

The Glenbard West girls track and field team gave social media its latest version of #TheReturn Friday, April 17.

The three remaining members of its 1,600-meter relay from the 2014 Class 3A state meet – senior Mary Nevins and juniors Ellen Daniels and Emma Winans – finally had been reunited for the final race at Downers Grove North's Bruce Ritter Invitational.

"Before the race, we all kind of had the huddle and (said), 'Guys, we've run this together before. This is the dream team,' " Winans said. "We recognized that we were given a really good opportunity. We wanted to make the most of it."

The trio and junior Nicole Rogus went out and ran a season-best 4:05.71 fully automatic time for fifth place in the varsity 1,600 relay and another finish reflective of a great second half of the meet by the Hilltoppers.

Glenbard West (42 points) finished 10th in the 16-team field, just behind ninth-place Wheeling (47) and one point ahead of 11th-place Lane Tech (41). Palatine (107) won the invite for the first time, followed by Prospect (82), Lyons Township (70.5) and West Aurora (70). Top-eight places earned team points rather than the usual top-six. There also was an additional frosh-soph 1,600 relay including in the scoring.

Great weather and great competition contributed to several strong performances. The 1,600 relay ran the state's 14th fastest reported team-best time this outdoor season at that point and already is within striking distance of the 4:04.24 state-qualifying standard.

"This is great," Nevins said. "Honestly, I was freaking out, not in nervousness but just in excitement. We're so capable of doing great things so it was exciting.

"I think we were all kind of unsure of where we stood in our area just because we've kind of been in limbo. What are we going to do? Tonight just brought so much reassurance that we can do this."

Sophomore Anna Gambol was second in discus with a lifetime-best distance of 111 feet-1 inch.

Junior Grace Rogers was third in the 1,600 (lifetime-best 5:15.77), the 3,200 relay of Rogers, junior Caitlyn Reick, freshman Marika Tammaru, senior Julia Sakach was fourth (9:47.18) and juniors Kathryn Kenwood (11:33.98) and Abby Shaver (lifetime-best 11:36.16) were fourth and sixth in the 3,200.

The 3,200 relay posted the state's 10th fastest outdoor time to that point. The frosh-soph 1,600 relay of sophomore Sophie Cvengros, Tammaru and freshmen Catherine Reedy and Schrauth was fifth (4:18.47), the 800 relay of juniors Isabella Salafatinos and Jessica Michel, freshman MaryBeth Feeley and Cvengros was sixth (season-best 1:49.65), Michel tied for sixth in pole vault (personal-best 8-6) and junior Sharon Murray (400 in 1:03.60) and Schrauth (300 low hurdles in 50.81) were eighth.

This was the first time Nevins, Winans and Daniels ran the 1,600 relay together since the 2014 state meet. At state, they and graduated JaSharra Clark posted a blazing 3:58.16 to finish 10th in the preliminaries, just one spot and .33 from the finals and a top-nine, all-state medal.

This season, Nevins was part of the 1,600 relay only once indoors as she saw limited action to keep her healthy for the outdoor season. Nevins, Rogus, Winans and junior Lindsay Graham, who won the girls cross country state championship Nov. 8, ran an indoor team-best 4:14.26 at the North Central College Invitational March 5. Winans and Daniels ran together on the 1,600 relay that was fourth at the Proviso West Invite March 7 (4:17.70).

Preparing for Friday's race, Winans noted last year's state prelim time was faster than any of the seed times. The Hilltoppers were beaten by Downers North (4:01.48), Palatine (4:02.92), York (4:05.26) and LT (4:05.65) by .06. Lane Tech (4:07.25), the No. 1 seed time at 4:01, was sixth.

"That just kind of reminded me that you can do anything you set your mind to," Winans said. "Sometimes it's hard to believe that, but knowing that you've been a

part of something like that gives me confidence in situations like tonight.”

Winans (1:00.3) and Nevins (1:00.7) both had sub 61-second splits, followed by Rogus (1:01.7) and Daniels (1:02.5).

“We were all saying before the race this our whole favorite meet of the year because it’s so much fun to run under the lights and with such good competition. I had a feeling that tonight was going to be a good one. I’m surprised but very, very happy with our time. I was not expecting that, but I’m very happy with it.”

Rogus was happy that she continued to hold her own as a newcomer to the relay. She was a state alternate for last year’s 1,600 relay.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to fill those shoes like JaSharra did, but it’s really exciting to be part of (the relay. They) know everything about the race and the state experience so it’s kind of nice to kind of feed off their energy,” Rogus said. “Before they go into a race, they’re all super excited and like, ‘Let’s do this. Let’s make this our best race,’ and I’m like, ‘OK, don’t want to mess up. I want to make sure I do a good job.’ They definitely make me a lot more relaxed going into the race.”

There was emotion and heavy hearts in shot and discus, but Gambol managed to throw yet another lifetime best after just doing so (108-4) to win Downers Grove South’s Mustang Invitational April 11.

Thurmond, promoted to varsity for the invite, was a top-15 finisher in both events. Head coach Kelly Hass oversaw the throwers because throws coach Nick Posegay was absent after the death of his father.

“One of the biggest losses today was not having coach there,” Thurmond said. “I do understand what he’s going through and I give him all of the credit in the world for not being here. Having even coach Hass there supporting me gave me a little boost of confidence. I tried my best.”

Gambol nearly won another invite, finishing second in discus to West Aurora junior SaMya Hunt (112-2), a 2014 state qualifier after throwing a fourth-place

128-9 at the 3A Metea Valley Sectional and beating the qualifying standard of 117-6.

“It feels great just to pop the 111 out there. I tried really hard for it every day, just to improve in distance. I think that really showed today,” Gambol said. “I throw more around 105 (in practice) so that 111 was surprising. With the lines that were out there (marking the sector), it was a little bit difficult to tell, but I knew that it was farther than a 105.”

This also was Gambol’s best series of the season. Getting just four throws with no finals, she opened with a 102-11, followed by her 111-1 and a 109-2 that also beat her Downers South Invite distance.

Gambol has been working on footwork and release and was encouraged that most of her throws landed near the middle of the sector. Her final throw landed out of bounds wide left.

“I think just kind of taking it easy at the beginning and really nailing down my foot in the middle and having a really good release, I think those all put together (helped me),” Gambol said. “We haven’t really mapped the season out to distances I should be throwing or that I want to be throwing but I think it’s progressively been going really well. Maybe I’m a little bit ahead but I just want to be able to get to state level (117-6 qualifying standard) real soon.”

In the 1,600, Rogers beat her previous best of 5:18.77, which earned sixth at the 2014 West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet.

In much the same way Friday, it was a loaded field and Rogers took advantage. Her 5:15.77 is fewer than two seconds from the 5:14.24 state-qualifying standard.

“(Distance coach Paul Hass) was telling one girl would be in front and no one would catch her but then it was anyone’s race,” Rogers said. “Once I was in the race, a lot of girls were running together. I did feel like I was running fast. I felt like I could (get a personal record) and that was the goal, but I didn’t know until I was coming around the turn and I could see the clock at the finish.”

Palatine junior standout Kelly O'Brien (5:04.40) dominated the 1,600 after her 2:12.5 anchor split gave the Pirates' 3,200 relay a .01 come-from-behind victory over Downers North (9:20.87 to 9:20.88) – the state's two fastest outdoor times. O'Brien was second in state in 2014 (5:00.50) to Hinsdale Central junior Anne Zaher (5:00.08), who currently is injured.

Naperville Central senior Rachel Hoffman (5:12.75) was second Friday with Rogers .48 ahead of Palatine senior Megan Beach (5:16.25). Fifth-place Champaign Centennial senior Rebecca Kaefring (5:16.91) also broke 5:20 in the field.

Rogers was the Hilltoppers' only entry in the race yet she had a remarkable teammate connection. Her 5:15.77 also was what Kenwood ran for third place at the Downers South Invite.

"That is the same exact time – down to the hundredths. That's funny," Rogers said. "It wasn't too different (competing alone) but it was weird not warming up with someone else. I'm sure someone would have if I wanted, but I was fine by myself."

Teamwork carried Kenwood and Shaver to strong races in the 3,200. While Kenwood put on a strong kick to finish fourth (11:33.98) to just miss her lifetime best, Shaver's sixth-place 11:36.16 was a lifetime best by roughly 14 seconds.

At the 2014 Ritter Invite, Kenwood ran a lifetime-best 11:30.34 to finish fifth in a race dominated by Graham (10:47.43).

"Just having Abby in the race is always good, always there. Abby's with me so it's golden," Kenwood said. "In the beginning, it was the competition pushing me and then Abby came around. Having her in front of me really made me want to keep going because if my teammate can do it, so can I."

Both runners came into the race a little more sore than usual after running the 800 and 1,600 relays in the team's home meet three days earlier.

Shaver still managed to continue her impressive recent streak of personal records in individual events and relays.

"I don't know why that's happening, to be honest," Shaver said. "I feel like I'm training the same intensity or whatever as last year. I guess I'm just in better shape."

Friday's race was reminiscent of the indoor Silver Meet, where a huge pack battled until the final lap for third behind Graham and Hinsdale Central sophomore Alexa Haff. Shaver took third in that battle in 11:51.29, just .39 ahead of fifth place.

While three sophomores led the way – Prospect's Brooke Wilson (10:56.32), Lane Tech's Maggie Scholle (11:13.16) and Naperville Central's Alana Austin (11:23.16) – Kenwood and Shaver were battling for fourth in a pack with Palatine senior Amy Kieliszewski and York junior Erin Muckian.

Kenwood and Shaver tried to open a gap with 300 left but Kieliszewski answered and passed them. Kenwood then passed Kieliszewski (5th, 11:35.54) in the final 60 meters and was 1.56 seconds ahead at the finish. Shaver was .62 behind Kieliszewski.

"My quad is hurting, but it started going away after the first few laps and then I started to get going," Kenwood said. "That sprint the other day was a little rough. I was not expecting (the soreness) to still be there."

The 3,200 relay's success marked the varsity debut of Tammaru, who has been having success on the frosh-soph level. The Hilltoppers (9:47.18) only were beaten by three teams all under the 9:38.24 state-qualifying standard. Besides the first-place photo finish between O'Brien and Downers North sophomore Emma Moravec, York ran 9:30.19 after leading most of the race.

Rogers, Kenwood, Reick and Sakach ran a season-best 9:36.27 to win the indoor Silver Meet March 20.

"It was very surprising I was invited to run in it," Tammaru said. "I feel like (coach Paul Hass) considers it sacred because we have a very good reputation for our 4-by-800. I was really happy to be asked to run in that because that's kind of a big step."

Rogers had the team's fastest split (2:23.2), followed by Reick (2:25.2), Tammaru (personal-best 2:28.5) and Sakach (2:29.5).

Tammaru's ran a personal-record split by .3 of a second. This was Sakach's first 3,200 relay since her phenomenal 2:20.7 anchor split gave the Hilltoppers the indoor Silver victory by .04 over York. Sakach used another strong kick Friday to pass a fatiguing Wheeling (5th, 9:49.17) with 40 meters left.

"I was hoping to PR by more, but I think we did really well collectively as a team," Tammaru said. "I was going as fast as I could and the gap wasn't narrowing or anything. I was like, 'Aw this is really frustrating,' because usually in frosh-soph it's a little bit easier."

The sprint relays also enjoyed success. The 800 relay broke 1:50 for the first time this season and the 400 relay of Salafatinos, Michel, Cvengros and Daniels was ninth (52.36), .24 from eighth.

The 400 and 800 relays both were in the first of two heats based on seed times. Both probably could have run faster if they had been in the faster heats, particularly the 800 relay, which won its heat by 1.67 seconds over eighth-place Joliet Central (1:51.32). Overall, the 400 relay finished right behind Lane Tech and Joliet Central (7th, 51.91), both in its heat.

"I thought we did well in both of them, definitely the 4 by 200. We went under 1:50, which was our goal," Michel said.

"The goal was to go under 1:50, which is a big deal, and we did it so that's very exciting," Salafatinos added. "The 4 by 100, I think we could have done a little bit better. We need to work on our handoffs a little bit, but overall I think we did

really well.”

Making her varsity debut, Feeley had a healthy lead during her third leg of the 800 relay before handing off to Cvengros. Feeley still had a 27.5 manual split, better than her 28.36 FAT performance earlier in the 200 prelims.

“I didn’t feel anyone behind me. I just feel like it’s always harder when you’re sort of running alone. I still felt like I had to go faster,” Feeley said.

“I was really excited when (sprints coach Mark Staron) told me (I was competing varsity) and then I was also really nervous but then after my first race, I kind of got all of the nerves out and then now it feels great. (The upperclassmen) helped me a lot with the handoffs and pretty much everything else.”

“MaryBeth was a star. She’s great, an MVP,” Salafatinos said. “I think the only piece of advice I gave her was to get out faster.”

Michel (26.8), Salafatinos (27.1) and Cvengros (28.0) also had solid 800 relay splits. Place-wise the team Friday would have had to drop another 2.01 seconds to catch fifth-place Palatine (1:47.64), but it was an encouraging drop under 1:50 after Salafatinos, Michel, Rogus and Cvengros ran 1:50.44 FAT-converted April 14.

Salafatinos, a mainstay on the relays, has been dedicating herself to stay healthy for her second full track season.

“I’m definitely trying to step it up this year. Last year was kind of a starter year. This year I’m definitely more serious about it,” Salafatinos said. “I think the biggest confidence that we can get is we had a goal and we made it (in the 800 relay) and we’re still able to get better. I think that we can continue to get better and meeting the goal today helped us realize that we can achieve a lot more than we knew.”

In pole vault, Michel was a little disappointed to clear 8-6 for the third straight meet but not be able to surpass it. Michel cleared 8-9 indoors.



In her other event, Daniels also made a rare appearance in the 400 relay, followed by a long wait until her return in the 1,600 relay.

"I don't run it often so it was a little different but it's fun," Daniels said. "I liked it because personally I like running a race before the (1,600 relay) just because it's the last event. I like being warmed up a little bit before that one so I thought it was a good combination."

For Reedy, the frosh-soph 1,600 relay was her only competition. While her three teammates had other events, Reedy's 1:05.0 split was in line with Tammaru (1:04.2), Schrauth (1:04.3) and Cvengros (1:04.4).

"I got to get up and run once. It's tough just coming at the end of the meet, but you've got to do what you've got to do," Reedy said. "This was a lot of fun. It was definitely a different mindset than I've had before. The teams were a lot better and it was a lot of fun to compete with them. It's kind of different from what we've seen before."

The invite's frosh-soph 1,600 relay often showcases varsity regulars or hopefuls. West Aurora's winning 4:12.37 would have placed seventh in the highly competitive varsity race.

At the indoor Silver Meet, the lineup of Cvengros, Schrauth, sophomore Jenna Kelly and Reedy (4:24.33) just missed the frosh-soph indoor school record of 4:24.25 from last season.

"Now we're running a 4:17?" Cvengros said. "We don't really have a set time what we want to hit but (head coach Kelly Hass) just told us all to run smart, run fast and hopefully in the end it will all work out."

Last season, Cvengros also participated in the Ritter Invite but with the varsity 1,600 relay and in long jump. A loaded frosh-soph lineup of Winans, Murray, Daniels and Graham won in 4:12.90, just .81 from what the sixth-place varsity Hilltoppers ran.

"This meet's fun, kind of coming back, just getting to do it all over again and to run here with new people and new experiences," Cvengros said.

"I never expected this would happen, starting this year, but it's been a lot of fun," Reedy added. "I have classes with all of these girls and it's a really comfortable setting to be in. We're working together in practice. We're good friends. I'm not nervous about anything. It's just a nice setting to be running in."

-- By Bill Stone