

Alternates enjoyed attending state meet

By Kevin Gordon - June 30th, 2017

Erik Fertig loves attending the state high school track and field championships.

The next time the Eastwood junior visits his sport's showcase event, he's hoping it'll be as a competitor.

Fertig attended the state meet for the second time almost two weeks ago. The shot put and discus thrower was at state as a member of Eastwood's team, even though he wasn't a qualifier in either of his events.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association allows schools to bring two alternates for each relay team which qualifies for state. The Eagles qualified all four of their relays for state.

Eastwood boys head coach Brian Sabo also brings a few more athletes to state who could qualify for the meet the following year. By being at the meet, those athletes receive a feel for the event and usually are more motivated to qualify the following season. Fertig was one of those athletes.

"It makes me excited for the future and next season. I'm even hungrier now," Fertig said.

Fertig already has had two solid seasons.

The 5-foot-11, 205-pounder finished second in the discus and the shot during the Northern Buckeye Conference meet this season, and qualified for the Tiffin regional in the discus. He finished seventh in the regional, three places shy of the final state berth. As a freshman, Fertig was second in the discus at the NBC meet.

"I'll prepare hard for next season. Hopefully, I'll be on the podium next year," Fertig said, referring to the awards stand where the top eight finishers in each event at state are recognized. They also receive All-Ohio honors.

Like Fertig, Eagle sophomore Shelby Getz enjoyed the state meet as an alternate on the girls 800 and 400 relay teams.

"It's exciting to see what state is like because I want to be here as a qualifier next year," said Getz, who finished eighth in the 100 hurdles and the 300 hurdles in the NBC meet as a freshman this spring.

In the district meet at Oak Harbor, Getz finished fifth in the 100 hurdles and sixth in the 300 hurdles. The top four finishers in each event advanced to the regional at Lexington High School.

“Coming to state gives me even more motivation for next year,” Getz said. “It’s really motivating to see how everyone pushed themselves in each event. It’s going to be exciting next year, if I’m able to get here.”

Fertig, Getz and all of the alternates received the full state experience.

The Eagles toured the facilities at Ohio State University’s Jesse Owens Stadium Thursday afternoon, the day before the Friday-Saturday meet.

They enjoyed cheering on their teammates and watching the competition at each of the event areas. The high jump is held at the north end of the track, while the pole vault is held at the south end, and the long jump is held on the backstretch.

The discus and shot put are contested west of the stadium.

Jesse Owens Stadium has a capacity of 10,000, with virtually all of the seating on the front stretch — in contrast to regular-season meets that generally attended only by friends and family.

After watching the state meet this season, Fertig finished seventh in the state meet for the hammer throw on Sunday in Columbus. The hammer throw isn’t sanctioned by the OHSAA, although it is held during some regular-season duals and invitationals.

Fertig already ranks in Eastwood’s Top 10 in all three throws. He’s second in the hammer throw (170-0), fifth in the discus (166-5) and seventh in the shot put (48-10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>).

“The atmosphere, there’s nothing like being at Jesse O,” Fertig said. “The atmosphere is a shock the first time you’re here because of all the people. There’s not a crowd like this anywhere else. Just to get familiar with that feeling is going to make it easier.”

The Eagles spent two nights in a hotel with their friends, teammates and coaches, and shared team meals, evening swims at the hotel, and card games/conversations at the Eagle camp at the meet.

“Being an alternate is great,” said Eastwood senior Jessica Lang, an alternate on the girls relay teams. “I’m proud of all the girls. I like supporting them and watching them do their best, and giving them all of the support I can.”

“Knowing they gave their all throughout the season makes me proud of them,” Lang added. “I love watching the competition, the level the girls compete at and the skills they have. It’s amazing meet to watch.”

Sabo also brought Fertig to state to help Eastwood senior Dalton Andrews remain in his usual routine. Andrews was a state qualifier in the shot, and has had Fertig next to him all season.

“You want to keep things as normal as possible because people like routine, especially at the biggest meet of the year,” Sabo said.

But the trip to state isn’t a vacation for the alternates. Injuries do happen at state.

One of the great moments in Eastwood’s boys run to their 2009 Division II state championship came at the state meet in the semifinals 400 relay. Alternate Jake Rogers had to run after standout Cody Seifert pulled a hamstring earlier in the semifinals of the 100.

When Seifert pulled up with his injury, Rogers was watching the meet in the stands. He then had about 30 minutes to change into his uniform, stretch and prepare to run in the team’s biggest race of the season.

Eastwood qualified for the finals, and Rogers and his teammates then finished fifth in the finals.

The Eagles also used senior alternate Alex Boyer in the semifinals of the 1,600 relay at state this season to rest Ryan Reiter, who was a four-event state qualifier. Boyer also helped Eastwood qualify for state in the 3,200 relay.

As a sophomore, Reiter competed in the regional as an alternate.

The alternates often dress in their uniforms and go through the warmup with their relay teams, in case they are needed.

“You have to be ready at all times because you never know what can happen,” Lang said.

“As alternates, they get to see what’s like, to be down there warming up on the track, to know they are trusted to step in at any moment,” Eastwood girls head coach Nikki Sabo said. “If something happens, I know they’re going to give their best effort. They know how to do the exchanges.”

Nikki Sabo also switches the members and the order of her relay teams during the season. In addition to creating competition for spots on those teams, the changes allow the runners to feel comfortable running the different legs of each relay.

“You never know what might happen,” Nikki Sabo said. “They’ve been put in different places in the (400 relay) and the (800 relay), and they can step in and know exactly what to do. We might have to adjust it a little bit, depending on who is

coming in. But we know they're going to give great effort. It adds to depth of our team."