

When Glenbard West junior Mary Nevins ran her first track race since March 8 at Downers Grove North's Bruce Ritter Invitational Thursday, April 17, she felt rusty.

"Honestly for the open 200 (meter dash preliminaries), I kind of forgot how to run," Nevins said. "I was definitely over striding and I guess I just have to remember those techniques that I had before, but it's so nice to be back. I was going crazy before."

By the end of the invite, Nevins was crazy with excitement. She led off the varsity 1,600 relay with a remarkable team-best 60-second split to join freshman Sophie Cvengros, sophomore Jessica Michel and senior JaSharra Clark in placing sixth in 4:12.09 fully automatic time.

"Mary Nevins is back – and with a vengeance, I might add," Glenbard West head coach Kelly Hass said while congratulating her and the relay.

"Mary Nevins was incredible. I can't believe that split. And she ran a 200 in 27 (27.39 FAT), which was scary because this is the first time she's gone all out in a really long time. That in itself was a little bit scary, but she looked great, felt great."

The Hilltoppers finished strong at the invite to take seventh with 45.5 points, 3.5 points from sixth-place York and 3.5 points ahead of 10th place. Winning the invite was state-trophy contender West Aurora (108 points), which in 2013 tied for fourth at the state meet, one point behind the third-place Hilltoppers.

Sophomore Lindsay Graham continued her distance domination by winning the 3,200-meter run in 10:47.43 fully automatic time – 33.85 seconds ahead of the rest of the field.

Graham also anchored the victorious frosh-soph 1,600 relay with sophomores Emma Winans, Sharon Murray and Erin Daniels. (4:12.90), which won by 2.21 seconds and nearly broke the outdoor sophomore school record of 4:10.7 manual time from 2009.

"We were hoping to be close to that (record) and we were close and not quite there," Graham said. "I thought it was pretty fun."

Junior Emma Gambol again competed in four individual events and was fourth in triple jump (34-0 1/2) and the 300 low hurdles (48.86), seventh in long jump (personal-best 16-6) and eighth in the 100 (13:48).

Sophomore Kathryn Kenwood also excelled in the 3,200 with an 11:30.34, a personal best by 23 seconds, for fifth place.

Freshman Anna Gambol was seventh in discus (season-best 98-0), sophomore Grace Rogers was seventh in the 1,600 (5:24.61), the 800 relay was eighth (Michel, Winans, Murray, Clark in 1:50.62) and senior Grace Lupu tied for eighth in high jump (4-9).

Top-eight finishers earned team points, unlike most invites that end at top-six.

Even with one of the most dominating performances of the invite, Graham was hoping to run faster in the 3,200. Her 10:47.43 was within range of her lifetime-best 10:41.92 from the 2013 York Sectional and her winning 10:44.98 at the Top Times Indoor Classic March 29 in Bloomington.

Graham won the Top Times race by 23.48 seconds. About the only

aspects Graham wanted to change afterwards were going out too slow and a runner who unintentionally created interference when she tried to pass.

Graham opened Thursday's race with a 1:16 first 400 lap, about one or two seconds too fast in her eyes in retrospect. By then, she already established a four-second lead over second-place Lyons Township senior Lexy Rudofski (11:21.28).

At the 1,600-mark, Graham (5:20) was 20 seconds ahead of Rudofski.

"(I wanted) 10:40. I went out too fast, but maybe it was just because of the wind and stuff," Graham said. "I was happier that I improved my time at Top Ties. My splits were better."

Graham's splits on her second through seventh laps were between 81 and 83 seconds (1:21 and 1:23) with an 82-second final lap.

"They just were not fast enough. They should have been 80 (1:20) each," Graham said.

"She might have (gone out too fast). She's figuring it out," Kelly Hass said. "She's got to give herself credit for that (victory). She forgets how hard it is to be the leader in a race like that. It is hard to go run a 10:46 by yourself. She needs to be happy with what she's done. She took control and it was over. What she's doing it starting to create a fear factor."

Paul Hass, the distance coach and girls cross country head coach, missed the 3,200 so he could attend his daughter's school play. Glenbard West girls not competing videotaped the distance races

he missed from the grandstands so he could review them later. He returned by the end of the meet.

"It was great to see (Graham's race). I just wish I could have seen it (in person), but I was where I needed to be," Paul Hass said.

"She's just as fast as she was a couple of weeks ago, actually faster, but she went out in a 75, a little bit too fast. She's still learning (the race). She's a sophomore and she's starting to figure it out. Just a little tweaking is all we have to do and she'll have it."

Kenwood also delivered an inspired effort in the 3,200 and continues to learn by leaps and bounds in her first track season. Kenwood not only slashed her previous-best time by 23 seconds. Her 1:20 final lap and vicious kick passed Downers North sophomore Kaitlyn Bonfield in the final 50 meters to claim fifth place by 1.59 seconds.

"I don't know what it is at the end. I just want to finish the race, go all out," Kenwood said. "I definitely wanted to PR. I was hoping like 10:40. At first, I was kind of not looking forward to it because I ran the 800 (at other meets), which is a nice and short race. I definitely like the 3,200. It's not as bad when you're running it."

While other runners conceded the victory to Graham, nine of them converged in a strong pack for second with Kenwood tucking in early in 10th but just one second from Rudofski through the first 1,200. Just after the fifth lap, Kenwood burst into seventh and then took over sixth during the seventh lap.

"Definitely the pack of girls I was staying with (helped). I just placed myself behind them," Kenwood said. "I heard Mrs. Hass yelling at me every time that I was running a good pace, my pace,

so that helped, too.”

”That was great for Kathryn, who just needed a solid dose of confidence. She just ran, for her, a really smart race for someone who’s learning and put herself in position,” Kelly Hass said.

Kenwood said Graham’s dominating race also helped in her performance.

”It was awesome to see her running,” Kenwood said. “The gun goes off and I still have a lap and a half before only one last lap (for Graham), but I had girls near me so I was good. It must have been hard for her to run by herself.”

It’s a performance reminiscent of the fall, when Kenwood joined cross country for the first time. She continued to gain race experience and confidence and ended up being the state championship team’s No. 6 state finisher (63rd place).

”That’s amazing what she did. I’ve been telling her based on working and what you’re able to do based on cross country, you should be able to run low 11:30s,” Paul Hass said. “She did it today. She finally became a believer, hopefully, at how good she is.”

The 1,600 relay – both of them -- also came away brimming with optimism.

Besides Nevins (1:00.0), Clark anchored the varsity 1,600 relay in 1:02.1, followed by Cvengros (1:04.5) and Michel (1:05.3), who was added Thursday in place of sophomore Nicole Rogus.

Winans led off the frosh-soph 1,600 relay in 1:01.0, followed by

Graham (1:03.0), Murray (1:03.9) and Daniels (1:04.4).

Just with the top four splits from those relays Friday, the Hilltoppers would be at 4:06.1. The state-qualifying standard is 4:04.24 FAT.

"We're starting to find our 4-by-400 legs a little bit," Kelly Hass said. "A little intersquad competition is never a bad thing. They both ran 4:12. That's a good problem to have. I love the (additional) frosh-soph 4-by-400 here."

The frosh-soph 1,600 relay was more like a showcase for varsity standouts that just happen to be sophomores. Besides the Hilltoppers, Palatine sophomore Kelly O'Brien anchored in 59.2 to carry the Pirates to second in a decent 4:15.11 – not long after taking second in the 1,600 (5:07.36) and contributing a 2:16 split for the third-place 3,200 relay (9:32.25).

"She's really good. My coach told me that she was close (in our 1,600 relay)," Graham said.

Winans and Michel were varsity regulars indoors. Daniels has quickly moved up after a late indoor start following basketball.

"I think we were like two seconds off (the school record) so that was exciting. It's just kind of exciting to have an all-sophomore relay, too," Winans said.

"I remember Mrs. Hass saying this is one of the only opportunities we'll have because we ran varsity for other events (in the invite). This is our last chance to really be true frosh-soph so it was cool."

Winans competed earlier for the varsity in the 400 and 800 relays

and Murray in the 800 relay. Daniels' other event was the 400, where she 10th (1:04.28), .24 from eighth. Junior Morgan McEnroe was 11th (1:05.55) – her second straight personal best in as many invites.

"It was just like the perfect (1,600 relay) team. We were all looking so forward to it because it's frosh-soph so it's for fun but it's good competition," Daniels said. "Running the first race afterwards, you always feel the worst just because you've been sitting around. After my 400, I felt pretty tight, but I wanted to do really well for this 4-by-400 so I thought it went really well. My leg felt a lot better than my open (400)."

While competing on varsity could be overwhelming for sophomores, Murray and Winans agreed that the experience has made them better competitors.

"I like running on varsity and I think it really pushes me to be better than my best," Murray said.

"This year I definitely feel more confident and comfortable with where I'm at," Winans said.

Winans actually is having a less stressful season than freshman year, her introduction to track. She's become able to keep her emotions under control and not get too overwhelmed about her races or competition load.

"Last year, I think I was more in my head, and this year I have a much broader view. I love the coaches, I love the girls, I just love the sport and what it does for me," Winans said.

"Last year, I had a lot of nervousness problems. I'd get very

anxious before races and I threw up. This year, I am much more calm and collected so that kind of reassures me I'm right where I need to be. I just needed to take a step back that this is just a high school track meet. I'm going to do my best on the day and that's all you can do. And my best is good enough for me."

Jumpers and throwers were allowed only four throws with no finals rather than the standard three attempts in preliminaries and finals.

Emma Gambol opened long jump with a 16-6, a personal best by three inches, and was just one inch from fifth. In triple jump, Gambol was just 4 1/2 inches from second, and her 34-0 1/2 came from well behind the takeoff board. LT junior Emma Haugen won with a 35-5 1/2.

"Not my best (triple jump), but that's all right," Emma Gambol said. "I PRed in long jump, but I had no height on it so there's definitely room for improvement. I know what it feels like (now). My goal is to try to get over 17-0, at least. I think I'm capable of doing that."

Emma Gambol also had mixed emotions about her track events. She reached the 100 finals but finished eighth (13.48). In her final event, the 300 low hurdles, she finished fourth (48.86), holding off fifth-place LT senior Jessica Stabenow by .46.

West Aurora senior Emma Spagnola secured her fourth individual event victory by winning the event in 45.58. She earlier won long jump (18-9) with one attempt and the 100 high hurdles (14.45) and 100 (12.46) back to back.

"(In the 100 finals), my start was all right and then I kind of lost



my footing a little bit. It just set really set me back. That really wasn't a good race. That kind of had me upset," Emma Gambol said.

"Honestly, I was just out running (the 300 hurdles) for fun. Mrs. Hass was going to let me drop it, but I didn't. I was just stressed, feeling pressure because I was racing against some really, really talented runners," Emma Gambol said.

In discus, Anna Gambol threw her season-best of 98-0 on her second attempt after opening with a 96-9 and ending with a 95-8. Her third throw landed out of the measuring sector. Burns' best throw was on her second attempt, along with an 86-6 and two fouls.

While not a lifetime best, Gambol believes she is close to her eighth-grade discus school record at Hadley Junior High and is on the verge of breaking 100 feet. Regular discus practice outdoors certainly has helped.

"It's good because I want to be more consistent now. I know I'm getting there (to 100 feet) definitely," Anna Gambol said. "I wanted to throw around 100 feet (Friday) or so and I just really wanted to pop it higher and I think I reached my goal. I'm focusing on my footwork and just trying to get my spin down."

Rogers came back form a good effort with the 3,200 relay with an even better performance in the 1,600.

A strong finisher, Rogers' powerful kick edged Downers North sophomore Grace Maletich (5:24.91), a 2013 state qualifier in the event, for seventh place by .30. Downers North sophomore Emma Moravec was fifth (5:22.47) after being part of the Trojans'

winning 3,200 relay (9:25.34).

"Maybe I had a little more left and I should have started (my kick) earlier, but I was happy with my finish. It feels good to just catch someone at the end," Rogers said.

The 3,200 relay of Rogers, sophomore Abby Shaver, senior Annika Manning and sophomore Katie Bassett was 10th (10:30.26), 19.15 seconds from eighth. Rogers had a team-best 2:27.5, her second best split of the season, and Shaver ran a 2:32.5.

"We had an awesome race (in the 3,200 relay), but I don't think we placed, so I could earn points for our team (in the 1,600)," Rogers said. "I'm like, 'I'm going to go out and help a little bit.' It motivated me to do well in the 1,600."

Several other Hilltoppers that didn't place among the top eight had encouraging races. Senior Erin Spiech, who has returned to the 300 hurdles after one season, was 13th, but her 53.27 was a significant drop from her first-place 55.6 manual finish in the outdoor opener April 9 at Duchon Field.

Spiech now is eyeing her career best in the 52s as a sophomore. Her ultimate goal is to reach 50 seconds.

"Actually, I told myself right before I got in the blocks, 'I'm aiming for a 53,' and then I got it so I was pretty happy," Spiech said.

"Even over the first hurdle, I just kind of had a feeling that I was just going to be like that for the rest of the race. I had a rough hurdle right in the middle of the end stretch, but I got over and then I was fine. I think I just concentrated more on keeping myself straight instead of just trying to get over (the hurdle). I focused

more on my arms so they weren't swinging wildly so I wasn't twisting wildly. I just kept myself straighter this time."

Spiech approached hurdles coach Kelly Hass on the first day of practice and said that she wanted to compete the 300 hurdles again. In anticipation of the longer hurdles race, Spiech has been training with the middle distance runners this season.

"After last year, I kind of missed them, even though it's such a hard race and I get so anxious before it," Spiech said. "I've been preparing myself the entire year for these 300s. I'm so far happy with the results and it can only better from here."

-- by Bill Stone