

Fertig signs to throw collegiately at Louisville



By Kevin Gordon

Erik Fertig is finally healthy.

Now that his knees are back to full strength, the senior is looking forward to a monster final season with Eastwood's track and field team.

He's off to a solid start.

Fertig's already signed a national letter of intent to compete at the University of Louisville and posted career-best throws in the indoor shot put and weight throw.

The reigning Division II state outdoor champion in the hammer throw and the discus, and a returning state qualifier in the shot put, Fertig is expected to throw all three

implements when he arrives in Louisville in the fall.

Fertig has been throwing well since the end of the outdoor high school season in June. He's competed in several national meets and has been throwing on his own in preparation for his final season at Eastwood.

He elected to not play football this season in order to rest his painful knees that plagued him last season. He worked out in the weight room almost every day and is throwing regularly during the indoor season this winter.

"I've never been better. My knees are great," Fertig said. "I took football off and hoped that would make a difference and help me feel better for the training process and the indoor season."

The road to Louisville

Fertig is the defending Division II-III state indoor champion in the weight throw and was the runnerup in the shot put.

His career bests this season came Jan. 27 at the University of Findlay where he won the shot put and finished second in the weight throw. Fertig threw 53-7 in the shot to beat to his previous best of 50-11¼, and 67-2 in the weight throw where his previous best was 63-¼.

He ranks third in the state this season in the weight throw and sixth in the shot put.

"It's all worked out," Fertig said. "My knees feel better than they ever have. I did a lot of rehab on them, and they've been handling all of the lifting and throwing very well. I feel great. I'm in a good spot coming into the season, and I think I'll be able to achieve my goals. I'm excited to get started."

Fertig originally became interested in Louisville after the Atlantic Coast Conference school mailed him some information. He then expressed his interest in the school via email to head coach Dale Cowper, who is the team's throwing coach.

The two eventually talked on the phone, and Fertig made an unofficial visit to the school in mid August and an official visit in late September. He verbally committed to Louisville in late October and signed his national letter in November.

"This is a dream come true, the realization of a dream I've been chasing for a long time," Fertig said. "Looking back at all of the hours I've spent working in gyms that are empty and dark, throwing by myself, I've missed out on a lot of things teenagers like to do and I've sacrificed a lot to achieve this dream, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

Early start

Fertig has been throwing since the fourth grade. His first experience came when he joined his older brother, Jason, for a session in the hammer throw with former Eastwood standout Justin Welch, a state and NCAA champion at Findlay.

Welch remains Eastwood's all-time outdoor leader in all three throws, 202-0 in the discus, 63-4¼ in the shot and 242-6 in the hammer. All three came in 2010.

Fertig's dad, Dwight, is a former throwing coaching at Maumee High School, and provided Erik with throwing drills to do during his early days.

Dwight Fertig played football at the University of Mount Union where he met his wife, Patty. Patty Fertig, the former Patty Caris, played volleyball and basketball at Eastwood. She's a member of the Mount Union Athletics Hall of Fame for her volleyball success. When she graduated, she was Mount Union's career leader in assists and aces. She still ranks third in assists and fourth in aces.

The family lives just north of the high school, and Erik Fertig was soon riding his four-wheeler over to the school's throwing area to practice every chance he had. He originally began throwing in the family's front yard, but quickly outgrew that.

"I fell in love with Louisville as soon as I visited," Fertig said.

Fertig has a 4.0 grade-point average and probably will major in engineering. He earned athletic and academic scholarships from Louisville.

"I liked my coach a lot," Fertig said. "I loved my teammates when I was there on my visit. They have a great engineering program. The school is just the right size. Their facilities are incredible.

"It's a good distance from home. I'll be away, but it's not too crazy, a 4½-hour drive, if I need to get home. I wanted to have a bigger college experience. The university has about 20,000 students, so it's not huge, but it's outside the main city of Louisville. You're not surrounded by buildings. It's set off on its own.

"It was such a good fit for me I knew I didn't need to wait to sign or look anywhere else. I knew it was the set up I wanted. There was no reason to wait."

Coming up

Before Fertig heads to Louisville, he's aiming for even more success at Eastwood. The powerfully-built 6-foot, 215-pounder is striving for repeat state outdoor championships in the hammer and the discus, and to improve his finish at state in the shot. The top eight finishers in each event at state earn All-Ohio honors.

The hammer isn't a state-sanctioned event, but a state championship is held the day after the official state meet concludes.

Among his indoor goals are to repeat his state championship in the weight throw and win the state title in the shot where he was the runnerup last season.

"To even win one state title is great and to win an event for the second time would be even greater," Fertig said. "But there are a lot of great throwers, so it'll be a fun competition, and I'll have to be ready to do my best."

The numbers

Fertig also is aiming for career-best distances in all five of his events this season. His outdoor bests came last season.

In the spring, Fertig has thrown 166-9 in the discus, 53-4½ in the shot and 204-2 in the hammer.

This spring, he's hoping to throw at least 180-0 in the discus, 58-0 in the shot and 220-0 in the hammer. He's already met his indoor goals of at least 70-0 in the weight throw and 50-0 in the shot.

"I'm never satisfied," Fertig said. "It's about trying to improve yourself one rep at a time and focus on every lift, every throw you do and trying to improve the little thing. You keep trying to chase that perfect throw.

"People talk about the perfect throw and it doesn't happen very often, just trying to chase that perfect throw or you can improve yourself and improve your distance.

My teammates, my coaches and my family all keep me motivated and the fires burning. I have a lot of internal fire to be the best I can be."

More than a thrower

Fertig, who turned 18-years-old in August, is one of the Eagles' captains for the second straight season. And for as good of a thrower he is, he's even an even better person. He treats everyone with respect.

"He's so genuine in how he treats people," Eastwood head coach Brian Sabo said. "I knew when he was an eighth grader, that if he stayed with track, he'd be a captain for us because of the way he treated people and how hard he worked. He's just an unbelievable human being and an incredibly hard worker."

"He makes you want to be a better coach," Sabo added. "He makes you want to get better as a coach and as a person. It's great to see all of his hard work and dedication pay off like this. He's deserving of all of his successes."

Indoor season

Fertig is using the indoor season to fine-tune his techniques in the throws.

"Not playing football really stung and being in the stands watching was hard, and I've really been craving some competition and seeing what I have, and being part of a team, so it's been great to have indoor track," Fertig said. "It's been really cool to compete this winter, not having been part of a team since last track season in June. It felt good to go down to Findlay (Jan. 13), be with all the guys and get each other excited and compete again.

"It takes some time to get the rust off and get back into things," Fertig added. "But I feel really good right now. I feel good about where I'm at throwing-wise, and I've

gotten significantly stronger. Doing indoor track puts you in a better position to succeed when the outdoor season rolls around.”

Fertig also competed in two national indoor meets last season, and he expects to compete in at least one of them again this season.

“You have a different mindset in practice than in meets because you get unlimited throws, so you get as many chances as you want to make the perfect throw,” Fertig said. “But in competition, you only get so many throws to make it perfect, to make it right. (Indoor track) puts you back in the competition mode.”

At Louisville

Fertig expects to compete in all three throws at Louisville, although he said his primary focus will be the hammer, especially as a freshman.

“The hammer is my best event,” Fertig said. “I’m a much better hammer thrower than I am a discus thrower or a shot put thrower. They have a really good shot put thrower and a really good discus thrower. I can fill that void (the hammer) in their program.”

Fertig was throwing the 16-pound college hammer during practice last year. He’s hit the 170-175 range in practice, although the distance was measured with his eyes and there were no lines to mark the throw. And it didn’t come with the pressure of a meet. The high school hammer weighs 12 pounds.

“I’m doing pretty well with that,” Fertig said of the college hammer.

As a team last season, Louisville was fourth in the ACC outdoor championships.

The ACC individual champion last season threw 234-11, while a throw of 180-9 or better was needed to place in the top seven. A throw of 144-0 or better was needed to finish in the top 10.

Four of the 10 finishers, including the third-, seventh-, eighth- and nine-place finishers will still have eligibility remain when Fertig starts his college career.

“I think I can compete in the ACC meet as a freshman,” Fertig said. “I know there will be a transition period, but I’m excited to get to the college level and see how I do. I think I’m ready for it.”