

Fertig excels at throwing, being a 'quality human being'



Photo Credit: Tammy Schmeltz

By Kevin Gordon

Erik Fertig fiercely competed in one of the most important meets of the season Saturday.

He didn't forget his manners, though.

The Eastwood junior said, 'Thank you,' to the workers every time they retrieved and returned his shot put to him during the Northern Buckeye Conference track and field meet at Lake High School.

Treating meet workers and officials well is normal for Fertig, who is well-respected by and popular with his teammates and coaches on the boys and girls teams.

Fertig already is one of the captains for the boys team. He has a 4.34 grade-point average and plans to major in engineering in college.

His favorite classes are physics and math.

"I knew when he was in middle school he'd be a captain because of how hard he works and how well he treats other people," Eastwood head coach Brian Sabo said. "There are times you'd never know he's our best thrower because he's so involved with other people and cheering other people on and getting them excited. He's a quality human being."

Fertig usually doesn't see the early running events during a meet because he's throwing the shot and the discus. In between the shot and the discus, he'll hustle over to other events to see how his teammates are faring.

Once he's finished competing, he becomes a cheerleader for the Eagles during the remainder of the running events.

The powerfully built 6-foot, 220-pounder also knows the personal records — both running and throwing — for many of his boys and girls teammates.

"Everyone adds value to this team, no matter how far you throw, how high you jump or how fast you run," Fertig said. "If you're here to work and you're here to improve yourself and to improve others, there's always going to be a spot for you on this team, and you're always going to be important to this team."

Fertig is one of the top throwers in the state and swept the NBC championships in the shot and the discus.

Going into this week's district meet at Oak Harbor, Fertig ranks second in Division II and 11th overall, regardless of division, in the discus with a throw of 166-9. In the shot, he's eighth in Division II and 25th overall at 53-4¼. Both distances are career bests, with both coming May 4 at the Oak Harbor Invitational.

Fertig also is first in the state overall and seventh nationally in the hammer throw, an event that isn't sanctioned by the Ohio High School Athletic Association. He's thrown the hammer only twice this season, including a career-best 204-2 at the Eastwood Relays April 20.

Another Fertig gem came after the Oak Harbor Invitational. He made it a point to seek out one of OH's coaches to tell him about an act of sportsmanship by one of the Rocket throwers.

The athlete had one of his throws incorrectly marked during the preliminaries. The incorrect mark, had it counted, would have enabled that thrower to make the finals, but the athlete informed the officials of the mistake as soon as the prelims were over. The results then were corrected in time for the finals.

"I try to be a good person, do the right thing," Fertig said. "I try to let everyone know they're appreciated. I try to thank all of the officials and the workers when I'm done throwing. If they don't do it, the event doesn't happen."

Fertig loves his sport and his events, but he's just as passionate about assisting his teammates. He's part of a fun group of throwers on the boys and girls teams. The throwers have a good time, but they also know when it's time to work.

"He's growing as a leader every day because he's finding out how much of an impact he has on our younger athletes," said Eastwood assistant coach Lucas Friess, who is one of the team's throwing coaches. "He doesn't ever stop getting better as a leader. He always wants to help them. He epitomizes what a leader should be."

Even though Fertig enjoys having fun, he becomes an intense competitor when it's his turn to step in the ring — whether it's during practice or a meet. He maintains the same attitude in the weight room.



Photo Credit: Tammy Schmeltz

"He works extremely hard and does everything with a purpose," said Eagle assistant coach Thomas Heckman, who also works with the throwers. "Even when you talk to him, he's very focused on what he's doing. We've tried a lot of different things with him to improve his throws, and he's willing to try everything. There are things we've done that he doesn't like because the throw doesn't go as far as we want, and we've scrapped them. But he's willing to try new things and trust the coaching. He's very adaptable."

"Even on the bad days, he's trying to find something good," Friess said. "He treats every throw like a meet. I've never seen him waste a rep, even in practice when he knows he'll get 20 throws. Even if it's a bad rep (repetition), he finds something to build off of. He builds off the good

and the bad."

Fertig is throwing the discus and the shot consistently well as he enters the final three weeks of the season. His immediate goal is to have a PR in both throws at each meet remaining, and his long-term goal is to qualify for state in both.

As a sophomore last season, Fertig finished seventh in the discus in the Division III regional at Tiffin, and second in in the shot and the discus at the NBC meet.

"I'm very excited about what's coming up," Fertig said. "I'm looking forward to some great competition that will push all of us to be even better."

The top four finishers in the Oak Harbor district advance to the regional May 24 and 26 at Lexington High School. The top four finishers at Lexington qualify for the state meet June 1-2 at Ohio State University's Jesse Owens Stadium.

Fertig already has one state championship this year, that coming in the weight throw at the Division II-III state indoor meet in March. He finished second in the shot at the same meet.

"I've been a lot more consistent lately, and I feel like I'm throwing well," Fertig said.

"I've noticed in the past that when I've become really consistent with one distance with a specific implement, I've noticed that a big jump (in distance) is coming."

Although the hammer throw isn't sanctioned by the OHSAA, a state championship will be held June 3, also at OSU. Fertig has won the Division III state title the last two years and finished seventh overall, regardless of division.

Most of Fertig's hammer throw competitions are during the summer months.

The track season is enhancing what already has been a great junior year for Fertig, who played on Eastwood's football team that advanced to the championship game of the Division V state playoffs. The Eagles lost to Wheelersburg in overtime.

The Eagles, who were ranked first in the final state poll, finished 14-1 overall and 7-0 in the NBC.

Fertig, who was the team's starting center, was a first-team All-NBC offensive pick.

He's also a member of the National Honor Society, Key Club and Student Council.

"I'm working on the little things, the technique stuff, so I can get the big throws in,"

Fertig said. "Focusing on the little things is what makes you great and helps you win the big meets. I've been working out in the weight room to keep my strength up and increase it a little bit going into the last part of the season."