

Glenbard West senior Emma Reifel decided to keep her college track plans in the Big 10 Conference family.

Reifel signed her letter of intent March 14 to compete in NCAA Division I track and cross country for the University of Wisconsin (Madison) on a partial scholarship with incentives based on time performances.

Reifel's parents and older sister both attended the University of Indiana. Her other sister attended Michigan State University.

"My family's been Big 10. It's just kind of fun to stay in the Big 10 so I'm excited about that," Reifel said.

"I felt like when I went up to my visit there, I just clicked with the team. I just like the style of training and everything. I had such a good visit, I could really see myself there."

Reifel made her official visit to Wisconsin in late September and had other official visits to Indiana and Butler University. She said she also considered visiting the University of Texas but then reconsidered because of the traveling distance. The only non-Division I program she seriously considered was Division III power Emory University in Atlanta.

"Kind of since that visit (to Wisconsin), all of my other visits have been great, but I think I just kind of was almost comparing them to Wisconsin. Once I got accepted to Wisconsin, I just kind of knew that's kind of where I wanted to end up," Reifel said.

"Since I've been little, I used to run with my mom. It's always kind of been a dream of mine, so when I had the opportunity to run D-1, that's really what I

wanted to do, just to see how far I could push myself.”

In track, Reifel finished with six career all-state medals for top-nine performances, the second highest total in Glenbard West history to 2011 graduate Kathryn Pickett’s seven.

This year, Reifel earned her first medal in an individual event as she finished third at the Class 3A state finals in the 800-meter run in a school-record 2:12.19 fully-automatic time, finally breaking the long-sought school-record of 2:13.57 set by senior Jenny Korrison for third at the 2000 Class AA state finals. Korrison went on to run at NCAA Division I Miami University (Oxford, Ohio).

Reifel also was part of the seventh-place 1,600 relay that clinched third place for the Hilltoppers (31 points), earning the first girls track team trophy in school history.

As a sophomore, Reifel was part of the sixth-place 3,200 relay, seventh-place 800 relay and ninth-place 1,600 relay. The Hilltoppers earned all-state honors in all four relays at one state meet for the only time in their history.

Last year, Reifel was part of the 3,200 relay that ran the second-fastest time ever in the history of the state finals (9:00.72) but had to settle for second to Wheaton Warrenville South’s record-setting 8:59.03. New Trier dominated this year’s state finals and won in 9:04.86, the fourth fastest time ever.

“Quite honestly, we went into thinking if we could maybe get a 9:03, that would be awesome,” Reifel said. “Obviously, when you finish second, we were disappointed. You have that little bit that tears your heart a little bit because you’ve been working for it, but I think a few weeks later you look at it and you’re just like, ‘What we did was really incredible.’ And props to

Wheaton South because they also ran so well.”

In cross country, Reifel has been part of the Hilltoppers’ last three consecutive state-qualifying teams. This past season, Glenbard West finished third in 3A for its first team trophy since 1981.

Besides her mother, who continues to run recreationally, Reifel said she receives help from her aunt, Ellen (Burns) Reifel, who ran at Division I Boston College and West Suburban Conference Silver Division rival Lyons Township and lives in Glen Ellyn. She was among the many friends and family in the Glenbard West athletic office when Reifel signed her letter of intent.

“She’s been a great mentor to me, just all throughout since I’ve been in sixth grade. She’s been to a lot of my state meets, cheering me on so it’s been really great,” Reifel said.

Reifel is among three key Illinois recruits this year with the Badgers.

Brenna Detra of Peoria Richwoods won the 3A 300 low hurdles (42.76) and was fourth in the 100 high hurdles (14.63). She also won the 2A title in the 300 hurdles in 2011 (43.10).

Oswego’s Kelsey Hjorth was seventh in the Class 3A 1,600 (5:03.11) after taking ninth as a junior and seventh in the 3,200 as a junior and sophomore. She also was a two-time 3A all-stater in cross country, taking 24th in 2012 and 13th in 2011.

Jim Stintzi is the head coach for Wisconsin women’s track and women’s cross country. He arrived in 2004 after coaching at Michigan State.

“He kind of said ultimately I’d be doing more the mile, 1,500s just because coming from cross country, (Glenbard West girls cross country head coach Paul Hass) has really built us a great base,” Reifel said. “The 800 may be my shortest (race), maybe a 4-by-400 here or there. I love the 4-by-400 so it would be nice to continue that.

“Looking at it right now, it’s hard (to list goals), but I think what I just really want to make sure is I’m improving at a consistent rate. Really staying injury free is important to me because I don’t want to overdo my body going into college.”

Reifel said she will major in kinesiology or business. During a career interest day in fifth grade, she was introduced to physical therapy and became interested in prosthetics. When Reifel shadowed a prosthetist, he suggested considering a business background as part of her education.

“I don’t know the exact route, but ultimately I’d like to do something where I’m not necessarily with building the prosthetic devices but that I was working with the patients and kind of fitting them,” Reifel said.