

Vongphachanh excels athletically, academically



Clayten is on the right. Photo Credit: Tammy Schmeltz

By Kevin Gordon

Clayten Vongphachanh patiently waited for his opportunity to be a key contributor on Eastwood's boys track and field team.

Now that he's a senior, he's earned his chance. And he's making the most of it.

Vongphachanh provides the Eagles with depth in the sprints, the sprint relays, the long jump and the triple jump.

During Friday's Eastwood Relays, he had a career best in the triple jump where he had a distance of 37-6½ to finish fourth. He also went 18-7 in the long jump for 12th place, the second-best mark of his career.

Vongphachanh's previous best in the triple jump was 37-½ in the Whitmer Invitational April 6. His best in the long jump is 19-2½, that coming last season.

He also helped the Eagles to a third-place finish in the 4x100 relay at the Eastwood Relays. The Eagles finished second to Whitmer in the team standings.

"It's great to see him in four years continue to get better and be a guy we're counting on," Eastwood coach Brian Sabo said. "It's fun for us, and I'm sure it's fun for him.

"He's just a great kid. I really like him. He's a great student. He's dynamic in a lot of different things. He can do multiple things. He likes track."

Vongphachanh, like many Eagles, had to wait his turn to earn his spot. The Eagles often are senior dominated, leaving only a handful of spots for their younger athletes in the weekend invitationals.

"As an athlete, as a competitor, you want to compete in every meet," said Vongphachanh, who also excels academically. His grade-point average is just under 4.0. "I still went to every single meet, watched the other guys and encouraged them during those meets.

"I wanted to be in there, so I worked hard the next year, and it kept paying off. Now, I'm one of those guys. It's great to be in that role. I hope to make track fun and make more people do it and make them work harder. I really like the big meets."

Vongphachanh came into the spring outdoor season with confidence after finishing 13th in the triple jump at the Division II-III state indoor meet in March. His distance of 36-5½ was the best of his career.

"I worked hard during the winter, and my fitness class played a big role in getting my power levels up," said Vongphachanh, who also played on the soccer team. "I'm in the best shape of my career. Everything else, I was inspired by the guys before us, trying to be like them and inspire the guys coming up.

"You can lead and inspire people without being a captain," Vongphachanh added.

"I'm trying to lead with my actions, my words and by being positive and encouraging. I try to put everything I have into it. Hopefully, they'll see if they do the same, they'll improve and that'll make the team better."

Sabo praised Vongphachanh and his classmate, Eli Garza, for being able to run any of the sprint relays.

“Those two are reliable, and they’re always able to adapt,” Sabo said. “They’re always solid. You can always trust them.”

“I’ll do whatever I can to help the team,” Vongphachanh said. “I like the team aspect of the relays. They’re a team effort. It’s not only one person. If one person messes up, the rest of us are there to pick them up. The relays bring people closer.”

Vongphachanh will study pre-med at Eastern Michigan University in the fall. He eventually hopes to transfer to the University of Michigan’s pre-med program.

“Academics have always been important to me,” Vongphachanh said.

Math originally was his favorite class, but science became his favorite after he took Anatomy and Biology.

“I’ve watched so many TV shows that have had doctors in them, I figured pre-med would be a good fit for my career,” Vongphachanh said, adding he hasn’t decided on what area of medicine he wants to pursue. “I have four years to study and figure that out.”