

When it comes to cross country race experience, Glenbard West sophomore and first-year team member Kathryn Kenwood is pretty green.

However, when the Hilltoppers competed against fellow state powers Hinsdale Central and host Oak Park-River Forest Thursday, Sept. 26, Kenwood instead was wearing white.

For West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual meets, the Hilltoppers' frosh-soph team wears green uniform tops. Kenwood, a top frosh-soph finisher in her first four meets, had a white top because she was making her varsity debut.

"I was nervous, but it was a fun race," Kenwood said.

It also was an impressive one. Kenwood was the Hilltoppers' No. 5 finisher among a key pack that secured a 26-29 dual victory over the Red Devils at Schiller Woods Forest Preserve. Glenbard West also defeated OPRF 15-50.

Sophomore Lindsay Graham (17:45 for 3.0 miles) and junior Lisa Luczak (17:55), two of the Hilltoppers' three 2012 all-staters, and sophomore Grace Rogers (18:35) swept second through fourth behind Hinsdale Central freshman Alexa Haff (17:40).

Freshman Janie Nabholz (19:04), Kenwood (19:05) and junior Megan Ozog (19:10) were eighth through 10th, and sophomore Christina Sedall was 12th (19:32).

"I actually felt really good in the race and it felt good to finish and stay with Jamie," Kenwood said. "During our first race (Sept. 7), she was kind of further ahead so my goal is to kind of stick with her."

The dual victory over the No. 5-ranked Red Devils was the first big step toward the higher-rated Hilltoppers gaining a third straight overall Silver title. OPRF also

is a top-10 rated team but chose to rest most of its top runners in preparation for its annual Gummerson Invitational Saturday.

To help compensate for the teams' travel times, and to Kenwood's delight, this meet was one huge race. Instead of three of two races like most Silver duals, the varsity, junior varsity and frosh-soph runners competed simultaneously with the three levels of results sorted out afterwards.

"I liked that everyone ran together so it didn't make me as nervous. I was still running with (Abby Shaver and Kate Dorsey from frosh-soph) and all of them," Kenwood said.

The Hilltoppers' two packs of finishers made the difference. Rogers was just one second ahead of Hinsdale Central senior Becca Marcotte (5th, 18:36). Kenwood was eight seconds ahead of Hinsdale Central's No. 5 finisher, sophomore Emma Sullivan (11th, 19:13).

If both of those results are reversed, the Red Devils would have won. Still, the Hilltoppers have yet to race this season without senior defending state champion Madeline Perez.

"Grace Rogers was huge. Grace was key," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said. "A lot of good things happened. I thought Lisa was awesome. She was so close to (Graham and Haff) and you can't say enough about Lindsay. She battled. "Megan Ozog had some back issues. But Kathryn Kenwood and Janie Nabholz stepped up for us. That's a sign of a good varsity team, having people step up. We'll keep on working, trying to get better, but I'm very happy with how they ran."

Glenbard West and Hinsdale Central previously met head-to-head in the season opening Hornet-Red Devil Invite Sept. 7 on the Red Devils' home course. The Hilltoppers were second to Palatine while Hinsdale Central had no team score with just four finishers. Sophomore Annie Zaher sat out the race recovering

from bronchitis and Marcotte was among two Red Devils who dropped during the race, both because of illness. Zaher was seventh Thursday (18:57).

Haff won that race by 5.18 seconds over the third-place Graham, also for 3.0 miles. Thursday's race was disappointing for Graham because she was stride for stride heading into the homestretch.

"I don't really have anything good to say about it," Graham said. "I tried to push it the second mile, but even staying with her is a hard task. I'd just like to work on my finish."

This was Haff's first race since taking second to Buffalo Grove's Kaitlyn Ko (22nd at state last year) Sept. 14 at the First to the Finish Invite at Peoria's Detweiller Park. The Hilltoppers competed at Detweiller Sept. 21 in the Richard Spring Invitational.

"Haff's a great runner. Lindsay's a great runner. They battled and she just got outkicked at the end," Hass said. "I'm sure she's not happy about it, but she battled for us. That's what we needed, and Lisa was close to them, the closest she's been."

Luczak continues to progress after her training was hampered in the pre-season by injuries and new orthotics. After a slow start during the Hornet-Red Devil, Luczak finished fourth but 25.13 seconds behind Graham. In Peoria, their split was 30 seconds.

"I feel better than I usually do," Luczak said. "I'm getting back there, not fully back to where I should be yet, but I'm slowly getting back there."

Last year, Rogers was injured most of last season before her best so far at the state meet (59th, 17:44). She made her varsity Silver dual debut Sept. 19 at York with Proviso West and ran a decent race in Peoria as the team's No. 3 finisher.

Also hampered by injuries, Marcotte was 83rd at state last year (17:57) and went on to qualify for state in the 3,200-meter run. Zaher qualified for state in the 1,600.

Rogers, a state track qualifier with the 3,200 relay, and Marcotte ran next to each other most of the race.

"I wasn't super upset or anything (about my Sept. 21 race). I just wasn't satisfied with how I did, but I feel good today," Rogers said. "I think I ran more, I pushed myself more today. I didn't really know who to keep my eyes on or who to make myself keep up with but there were more girls that were pushing me to do better and chase after."

Nabholz said she learned from her Peoria debut not to start out too fast. She toned it down about five seconds for the first mile yet tried to keep up with Ozog.

When Kenwood kept pace with Nabholz, the Hilltoppers were in good shape. In the frosh-soph race at the Hornet-Red Devil, Nabholz was fourth. Kenwood, in her first cross country race ever, was 15th and roughly 52 seconds behind.

"(Kenwood) just started running with me this week. She's really improved fast. She's really getting good," Nabholz said.

"(This race) was hard but I felt good. I felt like I started with a good pace and then finished with a good pace. Kathryn stayed with me. That was really good. I was proud of her. I was really happy that the three of us could stay in a pack and that we all finished in around the same time."

The overall Silver title is a 50-50 combination of standings from the regular-season duals and the Silver Meet Oct. 19 at Proviso West.

This would be the first time that Glenbard West has won at least three consecutive conference titles in a row. Last year, the Hilltoppers captured the overall championship outright by winning the Silver Meet after a 6-0 dual record. In 2011, they shared the title with York by winning the Silver Meet after dropping the dual.

"We do emphasize this. It's more important than the Peoria meet (Sept. 21), as far as I'm concerned because this is something," Hass said. "At Peoria, it doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't get you anywhere else. If you want to win a conference championship, you have to do your best on the Thursday meets. We want to at least stay in the picture of being able to win one."