

Fertig wins state discus championship



By Kevin Gordon

COLUMBUS — Erik Fertig delivered an impressive response to a disappointing start at the state high school track and field championships.

The Eastwood junior won a Division II state championship in the discus at Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium. Fertig threw 161-1 to win the event by almost five feet. Johnstown-Monroe junior Zachary Jenney was second at 156-8, while Jefferson Area junior J.J. Henson was third at 156-1.

"I couldn't be happier. I've been dreaming of this day since the sixth grade," Fertig said. "To be here now is a dream come true."

Fertig took the lead for good in the

competition on his second attempt during the preliminaries, posting a distance of 156-7. He then threw 161-1 on his final attempt in the prelims, and his best in the finals was 157-10.

"I had a big throw early and a lot of guys, feeling the pressure, didn't throw as well as they usually do," Fertig said. "I've been consistent all year, and I was consistent today and kept moving the mark."

The 16 state qualifiers are divided into two flights of eight for the preliminaries where the athletes receive three throws.

The top nine distances advance to the finals where they receive three more throws in an attempt to improve their distance. In the finals, the athletes throw in the reverse order of their standing, starting with the ninth-place distance. Fertig threw in the second flight.

Fertig realized he had won after Jenney's final throw came up short. He broke into a wide smile and thrust his arms into the air as he entered the ring for his final attempt.

The 6-foot, 220-pounder was coming off a difficult finish in the shot put Friday. He threw 50-10 and didn't place in the event, settling for ninth place and no trip to the awards stand.

Fertig's personal record in the shot this season was 53-4 $\frac{1}{4}$, and he was hoping to finish in at least the top four. The top eight finishers in each event at state earn All-Ohio recognition and are recognized on the awards stand.

"Yesterday really helped me a lot today," Fertig said. "A lot of the nerves I had were washed out during the shot put. I felt ready to go today. I was loose. I knew I could get a big throw in today and get myself where I wanted to be."

Fertig was one of seven throwers to hit the 150-0 mark during the competition, and a throw of 147-11 was needed to make the finals.

He was competing at state for the first time, although he attended the meet as an alternate last season, and won the state Division II-III hammer throw there the last two seasons.



"For him to bounce back and be a state champion is something not a lot of kids would do," said Eastwood assistant coach Lucas Friess, who works with the team's throwers. "That shows you how mentally tough he is."

"His mindset was amazing today," said Eastwood assistant coach Thomas Heckman, who also works with the throwers. "He had two choices, put this week away or throw it out and let's go after a championship. We've talked all year he could be a state champion. To see it become real is unbelievable for him."

Fertig entered the state meet with the third-best throw in Division II

this season, a 166-9 effort that is his career best. His regional distance of 160-1 was fourth best among the state qualifiers.

"His mindset was different," Eastwood head coach Brian Sabo said. "His movement was different. He was really dialed in. He was energetic. He was who he had been all year.

"It was a perfect day for a kid who deserves this so much," Sabo added. "The work he puts in, the care she shows for others, the thank yous to the people who retrieve the disks. He's a great person. The stars aligned for him to win a state championship."

Fertig will enter his senior season as a defending state champion. He was the starting center on Eastwood's football team that lost to Wheelersburg in overtime of the Division V state championship game.

"The best part is we get to have another year with him," Sabo said.

Fertig threw a piece of Eastwood track and field history to reach the state meet, using the same discus as former Eagle Justin Welch threw to win Division II state championships in 2008, 2009 and 2010. He also won a state shot title in 2010.

Fertig used Welch's discus all season until Saturday when it was impounded by meet officials prior to the competition because of a crack that happened during practice this week.

The discus and the shot are inspected by meet officials prior to the meet. As a result, he had to go to a backup discus.

"I was mad I couldn't throw that discus, but it all worked out," Fertig said.

Fertig will compete in the unofficial state hammer throw championship again Sunday. The hammer isn't sanctioned by the Ohio High School Athletic Association, and is only held in a handful of meets during the season.

Fertig is the two-time defending Division II-III champion in the event, and has finished seventh overall the last two seasons.