

Girls strive for even more success

By Kevin Gordon



Photo Credit: Tammy Schmeltz

Eastwood's girls fashioned an impressive résumé last season. But the Eagles — even though they return 31 letter winners, including 16 who scored in the Northern Buckeye Conference meet — aren't satisfied.

Instead, they're just as hungry and just as determined to improve on last season.

The Eagles won their 17th straight league championship and scored 110 points for third place in their

Division II district meet.

Eastwood also performed well in its regional and state meets.

The Eagles qualified seven athletes in nine events for the regional where they were second with 47 points. The points were Eastwood's most in a regional, topping its 37 in 2004 and 30 in 1997. Eastwood's previous best finish was fourth.

Eastwood advanced six individuals in five events to the state meet. The Eagles finished tied for 19th with 11 points, matching one school record and coming within striking distance of four other marks during the meet.

"The goals they've set are pretty good," said Eastwood coach Nikki Sabo, who is in her ninth season. "I'm excited about it. They're challenging themselves. It's neat to see that progression over the last few years."

The Eagles begin the season Tuesday at Clay and compete in the Liberty-Benton Relays Thursday.

"They want to do extremely well at the district, regional and state levels where their focus before was solely on the conference," Sabo said. "Yes, we want to win the conference. But they're also looking to do things in the post-season."

Eastwood has won 21 of its last 22 conference championships, spanning the now-defunct Suburban Lakes League and the NBC.

Among the returning letter winners are four first-team All-NBC selections for having won their event in the conference meet — senior Katelyn Meyer in the high jump, long jump and the 100 hurdles; and seniors Abby Schroeder and Nichole Swartz, and sophomore Jamie Schmeltz from the 4x100 relay.

But Schroeder will miss the season after knee surgery earlier this month. The setter on Eastwood's volleyball team will play college volleyball at the University of Findlay in the fall.

Eastwood also returns six athletes who finished second in the NBC meet to earn second-team all-conference honors — senior Jessica Lang in the pole vault; Schmeltz in the 200; Lang, Schmeltz and junior Allie Lucas from the 4x200 relay; and Meyer, Schmeltz and Schroeder from the 4x400 relay.

Seven athletes return after receiving honorable-mention recognition in the NBC meet, the result of third-place finishes. They are senior Allie Abke in the pole vault; senior Cassandra Clay in the shot put; Schmeltz in the 100; and senior Lauren Welker, junior Maggie Cochran and sophomore Rory Farmer from the 4x800 relay. "I like where our team is at right now," Sabo said. "They're doing very well, especially with the conditions (wind chills in the 20s and 30s every day). They're working hard. We're pretty healthy for the most part, and they're putting in the work.

"They're asking questions. They're trying to do their best. They're lifting more than they have during previous seasons, which was a goal of the coaching staff. I'm very pleased."

Schroeder's loss is a big one. She's one of the team's best sprinters and was voted one of the team's captains, despite the injury.

Schroeder ran on Eastwood's 4x100 and 4x200 relay teams that qualified for state last season. She also could have run the 100 and 200 this season, Sabo said.

"(Schroeder) is very similar to (Swartz)," Sabo said. "She has speed. She has leadership. She can do every single handoff. That's going to be hard to replace. But she'll be there to help with that transition, like a student coach. She's eager to get back to help her teammates, to encourage her teammates."

But Eastwood has a deep and talented group of sprinters.

"It's a big loss, but we'll move forward," Sabo said. "We have our depth to fall back on. It's opportunity for others to step up, and they're stepping up already. They're taking initiative and leading sprint workouts.

"It'll be fun to see how the pieces go together as the season goes along. It's nice to have that depth that (athletes) don't always have to be in four events every meet. They can be in two or three events, allowing us to try to save their legs so they can be fresher as the season goes along.

"It also helps with the competition. Competition is good. You're going to earn whether you compete in the bigger meets and the conference meet. It's going to be earned. Nothing will be handed to them."

Although the Eagles have high expectations, their goal list begins with having fun. They have 66 athletes, including 17 athletes each in the senior, sophomore and freshmen classes. Eastwood has 15 juniors.

"Track is a very social sport. They want to interact with new and different people," Sabo said. "You bring in athletes from other sports to form one team. It's cool to see how they mix and evolve together. They form new friendships. They appreciate going out the next year and watching their teammates perform in their other sports. "We have a lot of people from the musical on our team. A lot of the teammates went and watched that. It's cool to see those relationships and connections grow."