals.

“That gave me a little extra motivation because I definitely wanted to get to the regional,” Kiefer said.

Eagle junior Olivia Newsome, who won the discus, finished sixth in the shot with a throw of 33-9¼.

More regional qualifiers

Freshman Leah Emch qualified for the regional in two events as she finished second in both the 1,600 and the 3,200. She had a time of 5:37.94 in the 1,600 and 12:22.99 in the 3,200.

“She’s coming into her own,” Nikki Sabo said. “Today was about going out and competing. We’re trying to get in the top four, and she went out and ran her race. She did very well. To have three races to run in the regional as a freshman is a great accomplishment.”

Emch also qualified for the regional in the 4x800 relay.

Sophomore Haley Sponaugle also qualified for the regional in the 3,200, finishing third in 12:51.60.

Other Eagles to advance to the regional were:

- 100 hurdles: fourth, senior Aubrey Haas, 17.03.
- 300 hurdles: fourth, Haas, 49.12 (season best, lowering her previous best of 50.11).
- 800: fourth, junior Kayden Firsdon, 2:31.84 (pr, lowering her previous best of 2:36.11).
- 4x400 relay: third, Stevenson, freshman Lilly Mullholand, junior Talia Baum and senior Mikayla Hoelter, 4:11.42 (season best, lowering the previous best 4:12.45).

District placers

Also placing in the district to score team points by finishing in the top eight for the Eagles were:

- 1,600: fifth, sophomore Z Ramsey, 5:57.88.
- 800: sixth, sophomore Amelia Ward, 2:39.32 (season best, lowering her previous best 2:44.36).
- Long jump: eighth, Hoelter, 15-½.



Kayden Firsdon



Talia Baum receiving from Lilly Mullholand

Team standings

Eastwood scored in 14 of the 17 events and totaled 113 points to finish eight points behind champion Perkins. Central Catholic was third with 92. The Eagles finished first or second in the district for the first time since 2016 when they were second.

“We definitely had a great day,” Nikki Sabo said.

District results

<https://oh.milesplit.com/meets/476125-ohsaa-division-2-district-oak-harbor-2022/results#.Yomn6WDMK3k>

Regional schedule

<https://www.ohsaa.org/sports/track/tournament-info>