

Comfort zone: Simon at home on the track team, in the discus

By Kevin Gordon - April 2nd, 2017

Mykala Simon left her comfort zone to join Eastwood's girls track and field team last season.

Now, a year later, the senior is emerging as a confident athlete who is steadily improving in the discus.

And the once-shy Simon has become an outgoing and popular member of the team. Her teammates voted her one of the Eagles' five captains this season.

Simon finished fourth in her specialty at the Northern Buckeye Conference last season with a throw of 100-1, the best of her career. This season, she's striving to reach the 120 mark.

"My goal is to do my best every day," Simon said. "I really don't worry about places. I just try for a (personal best) every time."

Simon first threw the discus as an eighth-grader, but said she wasn't very good at it and didn't compete in track the next two seasons. She decided to give the discus a second try at the encouragement of assistant coach D.J. Michel.

Simon was a student in Michel's fitness class where she lifted weights. She also ran cross country as a sophomore, junior and a senior, but was limited to just three meets as a senior because of a hip injury that has since healed.

"(Coach Michel) told me I was strong and athletic, and I'd be a really good thrower, so I decided to give it a try," Simon said.

The 5-foot-6 Simon is powerfully- and athletically-built, enabling her to improve in her event which requires speed and strength. She runs sprints during practice to improve her speed.

"She was hesitant at first," Michel said. "But once she got into it, she fell in love with it. She's really grown in her confidence. Once she came out for track, her confidence grew even more. She's really enjoying it. She's matured and grown, and improved her confidence and her strength."

Simon threw 77-5 during Eastwood's first meet last season, and later added throws of 94-6 and 93-2 before posting her career best at the NBC meet.

"I was iffy at first because I wasn't very good and I'm still not amazing," Simon said. "But I liked it, and it's clicked for me. (Throwing 100-1) was great, and it gave me a lot of confidence this year. I didn't think it was that great of a throw when I left the ring, and then I heard them say 100-1, and that was really exciting."

Now, Simon is looking to reach the 120 mark with the help of Eastwood throwing coaches Scott Sehmman and Lucas Friess.

In most seasons, a throw of 120 or better gives an athlete a chance to qualify for the state meet. It also would be one of the best seven throws in school history.

“That would be great to reach that goal, and it would be an amazing experience to go to regionals and maybe even state,” Simon said.

Simon and senior teammate Danielle Miranda regularly lift weights at Eastwood on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 5:30.

Simon also throws the shot put and had a career-best of 24-10 March 28 when the Eagles opened their season against Clay and McComb. Simon’s best in the shot last season was 24-5½.

“As the season progressed, you could tell she was getting more comfortable,” Eagle head coach Nikki Sabo said. “When she threw 100-1 at the NBC meet, she got the feeling that I belong here. She works hard, and it’s showing.”

Simon’s success is even more impressive because the discus is a technical event in which she didn’t start competing at the high school level until her junior year.

“My technique wasn’t very good last season, and that’s something I’m really trying to work on,” Simon said.

Simon also emerged as one of the leaders of the Eagles in her role as a captain.

“Her teammates noticed her work ethic, her staying late and her helping others.” Sabo said. “That means a lot to them, and they rewarded her by selecting her as a captain.”

Simon said it was a hard decision to join the track team last season because many of her friends were not on the team, and it was a new sport for her in high school.

“I heard about the family environment Eastwood has for track and field,” Simon said. “I was very interested in that. The first practice, I realized it was a very family-oriented place. It was a big happy family. Everyone was involved. Everyone was excited. Encouragement was high. All of the coaches cared about you, even if they weren’t the coach of your event. Every coach knew everything about you and talked to you. It was a very welcoming environment. I loved the environment.”

Now, she’s a captain for the Eagles, who are bidding for their 17th straight league championship.

“I majorly had to come out of my comfort zone because I was very shy,” Simon said. “But I’ve made even more friends because I came out of my comfort zone to join the

team. I realized I could be outgoing. Being on the track team has been so much fun, and I want to help the team in any way I can.”