

Boys 1,600m relay aims to repeat state championship

By Kevin Gordon - April 4th, 2017

One state championship isn't enough to satisfy Logan Baugher, Isaac Emahiser and Ryan Reiter.

Instead, the Eastwood sprinters are aiming for a repeat state championship.

The three were part of the Eagles' winning 1,600 relay team in last season's Division III state track and field meet at Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium.

Baugher, Emahiser and Reiter return after winning their state title in 3:21.59, the fourth-fastest time in school history. The fourth member of the relay was Sam Church, who was a senior last season.

Baugher and Reiter are seniors, while Emahiser is a junior. "We're really going after it. That's our goal," Reiter said.

The Eagles are shooting to win a state championship in the 1,600 relay for the third time in the last four seasons. They won in Division II in 2014. Eastwood also finished seventh in Division II in 2015 when Emahiser ran a leg as a freshman.

"Winning state again would be an amazing feeling," Emahiser said.

But the state championship in the 1,600 relay isn't the primary focus for the three standouts this season.

"The big picture is cool to think about, but we have to hit our individual times and work hard every day," Baugher said. "When we get to the end of the season, the district meet, it'll be something we look at a little bit more."

The regular season isn't even two weeks old, and the district meet is six weeks away. And to have a chance to win state again, the Eagles first have to qualify for the regional and state meets. As a team, the Eagles will seek their 17th straight league championship May 13.

"It's one day at a time, work hard, get better every day," Reiter said. "We want to be peaking for the end of the season."

Although the Eagles still have to find a fourth sprinter to fill out the relay, they're confident they have that athlete. Developing 50-second quarter-milers is one of the strengths of the Eagle program.

Baughner, Church, Reiter and Emhaiser didn't run together last season until they competed in a regional semifinal. They won the regional in 3:24.21 after posting the fastest semifinal time with a 3:28.10 clocking.

Reiter had only run the race three times before the regional, Eastwood coach Brian Sabo said.

"We'll find a guy who can fit in," Baughner said. "We have a lot of guys with the potential to do that. We'll have guys battling."

In addition to winning state, the goal for the relay is to break the school record of 3:18.01 set in 2014.

"I'd love to see us break 3:20 because that's what it's going to take," Sabo said. "If you shoot for that and you run 3:19 and finish third or whatever, that's perfect. Then we'll be third in a great competition."

East Canton was the state runnerup last season in 3:22.25, and all four of its runners are eligible to return. Third-place Allen East (3:24.16) and fourth-place Waynesfield-Goshen (3:24.22) both had one senior last season.

"Our goal is to get back to state, and then we'll worry anything after that," Emahiser said. "That's how we approach it. If we give the best effort we can and pour everything we have into the race, we'll take the place we get."

"We shoot for time and let the competition bring us along," Sabo said. "Winning is still great, but we always shoot for time. They have a lot of confidence, they work hard, and they have the confidence to say we're going to go for it. We don't put pressure on kids in terms of place. We tell them to pour out the effort and see where we finish."

The 1,600 relay isn't the only state experience for the three.

Baughner has earned All-Ohio honors in the 3,200 relay the last three seasons, finishing sixth last season, third in 2015 and second in 2014. He also was eighth in the 800 last season. All-Ohio honors are presented to the top eight finishers in each event at the state meet.

Reiter and Emahiser helped Eastwood to a fourth-place finish in the 400 relay last season, while Reiter also was 14th in the long jump.

Eastwood returns three other athletes who competed at state last season, and lost only four athletes who competed in the NBC meet. The Eagles won district and regional championships and finished in a four-way tie for eighth at state.

“Experience is key,” Emahiser said. “We’ve got guys who have been there before. We know what to expect. We know the atmosphere. You’re always going to be nervous before a big meet, but the experience helps you feel more comfortable.”

The 1,600 relay is the signature event for the Eagles. Former head coach Gary White, who led the team to Division II state championships in 2009 and 2010, started the tradition. White has since returned to the program as an assistant coach after retiring following the 2011 season.

Eastwood loves the 1,600 relay because it’s the last event of the meet and it’s a good test of speed and endurance at the end of a long day.

And because it’s the final event, the Eagles, like many schools, cheer on their teammates from the edge of the frontstretch and the backstretch. Those teammates, both boys and girls, sprint from one side of the track to the other during the race.

“The (1,600 relay) is our race,” Reiter said. “It’s the team spirit again. There’s no better feeling than having your teammates cheer you on during that race.”

Eastwood has qualified for state in the 1,600 relay in four straight seasons and in six of the last eight seasons. It’s earned all-state recognition all six times. In addition to winning twice, the Eagles finished fourth twice, seventh once and eighth once.

“Every guy wants to be on the (1,600 relay) team,” Emahiser said. “It’s a great relay to be a part of. The tradition of that race here is unbelievable.”