

Glenbard West senior girls track runner Annika Manning had a somewhat unique childhood.

She grew up as a quadruplet with sister Eleanor and brothers Oscar and Arlyn, the oldest of the bunch.

"It was fun because we were pretty much each other's best friends. We had people over and stuff, but we had our own playmates, us four," Manning said.

"Kindergarten through fifth grade (at Ben Franklin School), we were in the same class each year. It was fun. My mom wanted us to be together so if one teacher didn't believe in giving homework, the other one did, it would be fair for (all four of) us. And it was easier to her, too."

Manning joined the track team as a freshman, and when Eleanor joined as a sophomore, both of them were sprinters. Slowly but surely, though, distance coach Paul Hass began shifting Annika toward distance races.

On Wednesday, March 12, Annika enjoyed her best 3,200-meter run with a lifetime-best 12:12.3 manual time for second place at Wheaton Warrenville South's junior varsity Tiger Invitational.

The Hilltoppers (24.5 points) finished fourth, just ahead of Downers Grove South (22). The host Tigers (102.5) pulled out the team title over Naperville Central (101) with Naperville North (65) third.

The Hilltoppers' 3,200 relay of freshmen Alexa Fausey and Jenna Kelly and sophomores Charlotte Graham and Nicole Berneche (11:21.6) also took second to Wheaton Warrenville South (11:03.0).

In her third time ever running the 3,200, Manning only was beaten by Naperville Central's Isabel Lopez (12:01.80), who broke the invite record of 12:07.8.

Even though she was 22.4 seconds ahead of third-place Sam Wexler from Naperville Central, Manning easily beat her previous best of 12:22.9 from

March 1.

"I was a little bit surprised, yeah," Manning said. "I was hoping to (get a personal record). The girl in third (Wexler) was quite a bit away from me, but I was behind (Lopez) for the first half and then she pulled away."

Eleanor Manning also competed for the Hilltoppers Wednesday in the 200.

"We're pretty similar. We get along pretty well," Annika Manning said.

In the 3,200 relay, Fausey had a team-best 2:45.6 split on the opening leg. The team's fastest split in the event came from sophomore Katie Bassett, who ran a 2:43.5 split to lead off her lineup's 12:05.0 finish.

A first-year track runner, Bassett slashed an amazing 18 seconds from her previous best 800 split. She entered the relay just hoping to drop six seconds for a 2:55.

"I thought I misheard (Hass) and I thought he said 2:53, which is still great, and then I asked him again. He was like, 'No, it's 2:43, and it was just like, 'Ahhh,' " Bassett said.

"Last time, I knew (I was faster). By the time you're done with the race, you either know you tried as hard as you could or you didn't. It's kind of like a bad feeling when you know you didn't. This time I was like, 'Yeah. I'm dead. I can't do any more,' so that's good."

Bassett was encouraged by Berneche to join track this season. It's the first time Bassett has been in a team sport since playing softball in fourth grade.

"I really like it," Bassett said. "The first week is hard. You're so behind everyone else. Once you realize that you actually can do it, it's really fun.

"I've learned that now that I'm in track, I'm a pretty competitive person. I definitely try harder when there's someone right in front of me. I'm like, 'I

can pass her. I can pass her.' ”

Since Berneche and some of her other friends are distance runners, Bassett started out with the distance group as well. Bassett said she probably will not run cross country since it conflicts with one of her other interests, the speech team. Bassett competed last year in humorous duet acting and original comedy.

“It would kind of be crazy to do both,” Bassett said. “If I could get under 2:40, that would be awesome. It’s definitely going to be harder now, though.”

Seniors Rachel Farley and Tricia Markby and junior Eva Alonso were third in the 800 relay with junior Shontana Hudson (2:07.8) and third in the 1,600 relay (4:46.1) with junior Jessica Johanson.

Junior Madeleine Winter was fourth in high jump (4-4). Sophomore Katie Goleash (4-4) tied for sixth and Markby (4-2) tied for eighth.

Senior Meg Maloney tied for fourth in the 400 (1:12.6), and junior Deena Harnboonzong was fifth in the 55 hurdles (10.3).

Harnboonzong came through with another strong hurdles race after a season-best 10.48 fully automatic time at the Proviso West Invite March 8.

On Wednesday, Harnboonzong won the third of four heats by .1. She was beaten by three runners in the final heat and an unseeded entry in the first.

“I was just looking at some of the girls go over the hurdles and kind of critiquing their form to see how I could kind of improve mine,” Harnboonzong said.

“I think maybe (the Proviso West Invite) gave me a little more confidence, but it’s not always good to not be completely confident. You still want to have a little nerves to channel that energy to a good race.”

Competing for the varsity at Proviso West, Harnboonzong was fourth in her heat and ninth overall, missing a spot in the eight-person finals by just .13.

"It was a tough meet, but I thought I did pretty well," Harnboonzong said. "(Glenbard West head coach and hurdles coach Kelly Hass) said it was the best race I ever ran and it was pretty much the speed because those girls were sprint state girls as well."

This is Harnboonzong's second year of high-school track. She "regretted" not coming out as a freshman after being introduced to hurdles as an eighth-grader at Hadley Junior High.

In one season with Kelly Hass, Harnboonzong said she feels she has improved significantly with her technique. She will return to the 100 high hurdles outdoors and might try the 300 low hurdles.

"I think last year we didn't practice hurdles as much but this year we're doing it more often," Harnboonzong said. "I think yesterday we were practicing hurdles for like an hour so that was helpful. We're being more consistent with changing, improving technique and I think that's really helping.

"I realize that there's so much hard work put into blocks and starts and reflexes and building up speed. (Kelly Hass) is a really great hurdles coach and I'm surprised she told me she never did hurdles in high school. I feel very fortunate to have her as a coach."

Freshman Melina Thurmond was sixth in the shot with a personal-best 28-2. Berneche (2:50.2) and Julia Kochert (2:52.8) were seventh and eighth in the 800, Hudson tied for seventh in long jump (13-3), Leah Backart was eighth in the 55 (8.5) and Kelly was 10th in the 1,600 (6:02.0).

Thurmond made a huge improvement from her 24-3 March 1.

Thurmond actually threw 28-2 twice in the finals after entering in seventh

place at 27-5.

"I don't know where that came from. I was really focused today," Thurmond said. "I knew coming into this I really wanted a PR so just knowing that I got 27-5, I just wanted to improve on that.

"I'm just hoping to improve a lot more throughout the season. There's so much more I can improve on."

This was the third full week in which throws coach Nick Posegay rejoined the team full-time after his obligations coaching wrestling. Sophomores Sam Gregory (25-0) and Emily Cvengros (21-0) and senior Faith Bischoff (22-4) also had personal bests at the invite.

"It's encouraging for my teammates to do well and it makes me want to do better," Thurmond said. "It was kind of rough in the beginning of the year. As (Posegay) came in and taught us everything we need to know, since then I think I've been doing really well."

Annika Manning is now a completely converted distance runner. She is coming off her best cross country season, in which she earned a spot as an alternate for the 2013 state championship roster.

She now plans to compete in cross country and track at two schools she is considering to attend -- North Park University, where her older sister attends, or Harper Community College, where her father works. Her brothers probably will attend Harper while Eleanor is leaning toward attending the University of Illinois.

In the meantime, Annika Manning is hoping her final high-school track season will come with several personal records.

"I'm feeling pretty good, pretty confident in this season. We still have outdoors so it's not even half over. I'd like to do (3,200 relays), but it's whatever Mr. Hass puts me in," Manning said.

"I like (our talented distance runners) because it really makes you push

yourself more in the practices. If they're getting better, you want to get better so you can be in the meets, but it's like a friendly competition. Everyone tries hard."

-- by Bill Stone