

Junior Jessica Hajny went into the Glenbard West girls track team's junior varsity home meet Wednesday, March 18, only expecting to compete in the 800-meter run.

Then Hajny also raced in the 400 to support junior teammate Eva Alonso. Now was Hajny done?

Not yet. Hajny ran yet another 400 when she joined a 1,600 relay put together at the last moment.

"I was really stressed out before, but it was fun," Hajny said. "Why not? It was kind of an adrenaline rush. It's nice to run for a change."

The Hilltoppers' meet with Fremd and Glenbard South was not scored, but there were many individual and moral victories along the way, and just plain enjoyment of the sport.

The contested events in which the Hilltoppers had the top performances were the 800 with sophomore Abby Moody (2:39.5), the 1,600 with freshman Jenna Kelly (6:01.1) and junior Rachel Aubrey in triple jump (29-7), which had three entries. Kelly was followed closely by freshman Alexa Fausey (6:01.6), sophomore Charlotte Graham (6:02.0) and junior Hannah Arduino (6:02.5).

There was no competition in the 3,200 relay or 3,200. There was a 1,600 relay, but Glenbard West had no entry until junior Julia Kochert tried to construct a lineup.

Good friends Hajny and Arduino soon were recruited. Senior Rachel Farley joined them after she had just competed in the 200, the preceding event.

In the meet's final race, the Hilltoppers won their heat over two Fremd teams in 5:12.2, the second fastest time overall counting the first heat.

"The captains of the 400," Farley said with a laugh.

"We did it for fun. We ended up winning so it was extra fun," Hajny said.

"We didn't expect to win so then when we did it just felt super awesome."

Hajny sometimes does not compete at meets but she is quite visible at the track. She's usually taking and recording splits for Glenbard West athletes or cheering on those teammates along the side of the track.

This time Hajny showed her team spirit as a competitor.

"Jessica Hajny is the team's best supporter. She yells on every kid on this team and yells her heart out," Hass said. "If there's a fifth coach, it would be Jessica Hajny. She's been so awesome. It's never about her. It's about everybody else, but she ran great tonight so it is about her."

The meet began as a somewhat late addition to the schedule simply as a dual with Fremd. Glenbard West head coach Kelly Hass then contacted Glenbard South coach Mark Tacchi.

"Fremd sent me who they were going to run and there were some events not filled so I just called (Tacchi) and was like, 'Do you want to bring some kids over?' and he's like, 'Yes.' It was good for everybody," Hass said.

Even with three teams, Alonso still was only one entry in the 400. Hajny stepped in to run the only 400 heat with Alonso, who finished in 1:12.4.

"I didn't want her to run alone so I kind of got volunteered for it and I didn't want to say no," Hajny said. "She was five seconds ahead of me (1:18.4). There was no chance of me beating her, but I just didn't want her to have to run alone because that's just no fun. Especially a 400, running alone. It's like why bother. Why not (run)?"

Such was the case for the 1,600 relay. Kochert, Hajny and Arduino often have been teammates for the 3,200 relay this season but never all together on the same relay.

They took advantage of the opportunity, and found the fourth member,

an "outsider," in Farley right after her 200.

"I was walking back (to the team area) and I was like, 'OK,' " Farley said. "Julia was the ring leader. She was like, 'Let's do a 4-by-400 and I was just like, 'These distance girls want to do a 400? Let's go.' "

The relay began with Arduino using a block start for the first time. By the time Farley received the baton for the anchor leg, the Hilltoppers were in front.

Farley opened a sizeable lead but then was being shadowed by a Fremd runner going into the final lap. Farley quickly regained the margin and the Hilltoppers won the heat by 4.6 seconds.

"I was actually nervous. She almost passed me on that corner, but I saw her out of the corner of my eye and I was like, 'OK. I should finish this race,' " Farley said. "They all closed the gap so it was really easy for me to pass her at the beginning. It was a fun race."

Farley also anchored the Hilltoppers' 4-lap relay with junior Jessica Wulffen and freshmen Shay Kiker and Katie Dillman (1:44.0), which was third in its heat and third overall.

"I don't think I've ever done the 4-by-100," Farley said. "(This meet) was really low key so it's always fun to be in that position where you can just enjoy running and not have pressure."

In the 800, Moody broke 2:40 and significantly beat her previous season best of 2:45.46 March 8. Aubrey had her second-best triple jump of the season to her 29-8 1/4 March 14 and also had a 29-0 among her four attempts.

Kelly's first 1,600 victory was bittersweet. While running a season-best, edging her 6:02.24 March 12, Kelly found out soon after the race that she just missed breaking 6:00.

"I thought I was really close and then I went up to (distance coach Paul

Hass) and he told me. I was kind of disappointed, but it was nice to win, too," Kelly said.

"It was really a change to actually be in the front for once so it was nice. I just wish I could have broken 6:00, but Mr. Hass gave me tips so I can do it next time. I heard Mr. Hass yelling out (splits) so I knew I had to pick up the pace for the last 400 in order to break 6:00. I caught up some time that I lost in the middle."

The race brought out the best in many Hilltoppers. The lead pack with Fausey, Graham and Arduino also ran season bests.

Freshman Annie Pasterz (6:13.2), Kochert (6:14.1), sophomore Meredith Miscinski (6:25.2) and Macy Lemke (6:25.8), senior Amanda Ortiz (6:27.0) and freshman Rebekah Crail (6:27.3) also had season bests while breaking 6:30.

"We had a really good pack so it helped everyone going faster to stay together," Kelly said.

"I tried to pace with (Kelly) because I knew we're really close. It's nice to have someone that can pace me well," added Graham.

This is the first track season for Graham, the twin sister of all-stater Lindsay Graham whose previous 1,600 best was 6:09.6 Feb. 22. Last year, Charlotte Graham participated in cheerleading and badminton for her spring sport. She has played volleyball in the fall.

"(This race) certainly brings up my confidence because I just started track this year so already I'm progressing quickly, which is nice," Graham said.

Sophomore Nicole Berneche was third in the 800 (2:51.0), less than a second from her best time. Junior Katie Harper was among the top performers in the 50 with a team-best 7.7 that tied her season best. Wulffen had a team-best and season-best 31.4 in the 200.

-- by Bill Stone