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OREGON GROWN, HERMISTON APPROVED

Prep track and field contemporaries come together as adults to build Dawgs' program

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON—The first time Emilee Strot met Mykael Bothum, they were competing against one another at the 2003 4A state track and field championships.

Strot was a junior and a powerhouse thrower from Gresham High School, while Bothum was a sophomore at Hermiston High School.

Strot won the state shot put and discus titles that year, and returned in 2004 to do the same. Bothum was on the state podium with Strot both years for the shot put, placing second in 2003 and eighth in 2004.

Fast forward 17 years, and two of the best throwers to come out of the Pacific Northwest in the past 20 years are coaching together at Hermiston High School, along with two other 2004 state champions.

Hermiston football coach David Faaeteete, competing for North Medford, won the 2004 4A state title in the discus (168-4) and was second in the shot put (57-9).

Pendleton's Sarajane Rosenberg, who won state titles in the triple jump in 2003-04, joined the Hermiston track program as a jumps coach in 2011.

"I don't know how we all landed in the same spot," said Strot, who is in her seventh year as head track coach at Hermiston. "The one cool thing about our staff is everyone has a passion for track and field, which is what I want. Coaches building relationships with kids. If my coaches love the sport, that translates to the kids coming out."

All of the high school accolades are great, but all four coaches went on to have stellar college careers at four different universities, and have brought their expertise to the Hermiston program.

"We know of each other's success, but we rarely talk about it," Strot said. "To be honest, we are a humble group of people. It's a pretty special group."

Hermiston Athletic Director Larry Usher said he takes no credit for the track and field coaching staff. Most of the pieces were already in place when he came in six years ago, but he is proud to have them coaching at the school.

"A lot of credit goes to Emilee for doing a good job recruiting," Usher said. "David came with football, and Mykael was a great great hire for the Hermiston School District. She helps out with volleyball and basketball, and is a great role model for our student athletes. Sarajane also is a great athletic role model for our kids."

Strot may know her stuff when it comes to track, but one of her greatest assets to the athletic programs at Hermiston comes in the weight room.

"How many schools do you know have the number of kids who buy into the weight room, and who have a strength and conditioning coach?" Usher asked. "That was a better hire than any coach we have brought in. Her girls lifting program is impressive. Emilee has the perfect combination of caring, but she pushes them to their maximum ability. You want to have someone who cares about kids, and they care about her as well."



Hermiston High School track and field coaches Sarajane Rosenberg Gutierrez, left, Emilee Strot, David Faaeteete and Mykael Bothum Mannucci pose for a photo at the high school on April 22, 2021.



Cal's Emilee Strot throws the javelin during a meet in 2005. Strot ranks second all-time in the event at Cal with a mark of 152-10. She held the school record from 2006-2018.

Hermiston will compete in the Mid-Columbia Conference championships on Thursday, May 6, at Richland High School.

The Bulldogs have the top boys discus thrower in Caden Hottman, and one of the best girls throwing teams in the conference, led by Bailey Young and Paige Palzinski — not to mention great jumpers, sprinters and distance runners.

"We have put together a pretty good team," Strot said. "Two years ago, we won one dual meet against Pasco. Now we are both 6-2. It will be interesting to see how we stack up against the conference."

As these four former high school standouts have come together to form a strong team, each brings something from their own background.

Emilee Strot

Strot comes from a track family. Her dad, Guy, started taking her to the state track meet when she was in the second grade. When it came time for her to compete, she did not disappoint.

Strot still holds the records at Gresham High School in the shot put (46-2¾) and discus (152-4). Her throw of 152-4 in the discus set a state record in 2004, breaking the

1990 mark of 149-9 set by Molly Duggan of Redmond. The record stood for several years.

After graduating from Gresham High School in 2004, Strot had a fair number of college offers, and she chose UC Berkeley, where she threw for the Cal Golden Bears, and still is one of the best to go through their program.

Strot holds the Cal freshman record in the discus at 177-11 (2006), and the javelin at 152-10 (2006).

The javelin mark also was the top throw in school history until it was surpassed by Chrissy Glasmann in 2018 with a mark of 164 feet.

She is second all-time in the discus with a toss of 181-4 (2007), and is seventh on the shot put list at 49-11¼.

In 2007, Strot placed second at the Pac-10 championships in the discus with a throw of 181-4. She also placed ninth in the shot put. At nationals that year, the Bears finished eighth in the team standings.

"That was a really big deal," Strot said of the national placing. "It doesn't feel that long ago."

After three years at Cal, Strot made the decision to leave the program, and wound up at Kentucky.



University of Oregon Athletics/Contributed Photo, File David Faaeteete was a three-year starter at defensive tackle for the University of Oregon.

"I really liked Jennifer Joyce, who was the Cal throws coach," Strot said. "She threw the hammer for Canada. Then she decided to leave and focus on her throwing for the Olympics. Track brought me to Cal, but I felt athletics was a huge part of who I was. The coach who tried to recruit me when he was at Kansas was now at Kentucky. I already knew him and it seemed like a good fit."

At Kentucky, Strot finished fifth at the SEC Indoor Championships in the shot put (50-3¼), and later placed second at the SEC Outdoor Championships in the discus with a throw of 173-2¼.

She ranks eighth all-time at Kentucky in the discus with a mark of 174-7 (2008), and in the shot put with a throw of 49-11¼.

After two years at Kentucky, she tried to do post-collegiate throwing but her body wasn't holding up.

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher, and I got accepted to Concordia University," Strot said. "(Olympic champion) Mac Wilkins was the throws coach and I got to be a grad assistant. That was cool."

After Strot got her teaching degree, she attended a job fair in Spokane, where she

met people from Hermiston. A job came up and she's been there ever since.

"My first year, I was a volunteer coach," Strot said. "There was no position for me. The next year, the head job became available and I applied. I had no idea what I was getting myself into."

David Faaeteete

Better known for his football playing days at the University of Oregon, Faaeteete also was a standout basketball player and track athlete at North Medford High School.

His senior year of high school he was the 4A Defensive Player of the Year, which reinforced Oregon's decision to give him a scholarship. He also was a first-team all-state guard.

Faaeteete went on to start three years at defensive tackle for the Ducks, and was invited to NFL camps by the Oakland Raiders and Chicago Bears. His pro career never took off, but his teaching and coaching careers did.

His former high school track and football coach, Mark Hodges, was at Hermiston when he asked if Faaeteete would like to teach and coach in Eastern Oregon.

Faaeteete, who teaches social studies, was an assis-

tant under Hodges from 2008 until he took the reins of the football program in 2015. He also worked with the track team upon his arrival in Hermiston.

At Oregon, Faaeteete tried his hand at track for a couple of years, but once he had to make the hard choice between football and track, football won out.

"I was more successful with the football side of things," he said. "I got to throw with the track team, but I competed unattached. I threw in four, five or six meets, but I always had football practice to go to. It was fun."

During his time with the Ducks, Faaeteete played in three bowl games, winning two.

Unlike his counterparts on the Hermiston coaching staff, he does not own his high school records in his signature events, but he does rank second with a discus throw of 175-6, and second with a mark of 57-9 in the shot put.

Faaeteete's relationship with Hermiston football goes back to his junior year in 2002 when North Medford lost a 16-13 game to the Bulldogs in the second round of the state playoffs.

His senior year, North Medford lost an 18-6 game to Tigard in the 4A state title game.

As a basketball player, Faaeteete played in the 4A state tournament as a senior. The Black Tornado lost to Jesuit in the first round.

Mykael Bothum Mannucci

Mannucci comes from a rodeo family, but the sport never took hold with her.

Instead, she played softball — from T-ball through her freshman year in high school. That included pitching lessons and ASA games as she got older. She was introduced to track during PE class her freshman year and she was hooked.

"I have no regrets," she said, "but my parents were upset with me."

She also played volleyball and basketball at Hermiston. She was on the basketball teams that went to state from 2003-05.

While there was never a state track title on Mannucci's list of achievements, there still were many things to celebrate.

She holds the Hermiston school record in the shot put at 44-10, and is third in the discus at 133-5.

It was at the University of Idaho that Mannucci found her groove.

She twice qualified for the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships (2009-10), and the Outdoor Championships in 2010.

In 2009, she finished seventh in the shot put (53-1½) at the NCAA Division I Indoor Track National Championships in College Station, Texas, earning All-American honors. She also was an All-American in 2010, placing sixth.

She competed in the Outdoor Track National Championships in 2010, placing 19th in the shot put.

She won the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) outdoor title in 2010 with a throw of 52-8¼, and threw a personal best 165-11¼ in the discus.

She also won the 2010 WAC indoor title with a mark of 56-5¼.

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