

Glenbard West junior and lifelong Glen Ellyn resident Mary Ladesic never had seen Lake Ellyn flooded as badly as April 18 after an evening of continual heavy rains.

The water crested so much that even covered the track and football field at nearby Duchon Field were engulfed.

The Glenbard West girls track team's annual home Sue Pariseau Invitational, scheduled for April 20, was in serious jeopardy.

"There's no way we could have had it at West because of the damage," Ladesic said. "A lot of houses are buildings are totally flooded. There was one other time that it was pretty bad, but I think this is tied for the worst we've ever had."

While Duchon Field recovered, the Hilltoppers thrived.

On the day of the invite, Ladesic was among team members fulfilling her role of helping athletes report in. The Glenbard West girls track program and family managed to move the event to Benedictine University in Lisle.

The 14-team event not only continued under a pretty similar time schedule but actually ran swimmingly.

"It was a proud, proud day for the girls. They have an athletic staff that believes in them and thought this was worth it," Glenbard West girls track head coach Kelly Hass said. "They clearly believe in them and they clearly believe in this sport because they were just awesome in helping to run the meet. If I had asked for anything, it was done.

"Honest to God, it was a credit to everyone. Part of my problem in getting this all organized was the number of people that kept e-mailing and texting me, wanting to help. I spent a lot of time telling people, 'Thanks. We've got it.' The outpouring of help was awesome."

The Internet photograph going around of Duchon Field underwater was enough to scare the staunchest of track fans. Hass recalled that eight or nine years ago, the Pariseau Invite nearly succumbed to snow, but they decided to run the meet as usual while other invites were cancelled that day. The decision prompted a flood of interest from teams wanting to join the invite the following year.

Hass said that the thought of canceling the invite this time never arose.

“Not going to happen,” Hass said. “Well (at first), we laughed a lot, like, ‘Are you kidding?’ because it was so unreal. (But) people believed in us and they were counting on us to run this meet.

“Coaches want to run. Kids want to run. They know we’ll find a way to do it no matter what. That’s a great challenge to have. That was our challenge.”

With hard work and a little luck, everything worked out better than could possibly be hoped or expected. Glenbard West athletic director Joe Kain began calling “everybody he knew,” including college facilities.

Hass said Benedictine University, a top-flight facility, had been rented for that Saturday for a lacrosse tournament, but the reservation had been cancelled a couple of weeks earlier.

“We lucked out,” Hass said. “I had two or three other places maybe on the hook. Nobody really wanted to do it, but they would have, so this just worked out better. It’s a top, gorgeous facility, nine lanes, fast. The times were great.”

Glenbard West won the varsity title for the third year in a row. Junior Madeline Perez took advantage of her first time competing at Benedictine. She won the 1,600 in a state-best 4:54.40 fully-automatic time, breaking her 4:59.04 outdoor school record from 2012 and the 4:58.6 manual-time invite record from 2007 by Bloomington’s Ashley Verplank.

“It was nice. I wouldn’t mind coming back here,” Perez said. “We still had a great showing of fans out there. We knew what we needed to do. It’s such a special invite for us.

“It was unfortunate that it was a home meet away from home, but either way I’m just happy we were able to get this venue and get the meet in so I’m pretty excited about it. We couldn’t have had a worse circumstance, really, and no one really let it bother them. I think it’s just pretty awesome how it all got pulled together. We’re so appreciative of everyone who was able to make this happen.”

Not much really was different. Pariseau, the longtime Glenbard West girls track and cross country coach, made her usual appearance. The long jump, triple jump and pole vault, which are competed on the infield of Duchon Field, were conducted along the outside of the Benedictine track. High jump remained on the infield, and shot put and discus were held in an area just south of the track.

“Everyone’s been doing the same jobs. I feel like we really came together to put it all together,” said junior Meg Maloney, another team member helping competitors check in. “Besides a different location, it was a little difficult to set up, but other than that, we all came together and it was working out really nicely.”

The Hilltoppers were under additional pressure because there was neither school nor practice April 20. Ladesic said the athletes found out that night on a Facebook page that the meet still was going to be held but now at Benedictine.

“We were all hoping we were going to find a solution because we didn’t want to have to cancel the meet,” Ladesic said.

“We had a big meeting and Miss Hass talked about the importance of this meet, not only as a fundraiser but Sue P. is the lady that started the track program at West like 30 years ago so it’s in honor of her,” Maloney said.

“Not only do we want to perform well because she’s here but we want to perform well for the other schools.”

The Hilltoppers also performed well after the meet.

Senior captains Leah Landry, Cynthia Mote, Emma Reifel and Grace Walker had organized and practiced a Glenbard West flashmob group dance just after the final event. Even with the venue switch, that went off as planned with other teams and opposing athletes joining in to Gwen Stefani’s “Hollaback Girl.”

“We’re like, ‘Oh no, we have our dance all figured out. Are we still going to be able to have it (at Benedictine)?’ But Miss Hass said, ‘Don’t worry. We’ll get it done,’ ” Reifel said.

“I was worried, especially the seniors. Sue P. is such a fun meet. Even though it wasn’t at our home track, it still felt like a home meet just because we had all of our girls working. There are so many familiar faces. A lot of my friends actually came to watch so that made it really fun.”