

Glenbard West senior Emma Reifel had just concluded the Sue Pariseau Invitational Saturday by winning her third event with the 1,600-meter relay, yet there still was work to be done on the track.

One of four senior captains, Reifel was among those in the front of the team's flash mob stretched along the middle of the final straightaway. The Hilltoppers danced to Gwen Stefani's 'Hollaback Girl' just as they had practiced the previous few days with scattered members from other teams joining in the groove.

"I think our team's really close and the bonding of it was so much fun," Reifel said. "The coaches have been great. They kind of let us stick around after practice a little bit and make sure we had it all put together, especially (head coach Kelly Hass) because we tried to keep it a secret from some of the coaches, but I think they all found out."

The Hilltoppers' practices obviously have been productive in other ways as well. For the third year in a row, they won their own invite, which had to be relocated to Benedictine University in Lisle, with two victories the state's top reported performances in those events this season.

Reifel anchored the 3,200 relay with freshman Caitlyn Reick, junior Madeline Perez and senior Kate Majewski that won in a state-best 9:28.62 and led off the winning 1,600 relay with sophomore Mary Nevins, freshman Emma Winans and sophomore Emma Gambol in 4:03.19, which ranks No. 5 statewide. Reifel also won the 800 in an outdoor season-best 2:17.78 that ranks No. 3 in the state.

Perez won the 1,600 in a state-best 4:54.40, breaking her 4:59.04 outdoor school record from 2012 and the 4:58.6 invite record from 2007 by

Bloomington's Ashley Verplank.

Reifel and Perez have contributed to the varsity's past three Pariseau Invite titles.

"As a team, you just go out there, you kind of want to defend your own invite so it's always a good attitude towards it," Reifel said. "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 with the hurdles, getting times. There are so many familiar faces. A lot of my friends actually came to watch so that made it really fun."

Even after Wednesday's heavy rains caused Lake Ellyn to overflow and flood nearby Duchon Field, there seemed to be no doubt that the invite would go on as scheduled. Hass said Benedictine became the best option after another event that booked the stadium canceled just a couple of weeks ago.

"It was a proud, proud day for the girls. They have an athletic staff that believes in them and thought this was worth it," Hass said.

"Honest to God, it was a credit to everybody. 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."

Had the meet been canceled, there also wouldn't have been the flash mob that captains Reifel, Leah Landry, Cynthia Mote and Grace Walker envisioned after the team's talent show and movie night April 6.

They created a simple dance Tuesday, taught it to their teammates the next

day and then reviewed it around altered practices Thursday and Friday. The final hurdle was pulling it off at Benedictine.

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

“We thought it was going to be canceled. I was so upset,” Landry added. “But it almost worked out better. Our sound system isn’t all that (great for Duchon Field).”

The Hilltoppers’ track performances complemented the effort behind the scenes. They won the 3,200 relay by 11.73 seconds and the 1,600 relay by 4.27 seconds, both over Whitney Young.

Perez won the 1,600 by 14.45 seconds.

“We couldn’t have had worse circumstances really, and no one really let it bother them,” Perez said. “I think it’s just pretty awesome how it all got pulled together and we’re so appreciative of everyone who was able to make this happen.”

The Hilltoppers took advantage to test their best relay lineups at this point before re-evaluating their individual options heading into the postseason. The 3,200 relay easily surpassed Downers Grove North’s winning time of 9:37.23 April 12 at its Ritter Invite, where the Hilltoppers were fourth in 9:51.87 with Reifel and Reick also part of that lineup.

On Saturday, Reifel got the baton with a slight lead but then burst to a comfortable lead that she nearly paid for. She more than managed to hang

on with a 2:16.5 split.

“I took it out too fast. I went out in like a 29 (seconds for the first 200),” Reifel said. “I was just feeling a little not great before the 800.”

After a bit of tension in the 800, Reifel still managed to prevail again. Reifel won by 1.84 seconds after statuesque Whitney Young senior Shianne Baggett was riding her shoulder until Reifel made her move with 250 meters left. Reick was eighth (2:27.18).

“(Baggett is) someone with those long legs. She’s got a great kick at the end so I wanted to try and kick a little sooner than I usually do,” Reifel said. “I didn’t want to have it come down to the last 100 meters with her.”

Gambol took care of matters in the 1,600 relay after another solid day individually where she was second in the 300 low hurdles (46.29) and 100 (13.14) and third in triple jump (33-8 1/2).

The 1,600 relay ran under the 4:04.29 state-qualifying standard for the first time outdoors this season. Like Reifel in the 3,200 relay, Gambol got the baton for the anchor leg with a slight lead and immediately zipped into a sizeable margin by the first 125 meters.

“I was over there (by the second curve) and Mrs. Hass was like, ‘You can get out harder. Come on, speed up.’ I was like, ‘OK,’ ” Gambol said. “I actually felt good coming out of the curve so I guess in that case it was good.”

Reifel put the Hilltoppers in front at the outset. Winans may have had the most important leg, keeping the lead with a Whitney Young runner pressing her down the final straightaway before the handoff to Gambol.

“I saw her out of my peripheral vision. I turned and I was like, ‘She’s right behind me,’ ” Winans said. “I was like, ‘Boom. I’ve got to go.’ I just ran as fast as I could and I looked back a little bit and she was nowhere near me.”

“I love watching her run because she just has such a little fire to her,” Reifel said of Winans. “She has honestly been so fun to watch. She gets really nervous, but she is such a strong, hard worker and just comes out there and gives it everything she has.”

Perez also is an ultimate competitor, no matter the situation. On Saturday, she once again posted a phenomenal time in the 1,600, even though she quickly had the race in hand with some help from warmer and less windy conditions.

“It was really nice, hardly any wind, especially compared to what we’ve had in the past,” Perez said.

Perez broke her outdoor school record that won last year’s conference meet after missing it with a 4:59.95 at the brutally cold and windy Downers South Invite. Sandburg junior Carly Krull (5:08.85) finished a distant second but also had earlier taken second in the 3,200 (10:41.65).

By just .80, Perez missed her all-time school record of 4:53.60 set indoors March 23 in winning the Top Times Indoor Classic in Bloomington.

“It’s a second shy of my overall PR so it was really close and I’m a little bit kicking myself that I didn’t get it, but for the most part, I’m pretty happy,” Perez said.

“I kind of lost myself a little bit in that third lap (of four). That definitely was my weakest. But you just kind of have to stay focused. It’s such a short race.

I just took it one straightaway and one curve at a time, and there's people at every corner shouting at me, which helps keep me focused."

York competed at the invite but senior standout Emma Fisher, who beat Perez by .03 in the 1,600 at the Downers Grove North Invite (5:02.23 to 5:02.26), instead ran the 3,200.

Fisher's winning 10:30.80 broke the invite record of 10:44.5 set in 1996 by former Glenbard West standout Nell Shields, as well as Krull's second-place 10:41.65. Hinsdale Central senior Jill Hardies, an all-state fifth in the 1,600 at state last year, was entered but then scratched.

Perez still owns the state's fastest 3,200 this season, winning the Downers North Invite in an all-time school fastest 10:27.30.

"I love the more competition, the better. They're going to give it their all so you've got to give yours," Perez said. "There were other great girls in the race so you've got to give them credit as well."

In the 3,200 relay, Perez also showed some fight from a trailing position. She ran a season-best 2:17.5 split on the second leg to bring the Hilltoppers back from seventh to the front by the time she handed off to Majewski.

"That really set the tone for our race, I'd say. It's calming," Reifel said.

"I kind of liked it because it kept me really focused. I knew what I needed to do for my team to get ahead," Perez said. "I was just happy to take it and try and catch as many girls as I could, and I just had such a great team behind me that it just made it so much easier. When you know you've got those girls looking for you to run your best, it makes it 10 times easier."

Gambol gradually is finding her first year of running the 300 hurdles becoming easier. Gambol also was second to Wheeling senior standout Sydney Keith in the 100 (12.83 to 13.14) and 5 3/4 inches from first place in triple jump.

Although she was edged Saturday by OPRF junior Amari Wilkerson (46.19 to 46.29), Gambol ran under the 300 hurdles' 46.94 state-qualifying standard for the first time.

"I'm still trying to get a hang of the race, just get a feel for it," Gambol said. "It was a little disappointing because I feel like I could have gotten her. It was just hard because every time I was about to make a move, there was a hurdle right there."

Sophomore Lisa Luczak ran the distance double for the second invite in a row with better but still mixed results. She was fourth in the 3,200 (10:55.61) and then third in the 1,600 (5:14.55) after times of 11:00.77 and 5:19.12 at the Downers North Invite.

Freshman Grace Rogers was sixth in the 3,200 in a personal-best 11:19.65.

"The 3,200 still was a little disappointing because I went out too fast again, and I guess I just need to learn," Luczak said. "At the end, you feel dead and you're like, 'Oh my gosh. I just want this to end,' since when you go out too fast it's terrible.

"After the 3,200, I was like, 'I can't let the 1,600 happen and be like last week. I can't do the same things over again or else I'm never going to improve.' I'm like, 'I only have one race left. I'm going to give it my all. I don't want to have a crummy weekend because of this.' "

The Hilltoppers' sprint relay also showed significant improvements. The 800 relay of junior JaSharra Clark, freshman Jessica Michel, Winans and Nevins was third (1:49.17) and the 400 relay of Clark, Winans, senior Tricia Briones and Nevins was eighth (52.91) – both with season-best times.

“On varsity, we could not buy points in the sprint relays indoors. I was ready to bribe people. And we scored here,” Hass said.

The 800 relay beat its season-best manual time of 1:49.6 established just four days earlier at Duchon in the Hilltoppers' home triangular with Winans, Clark, Nevins and Gambol.

“It just feels so nice to have another relay team that we can really count on to be strong and everything,” Nevins said. “It’s nice to get it going because we’ve been trying to fit good people together for the 4-by-200. We’ve always had (to say), ‘Someone has another race so we can’t have her,’ and all of that.”

Senior Nina Fraticola, who finished seventh in discus (86-9), was coming off her best throwing day ever Tuesday. Fraticola had a lifetime-best 94-3 in discus and season-best 30-6 1/2 in shot.

“Really, at practice it was a lot more hard work and focusing on certain things and technique-wise, and as soon as the meet came, the weather was good and it just went on from there,” Fraticola said.

“Discus has been going really well for me the past couple of weeks, which is surprising. The past couple of years I’ve struggled with disc and I am finally getting the hang of it my last year.”



Another surprise in field events has been Michel, who initially was promoted to varsity simply as a sprinter. After dabbling with long jump at St. Petronille, Michel has been discovered to be pretty good at it.

In her second time competing for the Hilltoppers at the Downers North Invite, she jumped an outdoor team-best 15-0 1/2 while junior Madelyn O’Gorman went 15-0. Michel was ninth Saturday (14-11), one inch from seventh and two from sixth.

“(Hass) had me try it at one of our meets, and then I tried it and so she keeps putting me in it,” Michel said. “I haven’t really practiced much because it’s been raining and the track is flooded. It’s fun. I like it a lot. I’ve only had to leave long jump to go to the 4-by-100, but it’s been fine (doing both events).”