

## Abke soars to success in the pole vault, FFA activities



By Kevin Gordon

Allie Abke first became intrigued by the pole vault when she went to a high school meet to watch her sister high jump.

When she eventually decided to vaulting, she enjoyed success and improved.

Now, Abke shares Eastwood's outdoor and indoor records in her specialty. And the senior is striving for even more improvement this season. Abke's goal is to jump 11-6 or 12-0 outdoors this season, breaking the school record of 10-6 she matched during the Eastwood Relays last season.

Elise Wolff first cleared 10-6 in 2014.

She tied the winter indoor record of 9-6 earlier this year. Abke's classmate and cousin, Jessica Lang, originally set the record in 2016. Lang's outdoor best of 10-0 in 2016 is third-best in Eastwood history.

"I've had a lot of successes, and I want to improve on those," Abke said, adding she was in the weight room during the offseason to better prepare for her final season as an Eagle. "We (Lang and Abke) have a friendly competition that pushes both of us to improve."

Abke was a regional qualifier as a sophomore, but narrowly missed a return last season with a fifth-place finish in the district meet. She tied for fourth place, but didn't advance because she had more misses.

Her goal this season is to advance to the regional and perhaps even qualify for state. She'll have a chance to achieve those goals if she can clear 11-6 or 12-0.

"I want to keep building on what I've done," she said.

After matching Eastwood's indoor record in the winter, Abke likes the way she's vaulting outdoors so far, even though the season is only three weeks old. The Northern Buckeye Conference and district meets are a month away.

The weather conditions have been nasty for the pole vaulters with the majority of the days being cold, windy and wet.

"I'm jumping well, but I'd like to be jumping better," Abke said. "But I understand the weather has not been good, so I know I won't be jumping my best early on. But I'm pretty happy where I'm at, and I'm ready to improve."

"You just have to go with the flow, and take what Mother Nature gives us. We deal with it every day at practice, so we're prepared for it. You have to keep a positive mindset and go for it. You accept your best heights won't come until later in the season when the weather improves."

Abke was third in the NBC meet last season after finishing second as a freshman and as a sophomore. Lang was the conference champion during her first two seasons and was second last season.

Abke also holds Eastwood's outdoor pole vault relay record with Lang and Limes. The mark of 27-0 was set last season. Limes is a sophomore this season.

Abke, who started vaulting as a seventh grader, was second in the NBC middle school meet as an eighth grader at 8-6 in 2014.

Her sister, Kirsten, is a 2013 Eastwood graduate.

"I've liked it from the time I started," Abke said, "It frustrated me at first, and it still frustrates me, but now that I've gotten the hang of it, I like it more, and it's a lot of fun. I definitely felt like I was improving. It's not an easy event, so you have to work through the hard times."

Abke is one of Eastwood's captains for the second straight season.

"I try to be a leader, and step up to do what's needed to help the coaches and the team as a whole," Abke said. "I try to set an example for the girls, so they have someone to follow or look up to when they become upperclassmen."

"I watched the captains during my freshmen and sophomore years. I would always try to be like them, and it helped me become a better leader. I try to be positive and encouraging, helping everyone to try to be their best."

As a captain, Abke can be seen encouraging and cheering on her teammates at their events during each meet.

And the Eagles' respect for Abke is evident.

The pole vault was the last event to finish at the Whitmer Invitational April 6. All of the Eagles — both girls and boys — headed to the vault area to cheer on Abke, Lang and Limes for their final attempts in the meet.

The teammates exploded into a loud roar when Abke cleared what turned out to be the winning height of 9-6. Lang and Limes were part of a three-way tie for second at 8-0, giving Eastwood first place in the pole vault relay with a total height of 25-6.

"The number one reason her teammates gave was the encouragement she gave to everyone," Eastwood coach Nikki Sabo said when asked why Abke was selected as a captain.

"When you're selected as a captain as a junior, that tells me a lot from a coaching standpoint," Sabo added. "If you just watch her, she'll go to every event and ask everyone how they're doing and give suggestions and encouragement. The girls really appreciate that."

But pole vaulting isn't Abke's only success.

She's the president of the Eastwood chapter of the Future Farmers of America, and finished sixth in the Ohio FFA's competition for job interviews. FFA offers career development events in all aspects of agriculture.

"Placing at state was awesome. That was my goal," said Abke, who lives on the family farm just outside of Pemberville. The family farms 800 acres of corn, soybean and wheat.

Abke qualified for the state competition by placing in the top two in the Wood County competition and winning the district competition.

She shows market hogs and cattle at the county fair where she said she's won "quite a few ribbons." She also was the second runnerup for the county fair queen last year. Abke also visited France, Spain and Italy last summer with Eastwood's International Club.

"That was great, visiting those countries and experiencing different cultures," Abke said. "That was a great learning experience."

Abke, who has a 3.6 grade-point average, will vault collegiately at Tiffin University where she's planning to major in education.