

Senior Grace Lupo already has an added responsibility this season for the Glenbard West girls track team.

At the Feb. 15 season opener, Lupo took over leading the Hilltoppers in singing the school song after meets, following the graduation of Grace Walker.

"I almost feel like I'm doing the same moves as her and in the same sequence, but I don't mean to," Lupo said. "I kind of tried to (experiment after our Feb. 22 meet), but it didn't really work out too well. I'm going to throw in some more stuff as the season goes on."

Lupo also is in new territory as a high jumper. On Saturday, March 1, Lupo cleared 4 feet-10 inches for the first time indoors as one of seven event winners for the varsity at their home quadrangular in Glen Ellyn.

The Hilltoppers (74.5 points) finished second behind St. Charles North (93.5) while defeating Fremd (67) and Mother McAuley (9).

The victorious 3,200-meter relay team of junior Lisa Luczak, sophomore Lindsay Graham, junior Julia Sakach and senior Madeline Perez (9:48.2 manual time) posted the state's No. 3 fastest time so far this indoor season, based on results reported by DyeStat Illinois.

Graham (1,600 in 5:06.7) and Perez (800 in 2:18.6) also won individual events with both times becoming No. 2 in the state. Perez owns the top 1,600 time with a 4:58.8 Feb. 22.

Senior JaSharra Clark (300 in 47.1) and sophomores Emma Winans (400 in 1:05.5) and Grace Rogers (3,200 in 11:41.5) also were event winners.

Two members of last year's state qualifiers, juniors Emma Gambol and Mary Nevins, did not compete because of injuries.

"Considering that we held back, the results are pretty good," Glenbard West coach Kelly Hass said. "Grace Lupo was huge, for her (clearing) 4-10, and (High jump coach Mark Staron) said she had three really great

attempts at 5-0."

The meet was somewhat bittersweet for Lupo and other seniors since it was their final home indoor meet. The Hiloppers' last three indoor varsity meets are at the Proviso West Invitational March 8 and at York March 14 before the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet March 21 at Proviso West.

Perez had quite a final home workout. She competed with the 3,200 relay, won the 800 and then led off the second-place 1,600 relay with Sakach, Clark and Jessica Johanson (4:26.0).

The only time Perez has run that particular sequence of three events was sophomore year at the same meet. Her other previous three-event agenda was the 3,200 relay, 1,600 and 1,600 relay.

"It feels good to just be getting back into things. This is my last race in this fieldhouse. I was just trying to go out on a nice note," Perez said. "Really it was (Hass and distance coach Paul Hass') call. It's early and we haven't really done any fast work so this was kind of nice to get some shorter races in. You don't want to kill your body doing the longest ones every single week so this was a nice change of pace."

In high jump, Lupo plowed through 4-4, 4-6, 4-8 and 4-10 without a miss and had three strong, although unsuccessful, attempts at what would have been a career-best 5-0. Lupo's career-high of 4-11 has occurred outdoors twice, most recently at the 2013 outdoor Silver Meet.

"This is the first time I've actually made it over on all of my first attempts," Lupo said. "After today, I feel like I can get (5-0). Like maybe next week, but I'm moving my way up slowly. I think I'll be getting 5-0 eventually but hopefully sooner rather than later because I don't want to be stuck in the 4s any longer."

Lupo said she will begin focusing on clearing higher heights with senior Madelyn O'Gorman, who was third Saturday (4-6). Lupo cleared 4-8 in the season opener but also rolled her ankle while competing in long jump.

Lupo cleared 4-6 at Downers Grove North Feb. 22.

"This week, I didn't really feel it. My legs just felt fresh when I was going through it. That helped," Lupo said. "I had a bunch of support because my friends came today. They showed up and they were cheering for me so that felt good and I feel like that helped me through it."

The 3,200 relay also is on pace for a great season after winning by 8.3 seconds over a decent sub-10:00 effort by Fremd (9:56.5).

Graham ran a career- and team-best 2:21.0 split in the second leg, followed by anchor Perez (2:23.6), Sakach (2:30.8) and Luczak (2:32.8). The Hilltoppers' other 3,200 relay lineup of Julia Kochert, Colleen Luczak, Madeleine Winter and Hannah Arduino was fifth (11:50.1).

Graham received the baton in third place but gave the Hilltoppers a slight lead when she handed off to Sakach.

"I was really happy," said Graham, whose best 800 all of last season was 2:22. "Mr. Hass said the time goal for us (was sub-9:50), but I wasn't sure if he told any of the other girls," Graham said.

Perez and Luczak qualified for state last year in the open 3,200 and 1,600 with Perez claiming state titles in both events. Sakach was injured last spring after competing at state as a freshman on the record-setting, second-place state 3,200 relay with Perez. Graham, who transferred to Glenbard West this school year from Glenbard East, also qualified for the 2013 state track meet in the 3,200 and was an all-state fifth.

Often last season, Graham would run the 3,200 and then the 400 to work on speed. Sometimes she also would add the 1,600 relay. For Saturday, Graham had momentum for the 1,600 after her strong 3,200 relay split, but at first she didn't want to know just how well she ran so that it wouldn't affect her 1,600 performance. Paul Hass happened to tell her anyway.

"It was good so I was glad he told me," Graham said. "I think I got a good

week of training in. I was confident."

Graham dominated the 1,600, winning by 16 seconds. Even with the race already in hand, Graham was battling the race clock, which was somewhat harder because it not displayed at the finish line of Glenbard West home meets.

"I wanted to break 5:10 but I didn't really verbalize it because I thought it was a very hard goal," Graham said. "I had my sister (Charlotte) and Lisa (Luczak) yell times at me every lap so I knew where she was. Mr. Hass tells us splits every quarter of a mile (400 meters) so that was helpful."

Perez also cruised to victory in the 800, winning by 10.5 seconds over Luczak (2:29.1), who took second by 6.9 seconds.

Perez went out hard and gained control quickly, but she continued to run focused. Time also was the determining factor of her performance, and Perez tied her all-time best for an open 800.

"I was just really trying to go after it today and leave it all out there. I was, I guess, kind of pedal to the metal," Perez said. "It's only five laps (on our 160-meter track) so you don't have much time to kind of sit back."

Last season, Perez impressively won the individual distance double at state despite warm temperatures. Saturday's three races presented different challenges but she still was able to turn in a strong 1:05.4 leadoff leg for the 1,600 leg.

Perez trailed most of her leg but then came on strong to give the Hilltoppers a slight lead as she handed off to Sakach, who ran a team-best 1:04.3.

"It was fun. It's always hard. You're definitely stepping it up a notch speedwise (adding an 800 and 400)," Perez said. "I haven't done a 3,200 yet (this season). They're all just their own individual races. No one is the same. You need to kind of prepare differently for all of them. When you're in the race itself, it's a lot different, too. They're all fun, though."

Before Saturday, Winans and Rogers also hadn't previously run the events they won this season.

The 3,200 was the Hilltoppers' most successful event. Rogers (11:41.5) and Megan Ozog (12:02.8) were first and second and Annika Manning (12:22.9) was fifth.

"I was happy with how I did. My goal today was to go under 12:00 and I did," Rogers said. "I wanted to start fast and I did, and I think that helped. It was cool (to win). I didn't have the goal of winning or anything."

Even as a freshman, Rogers won a couple of 3,200s on the varsity level last season and went on to compete at state with the 3,200 relay. She enters this season at a much higher level after being one of four all-staters for the Hilltoppers' cross country team's first state team title Nov. 9.

"Mentally and definitely I'm physically up for it, (running) better," Rogers said. "I hope to run (the 3,200) a few more times this season. Definitely I like that race and I definitely want to get better, do better than last year."

Rogers also displayed her speed later in the meet by taking third in any event she rarely runs, the 400 (1:08.9).

"I've only done it once (last year) and I liked it. It was cool, something different," Rogers said. "It's definitely not my race, but I like it. It's fun trying something different."

Winans, the 400 champion Saturday, has been receiving a steady diet of the 1,600 relay along with long jump, her new event for 2014. On Saturday, she was able to join her teammates standing along the track to cheer on the climactic finish of the 1,600 relay.

"This is the first time I haven't run it (this season). It's so fun to just watch everyone and see their faces when everyone's doing the wave or something crazy (on the sidelines)," Winans said.

In her 400, Winans won 1.2 seconds. At Downers North, Winans made her season debut in an open event when she raced the 300.

"My ankle had actually been hurting this week so I was glad to just have one (running) event," Winans said. "Doing an open 400 (only) let me focus more it so it was good. It was good to try something different because I've been doing (1,600) relays for this season so far."

Winans competed the latter half of her freshman track season with a cast. She broke her wrist after she braced running into the padded wall at Glenbard West after a 50-meter dash.

To help ease her nerves of an expanded workload this season, Kelly Hass suggested that Winans add long jump, whose prelims are before any of her running events. Winans jumped 13-6 Saturday, three inches from her best, to finish seventh.

"Since you have three tries, it's kind of a low-key, low-pressure event to do," Winans said.

"Last year, I had a lot of anxiety. I got really nervous before races, especially (the 1,600 relay). (Long jump has) given me another thing to focus on, kind of something to let me not have to worry too much about my races, kind of just getting work and stuff out of my system before running starts. And I've gotten closer with some of the girls on the team that normally do field events so I've gotten to know them better."

Junior Rachel Aubrey made her season debut and was third in triple jump (29-5). The 4-lap relay (Ellen Daniels, Chloe Powell, Amani Bader, Johanson in 1:37.0) was third, Ashley Schleck (25-6 in shot put), Daniels (200 in 29.8) were fourth, Jessica Michel tied for fourth in pole vault (6-6) and Erin Spiech (50 hurdles in 49.0) and Morgan McEnroe (300 in 49.0) were fifth.

As a performer, Lupo is gaining confidence with the school song. Lupo previously had filled in for Walker but only on a temporary basis or at

junior varsity meets, such as sophomore Katie Goleash did for the Hilltoppers' JV meet Feb. 20 at Glenbard East.

Walker led the team with a baton in her hand. After the season opener, Lupo just happened to be returning a baton when Kelly Hass summoned her over and asked her about singing.

"I'm like, 'OK.' It was just sudden. I didn't really expect it," Lupo said. "I'm really excited that I get to take it over. I didn't know that I was going to be in charge of it."

Frosh-soph

Glenbard West freshman Anna Gambol displayed successful and powerful bursts in quite a contrast of events Saturday.

After easily winning the shot put with 28 feet-6 inches, Gambol anchored the 4-lap relay to victory and helped the Hilltoppers' frosh-soph team remain undefeated by winning their four-team home meet March 1.

"For both of them, I feel really powerful," Gambol said. "I think I'm getting a really good spring out of my blocks when I'm running. For shot put, I think I need to pull my arm back more, but otherwise, I'm getting pretty explosive."

Glenbard West (109 points) dominated Fremd (64.5), St. Charles North (49) and Mother McAuley (7.5) and won nine of the 16 events.

Sophie Cvengros, Emily Asselmeier, Stephanie Perez and Gambol captured the 4-lap relay (1:35.5) by just .3 over Fremd. Just when the Vikings were closing on Gambol, she put on a surge out of the final turn to close out the victory.

"I tried to save some energy for the end. I like (sprinting) a lot," Gambol said. "It was really fun. The handoff wasn't as well as I thought it would go because it was my first time doing the relay, but other than that, I think I did really well. I leaned in the corners and it was nice."

Sophomores Kate Dorsey (800 in 2:34.4), Kathryn Kenwood (3,200 in 12:21.8), Abby Moody (4-6 in high jump), Sharon Murray (400 in 1:09.2), Nicole Rogus (300 in 46.3) and Abby Shaver (1,600 in 6:00.8) also won individual events. Rogus, sophomore Caitlyn Reick, Cvengros and Asselmeier won the 1,600 relay in 4:38.3.

"The frosh-soph team is doing super great," Glenbard West coach Kelly Hass said. "They've been full of surprises. It's been fabulous."

Asselmeier and Cvengros were part of both relay victories. Asselmeier anchored the 1,600 relay and brought the Hilltoppers to victory by 4.3 seconds over Fremd. Cvengros put them in front during the third leg just as she passed Asselmeier with one lap to go before their handoff.

"It was really exciting. Sophie's a great runner and it's her freshman year so we were a little worried that she'd be scared but she did awesome. We're really proud of her," Asselmeier said. "The 4-by-1 would definitely be one of my favorite races. It's a good length. We were all very competitive in that race, too. It was nice to win that one."

Last season, Gambol saw the Hilltoppers compete several times since her older sister Emma competes for the team. Emma Gambol was an all-stater last year in triple jump, but Anna said she doesn't plan to compete in any jumping events, at least this season.

"She's been really good. She told me about track and how I can make a lot of friends and how everything is really easy once you get into it," Anna Gambol said. "She told me about how her classes were and how she thought I would do and it really helped me."

Gambol won shot by nearly three feet and just missed her season best of 28-5. Gambol also won her heat of the 300 and ended up third overall (49.9) behind Rogus and Murray (48.8).

In the outdoor season, Gambol's best throwing event should be discus, where she set the seventh- and eighth-grade girls records at Hadley Junior

High School and already is on the verge of exceeding 100 feet. Gambol began shot towards the end of seventh grade.

"I feel really powerful when I do (shot) and it feels really nice coming out of my hand," Gambol said. "I have a couple of things I need to work on and I know what they are so I know how to improve."

The Hilltoppers swept the top four spots in the 1,600 with Shaver, Nicole Berneche (6:02.5), Jenna Kelly (6:11.5) and Annie Pasterz (6:20.2).

Besides the 300, they went 1-2-3 in the 3,200 with Kenwood, Reick (12:50.3) and Meredith Miscinski (13:58.4) and 1-2 in the 400 with Murray and Maddy Burt (1:13.4). Burt (50 hurdles in 9.8), Asselmeier (50 in 7.7), Grace Keane (26-9 in triple jump) and the 3,200 relay (Shaver, Burt, Alexa Fausey, Dorsey in 10:56.1) also were second.

Shaver's 1,600 victory was slightly bittersweet. There were no clocks at the finish line so it wasn't until moments after the race that Shaver found out that she just missed breaking 6:00.

"(Distance coach Paul Hass) was like, 'So close to breaking 6:00,' and I was like, 'Noo,'" Shaver said. "I know. So close, so close, but at least it's the beginning of the season. I could tell I was going at a pretty good pace and I was glad I was in first place, but I had no idea (of my time)."

From the Hilltoppers' frosh-soph lineup Saturday, Kenwood was part of the state championship cross country lineup and the team's No. 6 Finisher (63rd overall). Dorsey, Shaver, Reick, Berneche and senior Annika Manning were the team's five alternates.

"I was really pleased with cross country. It was the best so I'm hoping track will be good, too, and I can just work on my speed more," Shaver said. "I think my best outdoor time (last season) was a 5:48 so I want to get down to 5:45, below that. I was super excited so I hope I can get back down there again."

Murray also has come back stronger this track season. On Saturday, she sacrificed her time somewhat to focus on form but still won the 400 and was second in the 300. She also was fifth in long jump (11-7).

"Lots of experience (has helped) and I feel stronger and I feel faster this year," Murray said. "I'm trying to keep my chin level because I tend to go up and that's bad. And I'm trying to get out faster, so I can be in front of everybody."

During the summer, Murray participated in Glenbard West's running camp. She just returned from cheerleading, where she competed with the Hilltoppers at the state meet, but did conditioning and practicing on her own.

At state cheerleading, the Hilltoppers finished 20th in the Co-ed division in their third consecutive state berth. Murray and track members Rachel Aubrey, Bader, Kelsy Lentz and Allie Roule were among the team's 20 competitors.

"I think it's the same with both (sports for) endurance. You've really got to keep it up. It's totally different muscles you're using, but they're both cardio sports," Murray said. "I would do more weight lifting (for cheerleading) and it would be more flexibility based because we need to be a lot more flexible. For track, you don't really need to be that flexible."

Dorsey and Kenwood are newcomers to track this season. As freshmen, Dorsey played girls lacrosse and Kenwood played girls soccer. This past fall was Kenwood's first cross country season.

"I think I'm going to stick with track (outdoors). I'm enjoying the team and everything better than I did soccer," Kenwood said. "Over break, I went to play soccer with some of my friends and I love the sport, but I felt a better connection with cross country."

There was a cross country feel to Kenwood's victory. The frosh-soph and varsity races were combined and Kenwood wasn't really sure how she was doing in regards of the frosh-soph level.

Her 3,200 frosh-soph victory came with the fifth-fastest time overall and third-best among all Hilltoppers. At the end, Kenwood passed Manning (12:22.9), who was fifth in the varsity race.

"I didn't even know who was in frosh-soph. If someone passed me, I was like, 'I don't know.' I just ran the best I could and I didn't worry about what (place) I got," Kenwood said.

"(Paul Hass) just told me to pace myself with Annika and Caitlyn (Reick) and I'd be good. I did the 1,600 last week and I thought that it would be a little slower start because it's a 3,200, but it wasn't. I was like, 'Ahh.' I heard Mr. Hass say, 'Kathryn, get up.' So then I started, but it was good."

Kenwood is completely new to track. She's gained confidence as a runner from competing in several many high-level cross country meets, which usually were 3.0 miles, but competing on a track and being part of relays have been adjustments.

"It's a lot of fun. I get really nervous, though, because there's a shorter time (for races) than cross country," Kenwood said. "After the 1,600, if you're not liking how you're doing, you're like, 'OK, let's go,' but for the 800, for example, you're done before it starts to you have to do good throughout the whole thing.

"(For relays), to realize it's a whole team and you're handing off to someone, it's fun to see how they do. That race gets me the most nervous."

In the 3,200 relay, Dorsey's 2:38.4 split as the anchor was a team best and personal best. Dorsey continued the momentum in the open 800, where she cut her personal best by another 2.0 seconds to win by 1.9 seconds.

"I think (the 3,200 relay) just got me pumped up and ready. By knowing I ran faster, it made me want to run my next one even faster so I'm pretty happy it worked out like that," Dorsey said. "I don't want to go out too fast, obviously, so sometimes I'll run my own pace for a little bit and then

as the people around me start to die, I like to then try and pass them."

Coming off her best cross country season also has made Dorsey hungry for more success. So far, she has run the 1,600, her favorite event, and the 3,200 only once.

"I just want to make it to state again, I guess, as an alternate for something, or run, if I can, which would be nice," Dorsey said.

"I've been playing (lacrosse) for a long time and I felt kind of burnt out so I was like, 'I think it's time to move on and stuff.' Obviously, I had a really good season in cross country that I was happy with so I'm like, 'Maybe that'll translate into a good track season.' So far it has been so I'm pretty happy."

Asselmeier agrees that several newcomers have made the Hilltoppers stronger this season on the frosh-soph level and enjoys how she can lend her indoor experience. Asselmeier went on to play soccer last spring.

"I got a good sense of what the meets are like and how to run them. We're all a really big family so it's a fun sport," Asselmeier said. "Last year, I was just a little worried about how everything was going to go and how meets were going to go. This year, I'm a little bit more used to it. We have a lot of freshmen this year and it's a bigger team so I'm doing a little better this year, I think."

Taking fourth and fifth were Becka Dau (25-2) and Melina Thurmond (24-3) and the 3,200 relays of Kelly, Charlotte Graham, Pasterz and Berneche (11:39.2) and Sarah Cholewinski, Grace Zemenak, Lindsay Lifka and Macy Lemke (11:56.9). Claire Ficarella (25-4 in triple jump) and Keane (50 in 7.8) also were fourth and Lentz (50 hurdles in 10.4) and Moody (800 in 2:47.3) also were fifth.

-- by Bill Stone