

**At the 2012 Class 3A girls cross country state meet, Glenbard West sophomore Lindsay Graham took the first step toward history for her former school.**

**Then competing for Glenbard East, Graham was a somewhat surprising 20th to earn all-state honors for a top-25 finish. Nobody in Glenbard East history has been all-state more than twice.**

**Graham's family moved and now she competes for the Hilltoppers. On Saturday, Nov. 9, she hopes to help them capture their first state title -- even after nearly having her season end prematurely because of a knee injury.**

**"Being on a team that could possibly win state is a huge deal and I wasn't going to give up on my teammates unless I had to," Graham said. "If I can do it, I'm not going to stop, even though it kind of sucks to be way behind where I should be. I still want to help them."**

**The Hilltoppers showed they intend to be in the title hunt Saturday, Nov. 2, with an impressive performance at the Lake Park Sectional. Their 30 points won easily over second-place New Trier (76 points), also on the short list of favorites for the top-three trophies along with defending 3A state champion Naperville North and Palatine.**

**Senior and defending 3A champion Madeline Perez won her second straight sectional title (16:44.70 for 3.0 miles) by 10.25 seconds over New Trier junior Mimi Smith (2nd, 16:54.95), 12th at state last year.**

**Graham (4th, 17:18.42), junior Lisa Luczak (5th, 17:29.28) and sophomore Grace Rogers (9th, 17:49.22) also finished among the top 10, and freshman Janie Nabholz was 11th (17:56.42). Sophomore Kathryn Kenwood (17th, 18:09.86) also was in the top 20, and junior Megan Ozog was 27th (18:27.47).**

**"Obviously, the goal is to improve every single week and I think we've done that and we want to do that, hopefully, for one more week," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said.**

**"We changed our tactics in terms of getting out a little harder because the**

course was so narrow. We went out hard and moved. I was very pleased with the effort by the kids and how they executed those tactics in the race. They did a remarkable job."

The 3A girls state race is at 1 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 9, at Peoria's Detweiller Park. The 3A boys race is at 2 p.m. with 3A awards for both races at 3 p.m. at the park.

Glenbard West has never won the girls cross country state title. Perez (1st), Luczak (6th) and Rogers (59th) were part of last year's state lineup that helped the Hilltoppers finish third for the program's third top-three trophy ever and first since second in 1980 and third in 1979, the first year of IHSA girls cross country.

In their annual regular-season trip to Detweiller at the Richard Spring Invitational Sept. 21, the Hilltoppers were third to Palatine and New Trier without Perez.

"That's my No. 1 goal, to try and help our team to bring home the team title to Glenbard West," Perez said. "We know Naperville North is definitely going to give it their all. They've got almost everyone back. They're going to defend their title very well, but I think we're going to give it our best and we'll see the outcome."

Perez, the first Glenbard West girls cross country individual state champion, also is trying to become the first back-to-back champion since Woodstock's Kayla Beattie in 2A in 2009-10. The last back-to-back champion in the largest class was Geneva's Rebecca Mitchell as AA champion in 1996-97.

Saturday was only Perez's third race of the season and third week of competition after she rehabilitated from a calf injury.

"I'm progressing each week, which is kind of my goal. I'm definitely going to give

it my all when it comes time to race, but I'm excited," Perez said. "I'm going to definitely give it my all. I've been working pretty hard lately to catch up from what I missed, but it should be good."

Top-25 state finishers earn all-state honors. Perez should become the Hilltoppers' first three-time all-stater after also taking 15th in 2011, when the team finished sixth. Ozog also was part of that state lineup as the team's No. 6 finisher (126th).

Thirteen of last year's 25 all-staters qualified for this year's 3A state race either with their teams or individually. Besides Perez, four other top-10 finishers are back – Fenwick junior Olivia Ryan (5th), Luczak, Jacobs junior Lindsey Van Vlierbergen (7th) and Maine South senior Emily Leonard (9th).

Hinsdale Central freshman Alexa Haff beat Perez in her first race back at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Oct. 19. Haff only has finished second once this year, to Buffalo Grove sophomore Kaitlyn Ko (22nd at state) at the First to the Finish Invite Sept. 14 in Peoria with Van Vlierbergen third. McHenry junior Lauren Opatrny, 29th at state in 2012, beat Ko at the Schaumburg Sectional.

"She's going to give it 100 percent effort (at state). She's been working hard ever since the start toward that end," Hass said. "She's getting better and better. From the conference meet to the sectional meet, she's made a huge improvement. Hopefully, she'll keep on improving and I think she will. She's going to give it her best effort to defend that title. That's why we wanted to make sure she was 100 percent (healthy) when she went back to racing."

The Hilltoppers also made the most of their course experience at Lake Park's east campus. On Sept. 14, they won Lake Park's Harvey Braus Invite with 45 points and Graham winning the race.

"It's definitely my favorite course so I was definitely excited (to return)," said

**Kenwood, a first-year cross country runner.**

**"Every bend, it's like, 'Get to the next one.' I really like finishing on the track (for the final 300 meters) and also it just feels like a faster course. Every time we went up that hill, I counted the first time, second time and third time and then you're done."**

**At sectionals, Perez opened with a 5:26 first mile. While in command of the race, her second mile was 5:44.**

**"She always wants to take it out at a decent pace because that's what state is going to be like," Hass said. "She knows what to work on and focus on, and she's working on that second and third mile, finishing strong."**

**Besides taking sixth at state, Luczak also was the No. 3 finisher among non-seniors behind Perez and Ryan. Luczak beat Ryan for second at the Fenwick Regional Oct. 26 but Ryan was third at sectionals (17:11.45) by 6.97 seconds ahead of Graham.**

**Unable to move up as much as she wanted, Luczak had plenty of sprint left to finish ahead of sixth-place Oak Park-River Forest freshman Mary Blankemeier (17:35.27).**

**"(Regionals) was a lot better because I went out a lot faster. After last year's state meet, I'll have to go out faster so I don't have to deal with (playing catch-up) again," Luczak said.**

**"New Trier is a great team and to be able to compete against them and win was pretty amazing. There are a ton of hard teams and really big competition (at state) but after winning this, it makes us feel a lot better going into state."**

**Naperville North returns four of its top five finishers from the 2012 state championship team, including all three of their all-staters – junior Elly DeTurris**

(14th last year), senior Maria McDaniel (21st) and sophomore Judy Pendergast (24th). They and freshman Claire Hamilton formed the Huskies' top five Saturday en route to the Waubonsie Valley Sectional title.

New Trier, the 2011 champions that graduated two of three all-staters, and Palatine, which graduated its all-stater, were fourth and fifth at state last year.

"All we can do is do our best (at state). You can't focus on all of the intangible things. You can't control what other people do," Hass said. "We focus on what we can do. It's been that way all year long every single race. So far, it's worked out well for us. Hopefully we'll do our best and if it works out well great, and if not, we did our best."

The 1980 Glenbard West team holds the program record of three all-staters in one state race (14-16-25), but this team should at least equal that with the addition of Graham.

Graham became the team's No. 1 runner in Perez's absence until she started to feel discomfort in her knees. The injury hampered her during Wheaton North's Falcon Classic Oct. 5, yet she still finished fourth in the No. 1 flight.

She nearly feared her season was over. Because of her injury, Graham was held out of the Fenwick Regional, which the Hilltoppers easily won (22 points) with five in the top 10 and all seven in the top 15. Sophomore Kate Dorsey ran in Graham's place.

"(Graham) talked about the pain and how it kept on increasing, but we were able to do what she needed with training, taking days off, and her knee responded," Hass said. "Her legs feel fresh and that's how you want to feel at the end of the season."

On Saturday, Graham competed with her left knee heavily bandaged and once again was a frontrunner in a field with six all-staters from 2012. She said she

was disappointed that she was outkicked by Ryan down the stretch of the race, which ends with the final 300 meters on the stadium track.

"I haven't been doing that much training because of my knee, not as much as I'd like to," Graham said. "We're feeling good (for state). My legs feel good. Sometimes at the end of the season, your legs feel burned out and mine do not, probably because I haven't been training too much."

Rogers had a dramatic finish on the final straightaway, passing Loyola Academy sophomore Kathryn House (10th, 17:49.50) in the last 50 meters to pull out ninth by .28.

Last year, sectionals was the varsity debut for Rogers, who spent most of the season recovering from a back injury. This season, she goes into state with much more experience and as a leader for the pack with Nabholz and Kenwood, both first-year team members.

"I think I've had a better season than last year and I've been able to run more this year. I'm more excited about (state), I guess, but not that I wasn't last year," Rogers said.

"We're really excited. We're really prepared for it. (Finishing third at state last year) doesn't add pressure, but it sets a goal or expectation, not just from our coaches but ourselves. It sets expectations for the team to do well and something to look forward to."

Nabholz and Kenwood continued to show significant improvements from earlier in the season. Even with Saturday's large field and course conditions slightly hampered by rain, they each ran significantly faster than at the Harvey Braus Invite.

That day, Nabholz made her varsity debut and was 21st (18:25.2) as the team's No. 5 finisher, 32.5 seconds behind Rogers. Kenwood, a first-year runner, was

second in the junior varsity race (18:56.2).

Nabholz and Kenwood cut 28.7 and 46.3 seconds, respectively, Saturday. Nabholz, sixth at regionals and one place from a medal, again was one place shy of a medal but 6.92 seconds from 10th.

"On Saturday, I was with Grace the whole time so that was very different (from Sept. 14)," said Nabholz, who was with Rogers at the mile in 5:46 with Kenwood three seconds back.

"I'm really excited. It's pretty surreal that I'm actually going to state as a freshman, but I'm just really excited. (I'm looking forward to) probably just seeing how we are ranked in the state compared to all of the other schools. I'm really excited to see if we win it or not."

One of those important in persuading Kenwood to join cross country this year was sophomore Christina Sedall, who ran at state last year (78th, 17:55). Sedall was among numerous non-competing Hilltoppers who drove to Roselle to lend team support.

"I didn't realize how excited I was until I got home and I was thinking just, 'Wow, we're going to state.' It's so exciting now that I'm kind of in shock," Kenwood said.

"They all said (state last year) was so much fun. They've told me everything that happens, which makes me even more excited to go. Especially Christina, she was telling us all about it. And then because I was on the team, she told me more. It's always an advantage to have run there (at Detweiller). I know it's like. I know the parts I felt tired and the parts I felt good so I'm excited."

-- by Bill Stone