

Fertig earns All-American recognition by finishing sixth in national championship



Photo Credit: Fertig Family

By Kevin Gordon

Erik Fertig became a high school All-American Sunday afternoon.

The Eastwood senior earned the recognition with a sixth-place finish in the weight throw at the New Balance Indoor Nationals track and field championships in New York City.

His day was even more satisfying because he had a throw of 68-9, the best of his career. The top six finishers in each event at nationals received All-American status. "I couldn't be happier," Fertig said Monday afternoon after practice at Eastwood. His previous best of 68-5½ came Feb. 17 during a meet at the University of Findlay. Fertig's personal record entering the season was 50-11¼ last season.

"The time and hard work I've put into achieving this goal, to get that recognition and have it payoff like this is great."

Fertig's throw of 68-9 came on his first attempt in the preliminaries.

The 43 throwers were divided into three flights for the prelims where each athlete received three throws. The top nine distances advanced to the finals where the athletes received three more throws in an attempt to improve their distance.

Fertig was fifth after the prelims, but was passed by one thrower during the finals. The University of Louisville recruit was in the prelims' final flight, which included the best throwers in the event.

"I was a long shot to make the finals, let alone finish in the top six," Fertig said. "I went in there feeling really loose, nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. I was just going to go out and do my best and see what happened.

"I led off with a PR throw, and kind of put the pressure on the rest of the guys, and it showed. I climbed my way up. Definitely very pleased with my finish."

Fertig entered the meet ranked 15th nationally with his previous best of 68-5½, and Sunday's throw boosted him to 14th. Athletes qualified for the nationals based on their distances during the season.

"The week leading up to the meet, I wasn't feeling that confident, and my practices weren't going very well," Fertig said. "My lifting was going pretty well. But practice-wise, I wasn't feeling as connected as I have in the past.

"Once I got to New York, I started to settle in on what I was doing, and I loosened up. I let the energy and the moment take over, and I threw for the fences."

Trey Knight of Ridgefield, Washington finished first with a throw of 80-0. The junior had a career-best of 86-7½ earlier this season, the second-best ever by a high school athlete and the best by a high school athlete since 2010.

Van Buren junior Tyler Arbaugh was second at 73-8, while senior Justyn Loper of Fayetteville, Georgia was third at 70-3.

"It's an honor to be considered among the best throwers in the country," Fertig said. "It turned my competitive mode up a bit. We definitely brought out the best in each

other, and they definitely brought out the best in me.

"It's great to be able to throw under pressure. They said this was one of the best competitions in the weight throw they've ever had. To show up and have to perform against some of the best throwers is definitely a gut check. I'm glad I was able to compete on the big stage."

Fertig's personal-best came after a bittersweet performance at the Division II-III state indoor meet March 2. He finished second, but threw only 66-6½ to finish as the runner-up to Arbaugh. Arbaugh's season best of 73-7½ ranks third nationally.

"I definitely felt I like had something left in the tank," Fertig said. "I don't think I had



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something to prove, but I wanted to improve my mark and show what I could do. To have that opportunity to throw again and be able to take advantage of it felt good."

During the weekend trip to New York, Fertig and his family visited the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, and Times Square, and rode the subway. They visited the Statue of Liberty last year.

"That was great to be able to visit those," Fertig said. "It definitely added to the trip." Fertig also competed in the New Balance Indoor Nationals last season, finishing third in the Emerging Elite Division. He also competed in the Junior Olympics meet, finishing sixth in a division similar to the Emerging Elite.