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## Sports

# Oak Hill places third, Eastbrook fourth

By Sean Douglas

On a beautiful Tuesday evening at the Terry Lakes Track and Field Facility, new school records were set, personal bests were established, and above all, Grant County was well represented in the 2021 Girls Track and Field Sectional as 17 area athletes punched their ticket to the regional round.

Competing a pair of tremendous teams in Norwell and Bluffton, who finished in first and second, respectively, Oak Hill finished in third with a team score of 69, Eastbrook placed fourth with 64.25 points, Mississinewa came in eighth with 24.5 points, and host Marion finished in a tie for 11th with 18. Each Grant County school had at least one athlete advance to the regional round, with two coming away with sectional championship medals.

Heading into the sectional, Paige Brunner's Golden Eagles were suffering with both injuries and a lack of depth, a key compo-

nent to their success throughout the regular season. Long jump extraordinaire Kristen Travis, together with emerging sophomore Melissa Kluevein, were lost for the season before Tuesday's competition, while top distance runner Kate Hornocker was not running at 100 percent due to illness.

Despite this, however, the Golden Eagles still put together a tremendous performance, advancing eight athletes in four events while setting 21 new season and career bests.

"For us to still be in the top four or five teams, being in the situation we are in...I'm proud of the girls with the way they fought," Brunner said. "We will see what we got next week."

The star of the evening for Oak Hill was pole vaulter Taylor King. After a stout regular season, King recorded her best performance on Tuesday, finishing as the sectional champion in the pole vault with a per-



Oak Hill's Taylor King set the new school record in the Pole Vault with a vault of 10 feet even. **Photo by Sean Douglas**

sonal, and new Oak Hill record, height of 10 feet even.

"She is gaining more and more confidence there,"

Brunner said. "We have started the last couple of weeks here having that conversation that if she can be 9'6" or 10 feet, and be con-

sistent, she is going to have a shot next week. I think she's got a fighter's chance, and that's all you can ask for."

Additionally, Taylor's sister, Tori, also advanced to the regional, finishing in third place at 7'6", an incredible accomplishment for someone still relatively new to the track and field scene.

"Getting Tori out was huge," Brunner said. "Tori is a girl that is new to the sport in the pole vault, and she gets second in the Grant Four...and then gets out in the sectional."

Oak Hill's 4 x 800 team of Joy McDivitt, Selah Jackson, Emma Bledsoe, and Kinzie Robey, also qualified for the regional, holding off Eastbrook down the final stretch to take home third place honors with a time of 10:39.32.

Carlee Biddle was the Golden Eagles' final qualifier, finishing in third and setting a new personal record in the 300 Meter Hurdles with a time of 51.33.

Despite facing adversity, Brunner was proud of how his group competed in a tough field.

"I thought we battled," Brunner said. "We wanted to get as many girls out as we did, and hopefully, we will get some callbacks."

Despite their youth, the Panthers performed like a group of veterans on Tuesday.

"We had a lot of season-best, PR type performances today," Eastbrook Track and Field Head Coach Stu Goble said. "Not all of them are going to show up in the scorebook, but the kids came in and had their best meet of the year at the right time. It was a good, competitive meet here today."

Freshman Olivia Howell shined in her first sectional action, setting a new Eastbrook record in the 800 Meter (2:22.34 – second place), while also helping the Panthers place third in the 4 x 400 Relay (4:23.12 – season best) with some clutch running down the

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## Oak Hill wins second straight sectional with Marion, Mississinewa, Eastbrook all shining

By Sean Douglas

Thursday's boys track and field sectional was an electric affair from start to finish, one that saw all the Grant County teams show out and perform in impressive fashion.

There were a plethora of season-best performances and exhilarating finishes throughout the evening at the Terry Lakes Track and Field Facility, but in the end, Oak Hill's depth and experience, combined with some clutch points down the stretch, proved to be the difference as the Golden Eagles won their second straight sectional with a score of 90.66 points.

Oak Hill finished with one individual and one relay sectional champion, while 12 other Golden Eagles either qualified or



Marion senior Zaimar Burnett finished as the sectional champion in the Long Jump. **Photo by Sean Douglas**

were called back in seven other events. With their sectional championship victory, Oak Hill's cross country and track-and-field teams have combined to win at least a sectional or regional title in the last

10 calendar years.

"It was ugly [at times,]" Oak Hill Head Coach Paige Brunner said. "I told [Mississinewa Head Coach Ean] Van Winkle that in mind Mississinewa probably deserved to win

this meet over us and Marion, but I'm sure as heck not going to give the trophy back."

As the meet progressed, Oak Hill, Marion, and Mississinewa all jockeyed for position in the top

three, with the lead switching hands on numerous occasions.

But it was Oak Hill's seniors, at the meet's most crucial juncture, who delivered.

"We knew in the two-mile we were going to put points on everybody. We knew in the 800 we would put points on everybody. We knew the 4 x 4 would be competitive, and we knew that, based on how meets go, shot put would be the last thing standing," Oak Hill Head Coach Paige Brunner said. "We knew we had two throwers better than anybody Marion or Frankton or Mississinewa had."

Mason McKinney won the 400 Meter (50.70) while also picking up a crucial six points in the 200 Meter with a third-place finish (23.08). In the

shot put, Trey Castanon took home third place honors (44'3"), and Kasey Smith, though he did not qualify for the regional, placed fifth, giving Oak Hill the cushion it needed.

Smith did advance in the discus, placing third with a throw of 129 feet, 8 inches.

"We had some panic. Our kids had some panic. I thought our field events were a disaster tonight up until the shot put...but Mason brought it, Jacob Winger brought it late, and then for Kasey and Trey to go over there with the meet on the line...and go 3-5 [in the shot put,] that's the meet," Brunner said. "Two seniors, those are guys two years ago who were winning the regional. That's something

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