

**Glenbard West junior Mary Nevins has spent most of her track season waiting to compete.**

**Freshman Anna Gambol hardly waited to earn her chance to compete with the varsity.**

**Both Hilltoppers have come a long way this season and they were rewarded with individual titles at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Thursday, May 8, at Downers Grove North.**

**The Hilltoppers finished third with 94.5 points, 3.5 points from second.**

**"I'm still putting that through my head. I'm not really sure (how to react)," Nevins said. "It just feels good that it's in your mind for the rest of your life that you won conference."**

**Nevins captured the 400-meter dash in a lifetime best 58.79 fully automatic time after entering as the No. 4 seed at 1:00.60 and recovering from a pulled quadricep muscle since the indoor season.**

**Gambol more than held her No. 1 seed in discus by throwing 108 feet-1 inch, a personal best by more than two feet.**

**"Because I was gone for almost the whole season, it's just so nice to be back and win something – on your own," Nevins said. "It was just like a relief, I guess, just to be back for sure. It's just reassuring that the wait was worth it to come back so late this year."**

**Glenbard West finished just behind Oak Park-River Forest (98 points) while indoor Silver Meet champion Lyons Township (118) won its third straight outdoor crown. Hinsdale Central (82), Downers North (81), York (76.5) and Proviso West (8) were fourth through seventh.**

**"Lots of highlights," Glenbard West head coach Kelly Hass said. "I'm proud of all of the kids."**

**Nevins is the Hilltoppers' first varsity 400 Silver champion since Katy**

**Barrett as a junior in 2002 (59.2 manual time).**

**Gambol became the Hilltoppers' first varsity discus champion since Sarah Dau as a senior in 2011 and the first freshman thrower to win any varsity conference title under current coach Nick Posegay.**

**"I'm competing against juniors and seniors and (back then) I wouldn't really expect to win. It's pretty big to win conference, especially as a freshman, so I'm really happy," Gambol said. "I felt kind of a lot of pressure to keep that first (seed) up and I just wanted to make sure I kept my throws up there."**

**Senior Madeline Perez, the defending state champion in the 3,200 and 1,600, competed for the first time outdoors and the first time since March 8.**

**Perez anchored the 3,200 relay with junior Julia Sakach and sophomores Lindsay Graham and Grace Rogers that ran a season-best 9:22.57 to finish a close second to Downers Grove North (9:21.00). They are the No. 2 and 4 fastest outdoor times in the state this season, according to DyeStat Illinois.**

**Graham (800 in lifetime-best 2:18.90) and junior Lisa Luczak (3,200 in 11:17.02) also were second.**

**Perez was third in a tightly contested 1,600 (5:04.19), just 2.60 seconds from first, with all top-15 state times. The three athletes who finished ahead of Perez in Friday's two races all needed lifetime-best performances.**

**"I wanted to come back here and score as many points as I could for the team at the conference meet. It's my last one, so sad to think that, but it feels really good to be back," Perez said.**

**"Today I was just standing at the starting line, just beaming ear to ear, because it feels so great to be back out on the track again. You want to savor ever moment these last couple of weeks senior year."**

Junior Emma Gambol was third in triple jump (34-5) and the 100 (13.39). The 1,600 relay of Nevins, Graham, sophomore Emma Winans and senior JaSharra Clark was third in a season-best 4:07.73, and senior Grace Lupo tied for third in high jump (4-11).

Moments after the meet, thoughts already turned toward the Class 3A Wheaton Warrenville Sectional Thursday, May 15. Entries qualify for the 3A state meet May 23-24 at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston either automatically with a top-two sectional finish or by achieving state-qualifying standards at the sectional, regardless of overall place.

In 2013, the Hilltoppers finished third in 3A and captured their first team trophy in the sport. Besides Perez, Emma Gambol and Nevins and Clark also earned all-state honors for top-nine performances. Luczak and Rogers were other varsity performers Friday who competed at state.

"I'm so excited for next week. It's going to be awesome," Nevins said.

Nevins pulled out the 400 title by 1.07 seconds over Downers North freshman Emma Moravec (59.86) from the 3,200 relay. OPRF sophomore Chisom Nwoko (59.96) also broke 60 seconds.

The outcome remained in question until Nevins' final 50 meters.

"I think on the last straightaway it's who wants it the most because they're all talented enough to win. I think you just have to get it through your mind that you really want it," Nevins said.

"Looking at the (seed) times, it looked like it was going to be a close race. Honestly, I was just like, 'I have no idea what's going to happen,' so I'm just going to give it my best. I wasn't really thinking about anyone else, I guess."

The thrill for Nevins may probably only have been eclipsed at the 2013 state meet. She, Clark and Emma Gambol were part of the 1,600 relay with graduated Emma Reifel that dropped from 4:01.16 at sectionals to

**3:55.65 in the state prelims to easily beat the state finals cut of 3:58.62. The Hilltoppers were eighth (3:58.47) in the state finals.**

**On April 17, at Downers North, Nevins showed she was ready for another big postseason. She competed for the first time outdoors at the Bruce Ritter Invite and ran a sub-1:00 split with the 1,600 relay.**

**Friday was her first open time under 59 seconds. Clark was eighth (1:02.93).**

**"If I had the same time and didn't win, I'd be ecstatic still because this is my best time for the 400 so far," Nevins said.**

**The 1,600 relay also received a boost Friday after what Nevins and Clark did in the 400, and considering Clark and Graham previously competed in two events. Nevins (1:01.4) and Clark (1:02.0) had the top splits Friday, followed by Winans (1:02.3) and Graham (1:03.6).**

**"Mary Nevins is by far the (track) highlight. She's been running great, but she was just so mature and ran the smartest race," Hass said. "Our by-4-by-400 was really tired tonight and we ran our fastest time of the year. Those kids were tired and they should be. We have some pieces to move around, see how it shakes out, but they ran great."**

**Anna Gambol showed some maturity as well, considering she also had to contend with being a top seed. She won by nearly seven feet over York senior Sami Harrell (101-3), Friday's shot put champion (37-9) and the only returning top-five discus finisher from the 2013 outdoor Silver Meet (2nd, 99-2).**

**"I was kind of hoping to throw around my 105, like I was doing before. I didn't expect the 108 so I was happy with that," Anna Gambol said. "I think I probably held my arm back a little more and just waited on the release a little bit and I kind of calmed down before I went into the ring instead of being all stressed like I usually am."**

**Anna Gambol had a great indoor season throwing shot put and moved up**

to varsity by the indoor Silver Meet March 21, where she finished third with a lifetime-best 33-11 3/4. On Friday, she finished fourth (32-5).

But discus was Gambol's stronger event at Hadley Junior High, where she set school records for seventh grade (90-7) and eighth grade (98-5), breaking a record that stood since 1984.

Starting with her first 100-plus throw at Glenbard West's Sue Pariseau Invite April 26 (101-4 1/2), she has thrown personal bests each of her last four meets.

"The sky's the limit now. Who knows what she can end up with?" Posegay said. "It's fantastic. She's very consistent. She's always got that nice, smooth motion and she didn't let any of the pressure get to her and she threw a big one out there. If she could beat (Harrell), who's the class act of the conference, and Sami was struggling a little, maybe we could sneak in there (and win), but she threw great today, too."

Anna Gambol beat the frosh-soph school-record distance of 107-5 by Shelley Homolka in 2003, but Friday's mark will not supplant that because it occurred in varsity competition. The varsity record is Angela Bray's 127-5 from 1999.

After her throwing success, Gambol's mind quickly turned to another performance. She quickly returned to school for a mandatory practice for the upcoming Jazz Festival May 12.

Gambol, who plays the trumpet, has been in band since fifth grade while older sister Emma is in choir. The jazz band is an optional group that requires musician tryouts.

"I was in jazz band (at Hadley), but here it's obviously different. We have different music and it's a little harder," Anna Gambol said.

Perez's return to competition couldn't have been much more challenging. She ran great in both the 3,200 relay (2:18.9 split) and 1,600 and came just a combined 4.17 seconds from finishing first in both.

**"It came down to the wire in both races. I was disappointed that I couldn't pull it out at the end, but hopefully that'll come with just a little bit more sharpening," Perez said.**

**"People are going to be like, 'I don't know,' but she ran really well. A 5:04 your first race back, after a 2:18 on the 4-by-800, I think that tends to show something about the character and ability of Madeline Perez, that's for sure," Hass said.**

**In the 3,200 relay, Perez got the baton with a slim lead and quickly opened it, but Downers North senior Stephanie Urbancik passed Perez with 250 meters left en route to a lifetime-best 2:14.9 anchor split.**

**Urbancik later won the 800 by only .41 over Graham and was part of the winning 1,600 relay (4:00.84). The 800 times are ranked No. 17 and 18 in the state.**

**For the 3,200 relay, Graham ran a career-best 2:15.7 on the second leg, followed by Perez, Rogers (2:23.3) and Sakach (2:24.5). Rogers was part of last year's state-qualifying 3,200 relay lineup, and Perez and Sakach were part of the 2012 second-place state team that ran a school-record 9:00.72.**

**"I was so proud of that (3,200 relay) team. Downers North is one of the top three teams in state and they went toe to toe with them," Glenbard West distance coach Paul Hass said. "For Madeline, her first race back, was pretty incredible to run 2:18 and 9:22 (for our team) and 37th (ranked) in the nation, not bad."**

**Perez was the two-time defending Silver champion in the 1,600. She was trying to become the first athlete to win the event three times, dating back to 1973.**

**Perez was in the hunt until strong finishes by OPRF freshman Mary Blankemeier (5:01.59) and Hinsdale Central sophomore Annie Zaher (5:02.68) over the final 250 meters. Blankemeier was fifth at the 2013 state cross country meet.**

The races were lifetime bests for Blankemeier and Zaher by .56 and 4.42 seconds, respectively. They are the No. 8, 10 and 15 season-best outdoor times.

"(Perez) might be disappointed, but to run 5:04 in her first mile back, that's incredible against obviously very good competition," Paul Hass said. "You have to give your hats off to the other competitors. But for Madeline going 5:04, hopefully we can keep on getting faster from here on out."

Perez's 1,600 school record is 4:52.21 from last season. Friday's time was five seconds shy of her indoor season best 4:59.04 Feb. 22 but just shy of her last 1,600 race March 8 at the Proviso West Invite. She won in 5:03.95 after earlier winning the 3,200 in 10:34.48.

"I always have pretty high expectations of myself, but I haven't raced since the beginning of March so I didn't fully know what to expect," Perez said.

"When I think about it, I haven't been running on land too long so this is kind of a good stepping stone. I wanted to get something in before sectionals. At least that was what I was hoping for throughout my comeback and I'm happy it was able to be conference because it's just a really special meet."

In her first outdoor Silver Meet for Glenbard West, Graham rose to the occasion with three solid races.

After a lifetime-best 3,200 relay split and lifetime-best open 800, Graham still had enough left for a decent leg in the 1,600 relay.

"I was pretty gassed at that point, but I tried," Graham said.

"It's always hard to do the 800 after that 4-by-800, but that's OK. (Paul Hass) said my first 200 (for the 3,200 relay) was like 31 seconds so that's really fast. I guess getting out hard helped, but when I was coming down the homestretch, he was like, 'Go, finish in 2:15, and I was like, 'What?' so I just sprinted."

As a freshman, Graham attended Glenbard East and was part of yet another of the state's best girls track conferences, the DuPage Valley. Graham swept the 3,200 at the indoor and outdoor DVC Meets and took fifth at state in the 3,200 (10:42.42), the highest finishing non-senior other than Perez.

On Friday, Graham would have taken the 800 if not for an inspired effort by Urbancik. Graham could not pass Urbancik down the homestretch but was 2.21 seconds ahead of third-place Downers North sophomore Maci Schaub.

"I got boxed out in the first 200 so I couldn't really execute my race plan the way I wanted to, but I still gave it a fight," Graham said.

"Senior year, her home track, conference meet, those are a lot of intangibles (for Urbancik), just like Emma Reifel last year," Paul Hass said. "Urbancik probably felt the same way, 'Nobody's going to beat me on this day.' You've got to take your hat off and give her credit. She was something special, no question about it."

Luczak nearly pulled out the 3,200 but finished a close second by 2.35 seconds to Hinsdale Central freshman Alexa Haff (11:14.67), who was second at the state cross country meet. Luczak edged third-place LT senior Lexy Rudofski (11:19.00) by 1.98 seconds.

It was Luczak's first race since her fifth-place 11:09.42 at the Pariseau Invite, a race won by Graham. It was only the third 3,200 ever and second 3,200 outdoors for Haff, who did not compete in track in junior high.

"I feel like everyone in the race, of course, was dying a little bit. I heard that Alexa was sick, and I have a cold," Luczak said. "I haven't had one race this year where I've been healthy and not injured. I did my best so I was happy with my race.

"Of course, it's just an honor of being all-conference. No matter how my time is or anything, I'm just happy with how I did place-wise so that was

good.”

Luczak most recently returned to cross training again to tend to a strained muscle. She said she feels healthy again and is ready for the postseason.

“It was one of those things where I didn’t want to push it, especially so close to the bigger meets,” Luczak said. “I’m hoping I’m running (at sectionals). Even if I’m injured, even if I have a stress fracture, I’m on it.”

Sophomore Kathryn Kenwood used another strong 3,200 finish to add a fourth-place finish (11:46.01). She slowly reeled in Downers North sophomore Grace Maletich (6th, 11:58.72) who challenged the top-three finishers for the first mile but then fell back. Kenwood passed Maletich near the start of the final lap.

“I started seeing her fade away from the front pack. I knew I had to go,” Kenwood said. “I wanted to catch up to her and make sure I passed her. It helped (to push me).

“I think I ran OK. I probably could have gone a little faster, based on the time, but overall I’m happy with my place.”

In high jump, Lupu tied for third by clearing 4-11 for the second straight invite, one inch shy of her personal best. Lupu said she had some problems focusing early, but she soon progressed from missing 4-5 on her first attempt.

“It was just kind of sloppy that time, but then I stepped it up and I got it,” Lupu said. “I feel good and I felt better when I was jumping than I had in a while. I kind of felt almost numb. My body was just numb the whole time when I was jumping but it worked out. I didn’t feel like it was conference, and I was kind of all over the place with my mind.”

Sophomores Jessica Michel, Sharon Murray and Isabella Salafatinos and Winans were fifth in the 400 relay (51.77) and 800 relay (1:50.13) – both season-best times for the relays.

Senior Erin Spiech (100 high hurdles in 18.17), Michel (200 in 27.67) and Clark (100 in 13.58) each made their event finals and finished fifth. Junior Deena Harnboonzong also reached the 100 hurdles finals and was sixth (18.29). Spiech, Michel and Harnboonzong achieved season bests.

Senior Dee Dee Burns (89-6 in discus), Emma Gambol (15-10 1/2 in long jump), Rogers (1,600 in 5:18.17) also took sixth. Michel tied for sixth in pole vault (8-6).

Rogers broke 5:20 for the first time in the 1,600. Her strong kick was only :46 behind third-place Hinsdale Central junior Sarah Brennan (lifetime-best 5:17.71) and .68 from fourth-place Rudofski (5:17.49).

"With 200 (meters left), building up to finish strong, I kind of think, 'I can't really get them,' but then halfway through I'm like, 'Oh, I could get them,' " Rogers said. "It's that position where I finish so close behind them I feel like, 'Oh, I could have done it.' If it was that close, I could have got them."

-- by Bill Stone