

The weather conditions Saturday felt like April 6, but to Glenbard West junior Madeline Perez, the Downers Grove South Invitational was more like late May.

She certainly ran like it in the 1,600-meter run, even though she confronted head-on the brutal wind that greeted her and other runners down the final straightaway of the track.

“I didn’t really want to sit back at all. I just kind of wanted to go from the gun and it worked out fine,” Perez said.

Perez not only dominated, but in spite of the conditions, she somehow ran an invite-record 4:59.95, just slightly slower than her 4:59.47 that earned an all-state eighth at the 2012 state meet May 19 at Eastern Illinois University.

Perez and senior Emma Reifel each contributed to two of the five event victories by the Hilltoppers, who finished second (100 points) to Glenbard North (145.66) in the eight-team field.

Lyons Township graduate Lisa Gordon set the invite’s 1,600 record last year in 5:00.33 before taking fourth at state.

“I totally came into this race not even thinking about the record. (But) I was thinking sub-5:00,” Perez said. “My main focus was trying to work on staying strong throughout the entire race because I knew conditions weren’t perfect. I just wanted to do the best I could with what I had, and I think it worked out well.”

Other event winners were Reifel (400 in 1:00.87), sophomore Emma Gambol (100 in 13.75), freshman Grace Rogers (3,200 in 11:36.15) and the 3,200

relay of Perez, sophomore Lisa Luczak, senior Kate Majewski and Reifel (10:26.64).

For Perez, Saturday was just the second time she's been part of the 3,200 relay this season since helping the Hilltoppers finish second at state in 2012 in a school-record 9:00.72.

Perez also dictated the pace for the 3,200 relay, giving the Hilltoppers the lead from the outset with a 2:22.4 split. Reifel, also back from the all-state relay lineup, anchored in 2:21.0 to complete a 32-second victory over LT.

"I only ran one 4-by-800 indoors, and it was just a little quad meet. It was fun to finally get back together," Perez said.

"I've run in wind like this only one time before that's very memorable to me (in placing second at the 2012 Nike Cross Nationals' Midwest Regional Nov. 11 in Terre Haute, Ind.). You've just got to take what you get and go with it. It was fine in the end."

Even the Hilltoppers' second-place performances were impressive. Luczak's second-place 5:12.03 in the 1,600 was under the 5:15.24 state-qualifying standard and near her 15th-place 5:05.24 at the 2012 state prelims.

After winning the 400 by the 2.81 seconds with an open personal-best, Reifel ran a 59.5 anchor split in the 1,600 relay, but she, sophomore Mary Nevins and freshmen Sharon Murray and Emma Winans (4:13.78) were edged by LT by only .14 (4:13.64).

"What really helped me (in the 400) was I was able to get out and almost focus on that first 200 meters and then just give it everything I had left into

the wind,” Reifel said.

“Obviously, I was a little bummed I didn’t get (LT 1,600 relay anchor Sarah Kreikemeier) at the end, but she’s a great runner. I’ve got to give props to our first three legs. Two of them are freshmen and one a sophomore. It was just fun to see them, from where I was, and Emma Winans just kick it that last 100 meters and really be right there with the LT girl.”

Perhaps it would have even felt more like May had sophomore Julia Sakach competed with the 3,200 relay Saturday. The other returning member from the all-state lineup ran an open 800 for her season debut at a junior varsity outdoor event April 3 after missing the cross country and indoor track seasons recovering from a torn labrum muscle in her hip that occurred during the summer.

Sakach initially was going to compete but reconsidered and scratched Saturday morning. Majewski, already entered for the 800, added Sakach’s spot for the relay and had a 2:34.8 split.

“I was really looking forward to running with Julia, but I’m more happy that she made the smart decision and thought long-term,” Perez said. “I really appreciate also that Kate Majewski stepped up. She had about an hour’s notice and she didn’t even question it. She’s just like, ‘All right, let’s go.’ ”

“(Sakach is) going to have a great season, but she was just feeling a little sore, hurting a little bit today. I’m glad I was able to help them out,” Majewski said.

Majewski has state experience from competing for the cross country team as a sophomore and senior. The Hilltoppers finished third Nov. 3 behind

Perez's individual state title and Luczak taking sixth.

"I was glad that I was able to run at state (cross country this season). It was really cool team bonding because everyone performed so well," Majewski said.

After missing most of last outdoor track season with health problems, Majewski hopes to continue running well and plans on walking on to compete at Texas Christian University. Majewski recently found out that LT senior Randie Speir, a four-time state cross country runner and member of Saturday's 3,200 relay, also plans to run at TCU.

"I'm not quite sure who she is, but I want to meet her sometime," Majewski said. "I just want to keep improving and just have fun also, but take advantage of senior year and enjoy it and work as hard as we have. I haven't had my big peak with track yet."

Gambol resolved a bad memory from 2012 when she won the 100 by .24. At last year's invite, Gambol ran the fastest 100 times in prelims but then was disqualified for a false start in the final.

"I was kind of surprised (to win) because there's a lot of fast girls here and I don't run the 100 very much," Gambol said. "This year, I'm happy that I won and I didn't mess up this time."

"I was kind of a little worried about (the false start) because I didn't want it to be a repeat. It's kind of a bad memory, but it's OK. In the prelims (last year), the starter shot the gun really early after he said set. It was really fast. I just learned to adjust and not too anxious and stay steady on set."

Gambol added to her long repertoire of events Saturday when she competed for the first time in the 300 low hurdles and was second in 50.86, already approaching the 46.94 state cut. Gambol also was second in the 200 (26.76) by .24 to Glenbard North junior Simone Carr and sixth in the discus (79 feet-10 1/2 inches).

“I threw (discus) a little bit toward the end of (last) season. I think I would have done better if I would have gotten my spins (in bounds), but I was still happy that I placed and scored a (team) point for Glenbard West. It’s fun,” Gambol said.

“It was my first time running (the 300 hurdles) so I thought I did a pretty good job, especially with the wind. I was shooting for under 50 seconds. I stumbled midway down the straightaway, but I thought that I recovered from that pretty well. I think I’m starting to get the hang of it and hopefully I do better next time.”

Rogers was the only freshman in the varsity 3,200, but she ran smart, won by 9.4 seconds and was fewer than four seconds from her 11:32.49 personal best. The victory was especially sweet because she was disappointed with her final indoor race (11:53.93) at the Top Times Indoor Classic March 23.

“It felt really good to get back up there. I feel like I had to make up for (that race),” Rogers said. “It was kind of hard with the wind, but I’m happy with how I did. I ran behind two other girls, which kind of helped to block the wind. I had a lap and a half to go and then I passed them. It wasn’t a PR but I’m happy with it considering (the conditions).”

Senior Cynthia Mote was third in the 300 hurdles (52.15). Senior Grace Walker had the team’s other field-event points by sharing fourth in high

jump (4-10).

The 800 relay (Winans, Nevins, Walker, JaSharra Clark in 1:52.11) was fourth, and the 400 relay (freshman Jessica Michel, Walker, Tricia Briones, Clark in 54.34) was fifth. Erin Spiech was fifth in the 100 hurdles (14.47).

On the sophomore level, the Hilltoppers were third (77 points) to undefeated LT (161.75) and Hinsdale Central (110.75), whose only two defeats are to LT.

The Hilltoppers received victories from the 3,200 relay (freshmen Caitlyn Reick, Abby Moody, Maddy Burt, Christina Sedall in 10:26.64) and freshman Katie Goleash in just her second time competing in discus (76-2). Because of construction issues at Downers South, the discus and shot put competition was held Friday at Downers Grove North.

The 800 relay of freshman Ellen Daniels, sophomore Jessica Johanson, freshman Amani Bader and sophomore Hannah Paterakis (1:57.96) was second to LT by just .11.

The 3,200 relay won by 5.61 seconds over Hinsdale Central but would have placed third in the varsity race. Reick put the Hilltoppers in charge with a 2:28.6 opening leg, followed by Moody (2:41.2), Burt (2:42.9) and Sedall (2:33.9).

“My competition at the beginning was really tough. I’m like, ‘Oh gosh, they’re right on me,’ and then I just kind of felt good and kept kind of going with it,” Reick said. “I’m so used to running with Grace (Rogers) and everyone else that it’s easy to have them there cheering me on.”

The competition must have helped. Even as a frontrunner, Reick managed to basically equal her best 3,200 relay split from indoors. She followed in the open 800 with a second-place 2:32.98.

“The wind was mostly hard on the second lap (of the relay). The last lap, just the last 100 meters, that’s when it kind of really pushed you,” Reick said. “I was just hoping for maybe 2:27 or 2:26. That was my goal. With the wind and everything, I can’t really control it. It was tough, but I had a lot of fun.”

While Reick and Sedall are becoming mainstays with the 3,200 relay, Moody enjoyed the opportunity to rejoin the lineup.

“I’m glad to be a part of the team. I like the 4-by-800 a lot. The 800 is my favorite (event),” said Moody, who joined the Hilltoppers a couple of weeks through indoor season after being on the dance team.

“I did (track) in middle school (at Hadley) but this is the first year I’m really serious about it. The first meet was really fun, getting to know all of the girls and getting closer with them has been really fun.”

The Hilltoppers had six third-place finishes – Abby Shaver (3,200 in 12:21.67), Morgan McEnroe (400 in 1:09.40), Paterakis (100 in 14.67), Sedall (1,600 in 5:40.76), the 1,600 relay (Daniels, Johanson, Nicole Rogus, McEnroe in 4:33.79) and the 400 relay (Johanson, Bader, Rachel Aubrey, Paterakis in 56.52). Bekah Dau was fifth in shot (25-5) and sixth in discus (59-4 1/2), and Nicole Berneche (3,200 in 13:11.86) and Bader (200 in 30.64) were sixth.