

After an uncertain future, Hodulik is excited to throw collegiately at Oregon



By Kevin Gordon

Ashley Hodulik originally thought she'd be attending Brown University this fall.

Her plans to attend the Ivy League school and compete for the Bears' track and field program didn't work out. But the June graduate of Eastwood High School is still headed to college.

She'll attend the University of

Oregon, competing in the hammer throw and the weight throw for the Ducks. Hodulik, who had a 4.3 grade-point average at Eastwood, will major in biology or biochemistry at Oregon. She plans to go to medical school after earning her undergraduate degree. Her goal is to become an anesthesiologist.

"I'm really excited to be going to Oregon," said Hodulik, who committed to the west coast school in mid-June. "It was really nerve-wracking, and not knowing where I would be going to school, but it all worked out."

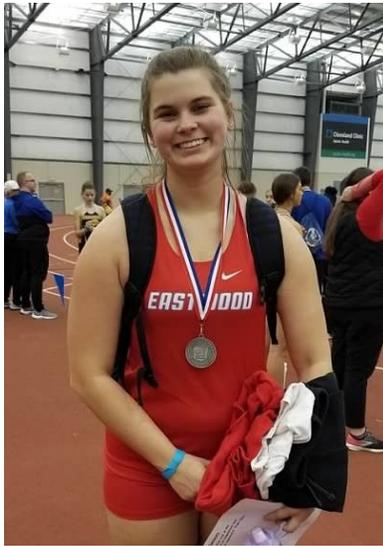
From Eastwood to Brown

Hodulik's impressive list of athletic and academic accomplishments at Eastwood earned her provisional admission to Brown. She was placed on a wait list to attend the school in late April.

Whether or not she would actually attend Brown depended on how many students ahead of her on the waiting list were accepted by Brown and how many of those students actually would have accepted their admission to Brown. That meant there was a chance she actually wouldn't be able to attend school there.

"I knew there was a chance I wouldn't get in," Hodulik said. "When they put me on the wait list, I was like, 'Oh no, where I am going to school?' It was very unnerving, very upsetting. Now, there's a lot relief, knowing I have a school to go to."

The coronavirus pandemic canceled Hodulik's senior season at Eastwood in the hammer throw last spring.



But during the winter indoor season, she finished second in the Division II-III state meet in the weight throw with a distance of 49-10, an Eastwood record and the third-best throw in Ohio during the season. The hammer throw isn't sanctioned by the Ohio High School Athletic Association, although the state coaches association sponsors an unofficial state championship in the event.

A few schools, including Eastwood, hold the hammer throw during regular season meets.

Hodulik was president of Eastwood Student Council her junior and senior years, and was senior class president. She also was a member of the National Honor Society, and president of Key Club her junior

and senior years.

An uncertain future

After realizing she might not have a place at Brown, Hodulik enlisted the help of her personal coach, Justin Carvahlo, to find her another school.

Carvahlo specializes in the hammer throw. He posted two videos of Hodulik on the national college throwing coaches Facebook page. In a matter of just under three weeks, Hodulik had attention from schools across the country.

"We were both very antsy about her not having a school. She should have known where she was going," said Carvahlo, who runs the Northwest Ohio Throws Academy in Findlay.

Carvahlo is a former assistant coach at Bowling Green State University and the University of Findlay.

"It was hard with no marks from her senior year in the hammer," Carvahlo said.

"But she knew what she wanted out of a school, and she knew she wanted to go to (an NCAA) Division I school. She had very precise ideas, and wants to be great at throwing. She's great academically and a great teammate. She had a lot to offer. She wanted to make sure she was going to the right program with the right coaching."

Oregon's the choice

Hodulik eventually chose Oregon over the University of Nebraska.

With the pandemic, Hodulik did virtual tours of the schools she was recruited by, instead of the traditional on-campus visits. She won't leave for Oregon until Sept. 21 since the school is on quarters instead of semesters.

“I haven’t even stepped foot on campus there yet,” Hodulik said. “Their track and field program speaks for itself. When their coach reached out to me, it was a no-brainer that I was going to get some amazing opportunities out there and I wanted to experience those.

“On top of that, they have outstanding academics,” Hodulik added. “It was really the combined athletics and academics, I was looking for. It gave me the best opportunity overall.”

“The campus overall looks very beautiful overall when you look at pictures,” Hodulik said. “It’s all mountains, and it’s very beautiful out there. I quickly fell in love with it. The coaching staff seems great, and I’m excited to work with them.” Hodulik also had help during the recruiting from Van Buren’s Tyler Arbaugh, who will be a freshman at Oregon in the fall. He’s one of Ohio’s top competitors in the hammer throw as well. Arbaugh visited Oregon before the pandemic.

“He told me a lot of things about the program and the school that were very helpful,” Hodulik said. “It was nice just to have another viewpoint. Just from what he said and the research I did, I was very excited about Oregon. He said he really enjoyed his time out there.”

During the recruiting process, Hodulik talked with Oregon head coach Robert Johnson and throws coach Eric Whitsitt. The virtual tours allowed Hodulik to see parts of the campus, the athletic facilities, academic buildings and the campus overall.

Oregon’s Hayward Field is one of the sport’s iconic facilities.

“Oregon has the premiere program in the country collegiately, and it has one of the five best facilities in the world,” Carvahlo said. “Oregon has a great history in the hammer throw and the American record holder is from Oregon.”

A late bloomer

Although Hodulik’s track and field career had a late start, she quickly blossomed in the throwing events once she joined Eastwood’s program as a sophomore. Hodulik was a two-time state indoor qualifier in the weight throw, finishing fourth as a junior in 2019. She originally broke the school record in the event in 2019 and extended it five times earlier this year.

Hodulik also competed in the discus and the shot put for the Eagles. At Oregon, she’ll concentrate on the hammer and weight throws.

“She’s very driven,” Eastwood girls head coach Nikki Sabo said. “She’s worked very hard to get better, and that goes for any aspect whether it’s athletics, academics or any extracurricular. She finds the resources she needs to accomplish her goals.

“She works very hard,” Sabo added. “She puts in the time in terms of lifting, drill work and watching film. She puts in the time to improve and build on what she’s done in the past.”

Hodulik’s best throw in practice with the hammer so far this summer is about 164-0, and she was hoping to add another 10 feet to that distance before heading to Oregon. She threw a school-record 120-9 as a junior and 70-5 as a sophomore. “Month in and month out, of all the athletes I’ve had, she’s been the most consistent, and it’s her consistency that’s made her successful,” Carvahlo said. “Her success has been the perfect storm. She has a good support system. She’s a great athlete. She works hard and does everything she needs to do to be successful. She’s a student of her events. She’s a great competitor. She bought into the system and kept the trust in the system, especially in the weight throw and the hammer throw.”

Hodulik started throwing with Carvahlo in November, 2018, and the hammer quickly became her specialty. This summer, she’s averaged three days a week throwing this summer. She lifts weights three days a week.

She’ll reduce her amount of throwing before she heads to Oregon to make sure she’s healthy and well-rested to start her college career.

“You could see hints of her being able to compete at a high level back then,” Carvahlo said. “She had a good feel for the hammer (throw) and the weight (throw). She ascended quickly because of the consistency and coming back every day, taking days off when they’re needed, but every day was a step forward. The throws aren’t easy events, but she’s learned the techniques, and she’s worked hard at them.”

Hodulik is one of two Eagles throwing at the NCAA Division I level. The other is Erik Fertig, who is entering his sophomore year at the University of Louisville



“I never saw myself being this good or going to Oregon,” Hodulik said. “When I first started to watch Erik throw and seeing how good he was. I never thought I’d be like him. I’m just baffled by it all, and how everything has turned out. But as I improved and had success, I did think I might have the chance to do something special

“I’ve gained more and more confidence every year, and my technique has gotten better, too.” Hodulik added. “The indoor

seasons have really helped me realize if I put my mind to it, I can achieve my goals.

Fertig won a state outdoor title in the discus as a senior, also qualifying for state in the shot put that year. He also finished third in the state hammer championship.

Hodulik gave up club volleyball to join the track program.

“I told Mrs. Sabo I wasn’t very fast, but I wanted to join the track program, and she said she’d find an event for me,” Hodulik said. “I really enjoyed it once I came out. One of the things that made it so nice was the team atmosphere. I really fell in love with the sport, and I wanted to work hard at it. That’s how I’ve gotten to this point.”

First-year goals

Hodulik hopes to compete for the Ducks as a freshman, although no decision has been made if the indoor and outdoor seasons will be held.

“It depends how I perform,” Hodulik said, adding her goals are to throw 57-60 feet in the weight throw, and approximately 198 feet in the hammer.

“If I can reach those distances, I can compete in both seasons, Hodulik said. “It comes down to how I perform. I feel really good about where I’m at right now with my throwing.”

Oregon’s track team will begin practicing later this fall in hopes of having its indoor and outdoor seasons. Classes begin Sept. 29. The school has switched to remote learning, although Hodulik and other students will have some in-person classes for lab work.

“I don’t think the whole COVID thing has crossed my mind yet, but it could be a huge thing once I get there and whether I get to compete and what classes are like,” Hodulik said. “All of us will just have to be careful and do what we’re supposed to do to stay healthy. I don’t want to lose another season, but I’m excited about everything.”