

Fertig's state championship highlights impressive day for Eastwood boys

By Kevin Gordon



Photo Credit: Corey Johnson

GENEVA — Erik Fertig had a monster day Saturday. The Eastwood High School junior won the weight throw in the morning and finished second in the shot put during the afternoon at the Division II-III state indoor track and field meet at the SPIRE Institute. He posted career-best throws in both events, 63- $\frac{1}{4}$ in the weight throw and 50- $11\frac{1}{4}$ in the shot. The finishes earned Fertig all-state honors in both events. The top eight finishers in every event received the

All-Ohio recognition.

"I'm very happy," Fertig said. "I had been throwing well in practice, and it continued today."

"What a great day for him," Eastwood coach Brian Sabo said.

Fertig actually won the state championship in the weight throw on his first throw in the event. The runnerup was Van Buren sophomore Tyler Arbaugh at 62-1.

"You're always happy when you win a state championship; that's what I came here to do," Fertig said. "I just went out there and gave it my best. You always feel good when you beat good competition."

Fertig was the first thrower in the second flight. After opening with a throw of 63- $\frac{1}{4}$, he fouled on his next three attempts. His fifth attempt went 62- $4\frac{3}{4}$, while his sixth attempt was another foul.

Each athlete receives three throws during the semifinals, with the top nine distances advancing to the finals. The athletes then receive three more throws in the finals in an effort to improve their distance.

The 24 state qualifiers were divided into two flights.

Fertig had the two best throws during the competition.

"A big throw at the start takes a ton of pressure off," Fertig said. "Getting your personal best on your first throw sets you up so you can go as hard as you want for the rest of the meet."

"You don't have to be as meticulous with how hard you can throw and the technique you use," Fertig added. "You can go out and throw as hard as you can and go for a really big one. You definitely take bigger risks when you have a big one in already."

Fertig's previous best was 61- $8\frac{1}{4}$, seeding him second for the event behind Arbaugh at 64-2. They were the only qualifiers who had thrown 60-0 or better this season.

"I knew had a good chance to win, but I still wanted to get that big one in," Fertig said. "You have nothing to lose, so you leave it all out there."

In the shot, Fertig was second with a distance of 50-11¼ — bettering his previous best of 48-10½.

The winner was Steubenville senior Zach Ekey, who threw 51-10¾.

Three of Fertig's four throws bettered his previous best of 48-10½. He had thrown 49-5¾ on his first attempt and 49-1½ on his second attempt. Following a foul on his third attempt, Fertig closed with the first 50-foot throw of his career.

But the shot was filled with controversy. After the preliminaries, it was realized the throws in the first flight were incorrectly calibrated by the laser used to measure the distances. The incorrect measures led to longer distances than were actually thrown.

But meet officials eventually decided to scrap the incorrectly measured throws and give the first flight throwers four attempts each and the second flight throwers one more attempt.

Each of the 24 throwers received only four throws, and no finals were held.

Normally, the shot is contested in the same manner as the weight throw.

"There was some chaos, but I just decided I was going to treat that fourth throw like it was my last throw of the competition," Fertig said. "I went out and threw a two-foot PR (personal record). I'm really happy with that.

"A lot of guys were getting frustrated and not focusing on their throwing, but I just went out and focused on what I had to do and the opportunity I got," Fertig added.

"Hitting 50 was a big one. That's been my goal. I've done it in practice, but I just had to do it in a meet. What better place to do it than at the state meet."

Fertig delivered his big throw after the controversy.

"What I was most impressed with is how he responded with his demeanor," Sabo said. "He didn't let the negativity bother him. He went out and threw a PR. He was mentally and physically ready for a two-foot PR.

"He deserves it for how much hard work he's put in, and for how much dedication he has to himself, our team and the sport," Sabo added. "I'm really, really proud of him."

Fertig is starting to throw consistently well after a slow start to the season, the result of a knee injury suffered during Eastwood's run to the Division V state championship football game.

The 6-foot, 220-pounder played center on the Eagles' offensive line. He's starting to get healthy and is scheduled to throw in two national meets next weekend in the New York City area.

"Everything is starting to come together," Fertig said. "It's exciting. I'm really confident right now. The indoor season has given me some momentum. Now, I want to keep that going and build on it during the outdoor season."

Eastwood also had All-Ohio performances in the 4x400 and the 4x800 relays.

The 4x400 team of junior Alex Boyer, senior Billy Barker, sophomore Nate McCauley-Benner and senior Isaac Emahiser finished fifth in a season-best time of 3:32.58. Eastwood's previous best was 3:44.03.

"To have a big PR like that in our first race is great," Emahiser said.

"We can a good race. Everyone went as hard as they could," McCauley-Benner said. Heath won the race in 3:28.08.

"I really didn't care what place or what time we got as long as we gave it our all and did the best we could," Boyer said.

"The number one rule here is give effort," Barker said.

Emhaiser is the only returnee from last season's outdoor 4x400 team which finished second in the Division III state meet in 3:23.43. The Eagles will move up to Division II this season after being in Division III the last two seasons.

"We seem to have new guys every year, but we still expect to be successful,"

Emahiser said. "There's no reason we can't run 3:20 again with the guys we have.

This is a great starting point. We're going to continue to work hard and improve."

The Eagles' 4x800 relay team of Barker, Boyer, senior Daniel Trombly and junior Jack Chappuies finished eighth in 8:25.23 — its best of the season and less than two seconds shy of the school record.

Barker, Boyer, Trombly and Chappuies all ran their season-best split by at least three to five seconds. The Eagles' time was well under its previous best of 8:45.48.

The quartet just missed the school record of 8:22.25 set by Aaron Lahman, Doug Russell, Jimmy O'Brien and Ryan Schroeder in 2003.

"Our goal was to medal and do our best, at least for the shape we're in right now," Barker said.

Barker, Boyer and Chappuies are returning state outdoor qualifiers from last season when they were 12th in 8:14.87.

"Our times are really close to last year at state," Chappuies said. "We want to get on the podium (at the outdoor state meet), too. We were surprised by the time today, but everyone went out and did their best."

"We weren't far off our state time, and we're running almost as fast right now," Barker said.

"This is a really good start," Trombly said. "We're in a good position right now for the (outdoor season)."

The Eagles start outdoor practice Monday, and have their first meet March 27 at Clay. Eastwood's been getting together approximately once a week since the indoor season began the first weekend in December.

"We're getting there in terms of conditioning," Barker said. "We're not in great shape, but we're in decent shape and it'll only get better."

"Once we get outside and start conditioning, and do more workouts for distance, our times will drop even more significantly," Boyer said.

Eastwood had two other season-best performances.

The Eagles' 4x200 relay team of senior Cooper Comes, Emahiser, senior DJ Rolf and McCauley-Benner had a season-best time of 1:36.39 for 15th place, beating its previous best of 1:38.36.

The Eagles were outdoor state qualifiers in the Division III 4x200 relay last season, finishing sixth in 1:30.47. Comes and Emahiser return from that team.

In the triple jump, Eastwood senior Josh McCauley was 12th at 36-8³/₄ and classmate Clayton Vongphachanh was 13th with a season—best distance of 36-5¹/₂. His previous best was 35-4³/₄.

Also for the Eagles, sophomore Logan Wendt had a time of 9.90 in the 60 hurdles for 21st place, and sophomore Jaden Rayford cleared 5-8 for a three-way tie for 15th place in the high jump.

Eastwood finished fourth as a team with 24 points — just three behind runnerup Heath. Dayton Dunbar won with 67 points, while Heath was second with 27 and Sheridan was third with 25.

“What a great day,” Sabo said. “I was really most impressed with our mentality of going after it. They really wanted to PR and get on the awards stand. Today, it was about the energy they had and wanting to PR. You can’t teach that, and Fertig really set the tone for today by winning the weight throw.

“The things we did today are exactly who we are,” Sabo added. “We’re going to go out hard and try to be in first. If you beat us, you beat us. We’re going to make it exciting and win, or we’re going to make someone else better.”