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Glenbard West at Downers Grove North w/Palatine, Crete-Monee



Perez

Reifel

Although it's been more than three months since Glenbard West junior Madeline Perez won the Class 3A girls cross country state title in state-record time, the moment will remain with her throughout the track season.

"I still get so excited every time I think about it. I don't think that feeling is every going to go away," Perez said.

"It's kind of nice because I'm buckling down again, just getting back into the swing of things but cross country definitely is a good motivator for me and kind of reminds me what I have to work for and what I want, goals, and how it feels to accomplish them."

If her indoor track debut is any indication, Perez is headed more big accomplishments in May. In the Hilltoppers' four-team meet at Downers Grove North Feb. 16, Perez easily won the 3,200-meter run in 10:39.1, and she still wanted to run faster. Perez missed the Feb. 9 season opener to take the American College Test.

“I personally had a little higher goal set for myself so there was a little disappointment after the race, I’m not going to lie, but I have to keep reminding myself it is the first race of the season,” Perez said. “To get that first race under your belt is always key, and then you can kind of see where you’re at and know what you’ve got to do.”

In a tightly contested varsity battle, the Hilltoppers scored 53 points to finish just ahead of Crete-Monee (51 points) and just behind Downers North (68.5) and Palatine (61.5). The Glenbard West sophomores were edged by Downers North 76-70, followed by Palatine (63) and Crete-Monee (24).

Other varsity victories for the Hilltoppers came from senior Emma Reifel (800 in 2:19.4), sophomores Emma Gambol (300 in 43.1) and Mary Nevins (15 feet-2 1/2 inches in long jump) , the 3,200 relay (freshman Caitlyn Reick, Reifel, freshmen Christina Sedall and Grace Rogers in 9:55.0) and the 1,600 relay (Gambol, Reifel, Perez, Nevins in 4:13.8).

“What I really liked about the meet overall was we didn’t worry about times. We competed,” Glenbard West head coach Kelly Hass said. “What a great lesson for the young kids to learn, and we are full of young kids. We have a team of 95 kids right now, which is 25 more than I’ve ever had.”

One lesson is the added congestion of indoor track races, especially on 160-meter tracks such as Downers North and Glenbard West. Assistant coach Paul Hass said Perez spent much of her 3,200 in Lane 2 rather than the inside lane primarily because the varsity and sophomore entries were combined for one race.

Nevertheless, Perez came through at the halfway point in 5:07 and won the

race by 30 seconds.

“That’s a good spot (5:07), but I’m not too happy with my second mile. I just fizzled a little bit. It’s good just because I know that’s kind of what I need to work on,” Perez said.

“I don’t want to make any excuses. I think there were about 12 girls in the race. Sometimes you just get stuck in Lane 2 and you’ve just got to deal with it. There’s a lot of weaving in indoor (track), period.”

Reifel continued her strong start to indoor track with three more victories. Often the younger or youngest member of state relays in the past, Reifel already has emerged as one of the team leaders.

“Thank God she does it all perfectly well. She does it right no matter what,” Kelly Hass said. “She’s one of the hardest workers on the team. She just takes all of the kids with her, like, ‘Come on. We’re going to do this now.’ She is definitely a leader by example. That’s what we need, not just do what I do, but do what I do and here’s why.”

Besides the individual state title by Perez at the state cross country meet, the Hilltoppers also finished third as a team. It was the program’s third state trophy ever and first since the first two years of the state meet.

Reifel was the Hilltoppers’ No. 3 finisher behind Perez and sophomore all-stater Lisa Luczak, who was sixth. Rogers and Sedall were the team’s No. 4 and 5 finishers at state.

“I got more miles in the summer than I ever have before,” Reifel said. “I think that’s really carried through (to track), especially with just my

confidence coming from cross country. I was really excited for the season so going into it that helped me a lot.”

A 2012 state track qualifier in the 800, Reifel turned in an impressive sub-2:20 effort at the quad to earn first by 1.4 seconds over Palatine’ senior Tess Wasowicz (2:20.8).

The Hilltoppers have three returnees from last year’s state runner-up 3,200 relay, but Reifel was only one who competed at Downers North as the Hilltoppers won by 1.9 seconds over Palatine (9:56.9). Wasowicz was a member of the Pirates’ fourth-place 3,200 relay at state in 2012 and a state qualifier in the 1,600.

The Hilltoppers’ 1,600 relay, which won by 1.7 seconds over Crete-Monee, included Gambol and Nevins from last year’s state lineup in the event. Senior Cynthia Mote is the other returnee from that group.

“That (1,600 relay victory) was a lot of fun. It was really exciting,” Reifel said. “(Gambol) came out the first meet of the season and ran a 63 (second split) and last year I think she finished at 61 so I’m really excited to see how everyone can really come together this year.”

Reifel hopes she can help the team additionally as one of the senior team captains along with Mote, Grace Walker and Leah Landry.

“It’s been fun to really take the reins and kind of be the leader in a lot of situations but it’s been fun and great, a new experience,” Reifel said. “What we’re really working on this year as a team is really staying together. It’s really what is going to make us the strongest. If we have a big team dynamic, cheering each other on, it’s going to push each person to do her best.”

Nevins won long jump by one-half inch with her third of four jumps. Gambol nearly won high jump by clearing 4-10 on her first attempt, but she ended up second on a tiebreaker going back to needing one more attempt to clear 4-8.

In the sophomore-level meet, Isabella Salafatinos won the 200 (28.7) and 300 (45.9) and the 1,600 relay of Sharon Murray, Maddy Burt, Hannah Paterakis and Morgan McEnroe (4:47.1) won a virtual dead heat at the finish line with Downers North (4:47.1).

Glenbard West swept the top three places in the 200 with Salafatinos, Melissa Carter (29.4) and Emma Winans (29.9). Winans also tied for second in the 300 (47.5).

Hannah Arduino (3,200 in 13:46.7), Megan Ozog (1,600 in 5:43.4), Burt (55 hurdles in 10.5) and The 3,200 relay (Ozog, Abby Shaver, Jessica Hajny, Burt in 10:47.9) also were second, and Paterakis was part of a three-way tie for second in the 55 (8.2). Also taking third were Shay Kiker (27-2 1/2 in triple jump), Shaver (800 in 2:41.7) and the 4-lap relay (Melissa Carter, Murray, Kiker, Jessica Johanson in 1:39.3).

-- by Bill Stone