

Freshman Katie Hohe isn't yet an official member of the Glenbard West girls cross country team's Wolfpack that completes the No. 2 to 5 behind sophomore frontrunner Lindsey Payne.

On Saturday, Oct. 3, Hohe made a case for joining that integral group thanks to her performance -- running all by herself.

Hohe took second in the No. 6 flight at Wheaton North's Falcon Classic at St. James Farm in Warrenville with a personal-record time of 18:07 -- also the Hilltoppers' fifth fastest overall time of the day on the 2.95-mile course.

"I was coming up to the finish line (clock). I was very shocked," Hohe said. "In the distance, I saw 17:52 and I was like, 'Oh my gosh. I'm going to get a (personal record). I've never run this fast before.' It was just a very cool moment for me."

The Hilltoppers had many memorable races in winning the invite for the second year in a row.

In a format in which results from seven flight races are combined, Glenbard West (16 points) only won one flight with Payne but also had four second places, one third and an official fourth that possibly was a third place as well.

Payne dominated the No. 1 top flight (16:43.8) by 45.3 seconds.

Seniors Kathryn Kenwood (17:45.8 at No. 2 flight), Grace Rogers (18:02 at No. 3) and sophomore Claire Kenwood (18:35.1 at No. 7) joined Hohe in finishing second. Senior Abigail Shaver was third (18:23.7 at No. 5) and junior Janie Nabholz (18:17.0 at No. 4) was fourth.

The Hilltoppers won over New Trier (22) and Yorkville (27) after trailing the Trevians 7-13 following flights No. 7-3.

"It may have been our best overall team performance as far as 1 through 7," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said. "We just kind of hope to get (Hohe) up with the rest of the pack because she wasn't in the top five until that meet. Now she can see them (timewise) and I think she can do that. She's getting better every meet."

Glenbard West won last year's invite with 13 points and four flight champions. This year, there was an additional challenge because the invite conflicted with homecoming later that day.

In 2014, the Hilltoppers' race-day conflict was with the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet, but it didn't keep them from again winning the varsity title and the junior varsity race.

Rogers and senior Christina Sedall, who competed in Saturday's open race, also

were members of this year's homecoming court.

"Mr. Hass and (assistant coach Mark Staron) congratulated us on that, how we all did amazing at the meet and everyone did exactly what they were supposed to do even with all of the distractions we could have let hinder our races," Rogers said.

"We didn't let that affect us negatively at all."

Last year, Kathryn Kenwood scrambled on the way back from the Silver Meet to get shoes for the homecoming dance. This year, she was prepared for the dance, at least physically.

"After the race I was like, 'Crap, we have Homecoming tonight. I have to get things done.' I had everything, but nothing was planned out because I was like, 'I'm not worrying about it until after the meet,' " Kenwood said.

Hohe had several concerns simply as a runner Saturday. She was coming off strong performances at Peoria's Detweiller Park Sept. 19 and in the Hilltoppers' home triangular Sept. 24. She had run a personal record and was the team's No. 6 varsity finisher in both events.

However, Hohe said that having to race individually Saturday was a bit intimidating, especially because she had never competed in a race without teammates.

"Mr. Hass said that I would probably be one of the frontrunners. But don't go out too fast or I won't have too good of a race," Hohe said. "I saved energy for the second and third mile so that really helped me have the race I had."

Hohe went out in 5:57 for the first mile and closed in 5:52. With a late surge, Hohe moved from third to finish just 2.4 seconds behind New Trier freshman Caroline Trukenbrod (18:02.7) and 2.3 seconds ahead of third-place Yorkville sophomore Alyssa Edwards (18:07.4).

"I used all of my energy and passed (Edwards), and if I had 50 more meters, I probably could have caught (Trukenbrod)," Hohe said. "I think I just didn't start my kick early enough. (Trukenbrod) was too far ahead of me to catch. I probably have to work on when to gradually build up my finish."

Payne, Rogers, Kathryn Kenwood and Nabholz returned from last year's varsity flight lineup.

In 2014, Kenwood won the No. 4 flight in 18:15.1 and by 15.8 seconds. At No. 2 Saturday, she clinched the team title with a furious finish that carried her from the back of a second-through-sixth lead pack into second place to Grant senior Madison Romig (17:42.7) and 2.7 seconds from fourth.

"There was that hill right before the finish so going up it I was like, 'There's no way I'm finishing hard and then I just kept hearing Mr. Hass in my head and I was like, 'Kick it. OK, I'll finish hard,' " Kenwood said. "Just the adrenaline and everyone cheering and screaming (pushed me)."

New Trier's entry eighth in the No. 2 flight. The Hilltoppers were now tied for first at 15 points heading into the No. 1 flight with Payne the overwhelming favorite to win:

"Kathryn Kenwood was one of the heroes of the meet," Hass said. "With about 500 meters to go, she could have been anywhere from first to sixth. I yelled at her, 'You win this flight, we win the meet,' and she ended up passing all but one. We were trailing up to that point. That was a big eight-point swing and that was the difference in the meet."

Payne said going into her flight race she didn't know how well everyone had finished, including Kathryn Kenwood, because she was busy warming up.

"Honestly, I wasn't really thinking about (the team title) at all. I was really, really nervous and just focused on my race honestly," Payne said. "I knew coming into the meet that we were probably going to have an upper hand just because we've been training so hard."

Payne took control of the race early with a 5:32 first-mile split, followed by a 5:45. Her final .95 in 5:26 probably was affected by heavy winds, some poor footing and finishing uphill.

Second-place Naperville Central junior Alana Austin (17:29.1) had the invite's second-fastest time. New Trier senior Oona Jung-Berman was seventh (17:38.1).

"My goal is to just push myself in the second mile," Payne said. "Sometimes I get afraid if I do that I won't have enough to finish at the end but Mr. Hass tells me I'll always have enough so I've just got to trust that."

"You almost take (her first place) for granted but we don't because we know how what it takes to work so hard like that," Hass said. "We have so much confidence in her ability. She's so mature in how she approaches races and how she runs. We knew that if Kathryn Kenwood can do this (well), it's fine because we'll only get one point in the last flight. That's nothing against the competition. It's just the faith in Lindsey Payne."

It was quite a change of fortune for Payne from the 2014 Falcon Classic, even though she was a winner as well by taking No. 2 in 17:49.6. Austin also improved significantly from fifth in that race in 18:21.8.

"Last year was a little rough because it was snowing and freezing," Payne said. "I was a little freshman warming up and I didn't really know what I was doing because it was the first time I had to warm up by myself. I couldn't feel my feet. Literally they were numb and I was freaking out. It ended up being fine but I definitely improved (Saturday)."

Claire Kenwood and Shaver went through some of the same concerns Saturday in their flight debuts.

Kenwood set the tone by taking second in the No. 7 flight to New Trier sophomore Rachel Weix (18:25.2). It was roughly 15 seconds faster than what Kenwood ran in last year's frosh-soph race at the invite – a team-best 16th in 19:50.1.

"(Last year's invite) definitely was not one of my good races," Kenwood said. "Running in the flight race was weird but it was really cool so I just had a lot of fun with it, too."

Shaver was last year's junior-senior open champion by 37.4 seconds, yet she improved her 2014 time of 18:43.5 by almost 20 seconds Saturday. Yorkville freshman Nicole Greyer won the flight in 17:35.8 – the fifth fastest time of the entire invite.

"Mr. Hass was telling me getting third in any flight is pretty good no matter what. Just for how I've been running, I was disappointed with my time," Shaver said.

"The flights are a weird race to run because they're not with your team. Usually I can see Kathryn and Grace and I'm like, 'OK.' They help push me to go faster."

Rogers won the No. 3 flight in 2014 by nearly eight seconds, but she was about a second faster Saturday.

"I love that race because there are not that many girls in it," Rogers said. "I was pretty proud that I never gave up chasing that girl who was in front of me the whole time (New Trier junior Caroline Fix). She did get pretty far ahead of me at one point, but I kept trying to move towards her at the end. I was able to close on her."

Nabholz won last year's No. 5 flight in 18:24.6, 7.6 seconds slower than her time Saturday. Nabholz may have finished third but she was awarded fourth by .1 behind by Neuqua Valley sophomore Corinna Pena (18:16.9) because of a chip timing issue. Runners were timed by sensor mats that detect chips tied to their shoes.

"My chip just didn't work so they just put me down as fourth," Nabholz said. "It

was really close. Everyone said that I beat her, but I don't know."

"Our team and Mr. Hass believe that Janie really was third. It's just that her chip didn't work," Rogers said.

-- by Bill Stone