

Manning, Ewer enjoy state track experience

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Madison-Grant junior Emma Ewer runs through the turn during her 200-meter dash trial at the state track and field championships Saturday in Indianapolis. Ewer finished 17th in the event.

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INDIANAPOLIS — The experience of a state track and field meet is unlike any other for a high school athlete and often provides a memory for a lifetime.

Eastbrook senior Rachel Manning and Madison-Grant junior Emma Ewer each got their first taste of Indiana’s biggest stage Saturday in the IHSAA’s 47th-annual girls track and field state championships held this year at Ben Davis High School.

“Definitely cool. It’s not IU-Bloomington but it’s a nice school, lots of people, lots of buzz,” said Manning just a few minutes after she competed in the high jump competition. “It doesn’t feel real until you step up there and there is only 30 other girls

and you're like 'I made it. I'm in the big leagues now.' It was nice, it was a fun way to end.

Manning's experience included being the first athlete to make an attempt to clear the 5-foot opening height, which she did on her first try.

Once all 30 competitors had completed the first round of jumps, the bar was moved to 5-feet, 2-inches, where Manning's day ended after she failed to clear it on three attempts.

Still, she walked away from the event with a smile on her face and into hugs from family and coaches.

"I think I was nervous the whole hour-and-a-half bus ride it took to get here. As I stepped up to jump, I was like 'I gotta go first, man that's not fair,'" Manning said with a laugh. "I was a little nervous, but it wore off. I told myself you're just here to have fun doing what you love to do."

Officially Manning finished 24th after entering the state meet seeded 30th. She'll now move onto to compete for Indiana Wesleyan and begin her studies to become a veterinarian this fall.

"She brings it to practice everyday. She's always eager to learn and do her best and help her teammates out," said Eastbrook coach Stu Goble of Manning. "Thinking about both (senior boys state qualifier in the 110 hurdles) Hayden (Raikes) and Rachel the last couple of days, we're losing two really good athletes but we're losing two better people more than anything.

"That's what we'll miss the most out of them is just the people, the family, all that stuff that goes along with it," he continued. "Sure we'll miss the points, but just the conversations. We've had just as much fun being together with the kids these last two days as what we've had in the competition."

While Manning was one of the first athletes to start her competition, Ewer, her dad Jason Ewer and M-G track coach TJ Herniak arrived in time to watch the opening of field events 3 p.m. and just experience the ambiance of a state track meet.

The trio found a rare spot in the shade near the high jump and pole vault areas and spent a couple hours observing before Emma took the track for her 200 meter trial.

“It was a lot of fun to be around people. I’ve been to a lot of college meets and all of (the athletes) were older than me,” Ewer said. “I’m a people watcher so I enjoyed sitting around watching everything and watching people jump.”

Shortly before 6 p.m. Ewer took to the Giant Stadium track to run in the second of three heats in the 200-meter dash trials.

Her goal coming into Saturday was to reach the finish line in 26 seconds, which is the current record at Madison-Grant. A stiff head wind in the homestretch of race made that goal tough to reach.

Ewer finished in 26.53 seconds, short of her goal and reaching the finals, but her 17th-place finish was six spots higher than her seed position.

“I’m going to be honest, I don’t remember the race that much. It was the weirdest thing,” Ewer shared while surrounded by a large group of supporters after the race. “I just didn’t think half of it. I don’t know if it was all the experience and just trying to embrace everything at the wrong time when I was running, but it was so fun.

“The wind, I didn’t notice it until after the race. I was just kind of in that zone. They said it added three-tenths to everyone’s time,” she added. “I’ll definitely be ready next year. Excited to experience this and try to do it all over next again.”

Herniak sees Ewer’s state-meet experience as a reward for her dedication and determination she puts into her craft every day. It was also an important day to learn

and grown from as she continues to pursue the school record and more championships next season.

“I think the biggest experience for her comes on the track. She didn’t trail all year, today is the first time she’s finished behind people all season long,” Herniak said. “She’s led wire-to-wire every (200) race she’s won this year. It’s amazing to think, but you make it all the way to state meet before she ever trailed in a race. ... I think that experience will motivate her to be even better next year.”

Ewer’s season included 200-meter championships in the Madison County, Grant Four, Central Indiana Conference, Western Sectional and Goshen Regional.

“We take the wind out of it and she ran a 26.32, that would be a PR,” Herniak said. “I’m proud of her, proud of everything she’s accomplished this season. I don’t know if we’ve ever had an individual win a regional championship for as long as I remember.

“To be a sectional champ, a regional champ and come down here and finish 17th in the state, she’s been outstanding. She’s special kid and I’m excited I get to do it one more time with her next year.”