

As the Glenbard West girls track team opened its indoor season Saturday, Feb. 15, junior Julia Sakach dramatically won her first race in the 800-meter run by just .3 of a second.

Actually, just making it to the starting line felt like a victory.

Sakach was a 2012 all-stater with the 3,200 relay as a freshman but was injured for her sophomore year. This also was her first race back since undergoing hip surgery in August.

"It's so much fun to be able to run for West and come back," Sakach said. "(The race) was really close. There was a lot of good competition so it was really nice to be able to run with such great girls for the first one back. (My hip) has its days, but it's overall really, really good."

The Hilltoppers had plenty of success as they scored 64.5 points to edge Downers Grove North (60 points) and Glenbard East (31.5).

Other event winners were sophomore Lindsay Graham (3,200 in 11:06.7), juniors Lisa Luczak (1,600 in 5:27.5) and Emma Gambol (33 feet-10 1/2 inches) and the 4-lap relay of sophomores Jessica Michel and Emma Winans, junior Mary Nevins and Gambol in 1:29.0.

Graham, Luczak, senior Madeline Perez and junior Megan Ozog were varsity competitors Saturday who helped the Hilltoppers win their first cross country team state title Nov. 9 in Class 3A. Last May, Glenbard West captured its first team state trophy in track with a third-place 3A finish.

Perez is the defending state champion in the 3,200 and 1,600. On Saturday, Perez, Ozog, junior Hannah Arduino and Luczak were second in the 3,200 relay (10:40.4) to an impressive 10:12.2 by Downers North. Perez ran a team-best 2:23.9 leadoff leg in her only race.

"It's amazing just to be back out here (competing)," Luczak said. "Cross country and track, they're similar in a way but they're totally different. Just feeling the speed of the small (160-meter) track, it just feels so great. It's nice to be back with the girls and training again. I think everyone's just

pretty excited to see how good we can do, especially after cross country, when we did so well."

At the 2012 3A state track meet, Sakach joined Perez and graduated Emma Reifel and Maddie Nagle in finishing second at state in a school-record 9:00.72.

Since then, Sakach has been fighting injury, but hopefully her surgery will put that in the past. Sakach was discovered to have a bone impingement in her femur and the misshapen head was causing a tear in labrum. Her femur was rounded to its correct shape and her labrum was re-attached to the hip with little posts that are permanent.

While Sakach is training conservatively, she is doing so consistently to keep herself competitive.

"(I want to) just kind of stay healthy, which is my main goal, to be able to keep running," Sakach said.

"(My training has) been more modified. I find myself biking long-run days and then I'll run the workouts, just to kind of play it safe. I'm not really there yet (to talk about state). I'm just more focused on kind of (staying healthy) right now."

Graham also has a healthier outlook after she battled through the final month of the cross country season with sore knees. Graham still managed to earn an all-state 17th as the team's No. 3 finisher after taking 20th in 2012 while still competing for Glenbard East.

"I felt good (today). The best thing is my legs didn't feel tired because I don't like when that happens. I think I'm at a good starting point," Graham said. "I'm being very careful so it doesn't come back but it hasn't stopped me since I took time off after state. My knees haven't hurt."

At the 2013 state track meet, Graham was an all-state fifth in the 3,200 (10:42.42) before moving and transferring to Glenbard West this season.

This 3,200 already is well under the state-qualifying standard, and that was with her more than two minutes ahead of the rest of the field and after mostly non-running training in the offseason. Graham also provided a team-best 1:04.2 split on the second leg for the second-place 1,600 relay (4:28.1) with Nevins, junior Jessica Johanson and Winans.

"I ran (the 1,600 relay at Glenbard East) quite a bit. It was good to get some speed work in, though. It makes me nervous but I don't mind it," Graham said.

"This winter I didn't run much. I cross-trained a ton and I think that actually helped. I do pretty much everything (biking, elliptical, swimming) because I get bored if I keep doing one thing. As long as you're working hard, you can keep fit on the other machines."

Luczak also has had a history of injuries. She strained her hamstring in late December after an all-state ninth for the cross country team.

"Of course, that's frustrating, but I just started running a little bit this week so this race I was going to pull out of it since I wasn't feeling so good beforehand," Luczak said.

Luczak almost didn't even run the 1,600 after she had a 2:38.5 as the anchor leg for the 3,200 relay.

"She said she ran around the weight room (warming up) and said she didn't feel right," Glenbard West distance coach Paul Hass said. "I said, 'Try the treadmill, see how you feel.' She ran on the treadmill and she was now going to run. She felt good."

"I was like, 'You know. I'm just going to run it,' " Luczak said. "When you're running, you're just so excited that the pain goes away. Of course, my time isn't as good as I feel it could have been if I wasn't injured. I'm happy I ran and I was happy with how I did."

Second-place individuals were Dee Dee Burns (29-1 in shot put), JaSharra Clark (400 in 1:05.2), Erin Spiech (50 hurdles in 9.5), Jessica Michel (50 in

7.1) and Emma Gambol (200 in 28.7), who was picked second in a virtual tie for the title.

Isabella Salafatinos (29.2) and Michel (29.5) were third and fourth in the 200. Colleen Luczak (14:04.2) and Amanda Ortiz (11:06.7) were third and fourth in the 3,200.

Morgan McEnroe (300 in 50.3), Ashley Schleck (26-6 in shot), Ozog (800 in 2:35.6) and Nevins (15-2 1/2 in long jump) also were third. Grace Lupo and Madelyn O’Gorman were fourth and fifth in high jump, both clearing 5-8. Johanson (25-5 1/2 in triple jump), Deena Harnboonzong (50 hurdles in 10.5), McEnroe (40 in 1:12.5), Michel (200 in 29.5) and the 4-lap B relay (Johanson, Chloe Powell, O’Gorman, Kayla Findley in 1:39.7) were fourth, and Salafatinos (50 in 7.3) tied for fourth.

Frosh-soph level

Glenbard West sophomore Nicole Rogus started this indoor track season running the 300-meter dash for the first time Saturday, Feb. 15.

Rogus won the race in 46.7 seconds, but she didn't have much time to enjoy it.

"I ended up blacking out. It was emotional," Rogus said.

"Right after I finished, I kind of was out but I was just like, 'That's because it was a mid-distance run after I do (1,600 relays) I'm always exhausted.' I was walking off and my dad was there to congratulate me and I saw spots. I just had to sit down and I blacked out."

Rogus soon recovered, and she was able to return to the team area and enjoy the rest of the Hilltoppers' success. They won the meet by edging Downers Grove North 60-56 with Glenbard East scoring 31 points.

Other event winners were Caitlyn Reick (800 in 2:39.5), Anna Gambol (27-5 in shot put) and the uncontested 4-lap relay (Sophie Cvengros, Emily Asselmeier, Claire Ficarella, Stephanie Perez in 1:38.2).

"I'm hydrated. I had enough water and everything," Rogus said. "I just needed more fruit in my breakfast, I guess. I had four waffles and they were like, 'Yeah, throw in an apple.' "

The Hilltoppers went 1-2 in the 300 with Rogus and Sharon Murray (47.9), the 800 with Reick and Kathryn Kenwood (2:40.9) and shot with Gambol and Bekah Dau (24-5).

Last year, Rogus mostly ran the 1,600 relay as well as the 100 and 200. She needed all of the energy she could muster to survive her first 300.

"I went full out the entire time and obviously you can't do that the whole time. That last half lap, that last turn, I was exhausted and my muscles just tightened up," Rogus said. "I didn't really know what to do so I just

kind of went out the whole time and I think that also is why I felt so bad because I didn't pace myself well enough."

Two factors in Rogus' favor this season are experience and better endurance. This past fall, she ran cross country for the first time.

"I did cross country to help with my (1,600 relays)," Rogus said. "After last year when I finished, I felt terrible. Now, since I was able to run three miles, running the (1,600 relay) doesn't seem that bad. I'm more comfortable with mid-distance than I was and I think it helped me with my strides and stuff. And it kept me in shape."

Rogus also was supposed to run the 1,600 relay Saturday, but she was taken out, just to be safe. Reick, who thought her day was over after running two 800s, willingly took Rogus' place.

"I was kind of tired by the time I got to the (1,600 relay), but I was really excited. It was kind of unexpected, kind of expected because (Paul Hass) told me just to be prepared," Reick said.

"I was planning on doing the (1,600 relay), but right before we went, I was like, 'You know what? I think it's best if I don't do it,' " Rogus said. "The team was so supportive. They told me I was amazing no matter what I did and Caitlyn Reick was amazing. She just jumped right in. She did the (3,200 relay) and the 800 so to do the (1,600 relay) after that, that was amazing."

Kenwood, Reick, Alexa Fausey and Kate Dorsey (4:43.7) finished second to Downers North (4:39.9) with Reick running a team-best 1:08.9 split on the second leg. The Hilltoppers' B lineup of Jenna Kelly, Charlotte Graham, Annie Pasterz and Nicole Berneche (11:43.1) and C lineup of Grace Zemenak, Rebekah Crail, Lisette Gonzalez and Katie Bassett (12:22.4) were fourth and fifth.

Reick's three-event slate was reminiscent of 2014 graduate Emma Reifel, now at Wisconsin, who was third in the 800 at the 2013 state meet.

"I was talking to Emma Reifel over the phone because she does that a lot so she was just telling me what to expect. She definitely boosted my confidence," Reick said.

The overall performance was a boost for Reick after she spent most of the cross country season battling anemia. She still earned a spot as one of the five alternates for the cross country postseason lineup.

Reick has altered her diet and taken medication to improve her iron levels.

"I just got it checked and all of the levels were really high. I'm just kind of trying to get back into shape but everything's going pretty good," Reick said.

"I'm still kind of dusting off, just trying to get ready, get in kind of good shape. I'm feeling pretty good so far. I'm still kind of slow right now just because I'm not used to doing events yet, but I'm definitely feeling way better."

Maddy Burt (50 hurdles in 9.7) and Asselmeier (50 in 7.2) were second by .1. Meredith Miscinski was second in the 3,200 (14:28.1) with Sarah Cholewinski (14:42) and Macy Lemke (14:47.6) were third and fourth.

Sophie Cvangros (30.5) and Asselmeier (31.6) were third and fourth in the 200, Kate Dillman (24-2) and Claire Ficarella (23-11) were third and fourth in the triple jump and Dorsey (5:50.6) and Burt (6:01.7) were third and fifth in the 1,600. Murray was third in long jump (12-10) and Melina Thurmond was fourth in shot (23-6).

-- by Bill Stone