

Despite running the cross country race of her life at the 2012 Class 3A state meet, Glenbard West sophomore Lindsay Graham realized something Saturday upon her return to Peoria's Detweiller Park.

"Honestly, I hate this course," Graham said.

"Everyone else loves it. I don't like it at all. I wish (state) wouldn't have to be here, but it is so I have to learn to get used to it. There's a lot of good energy here so that's always nice. It usually produces some pretty fast times."

That includes Graham when she's lately run on the annual site of the state meet. She used a strong finish to capture second place overall as the top Illinois finisher in a huge field at Peoria Notre Dame's annual Richard Spring Invitational.

Graham (17:02 for 3.0 miles) only was beaten by Pleasant Valley (Iowa) sophomore McKenzie Yanek (16:49) after getting past New Trier junior Mimi Smith (17:04).

Glenbard West junior Lisa Luczak claimed sixth in 17:32, followed by sophomore Grace Rogers (25th, 18:08), junior Megan Ozog (47th, 18:25), freshman Janie Nabholz (81st, 18:44), sophomore Christina Sedall (123rd, 19:10) and senior Annika Manning (162nd, 19:26). Juniors Hannah Arduino (278th, 20:27) and Colleen Luczak (345th, 21:01) and senior Amanda Ortiz (359th, 21:18) also competed as teams were allowed 10 varsity entries as opposed to seven like most invites.

The Hilltoppers (159 points), who entered the invite as the top-rated team in the field, finished third behind Palatine (94) and New Trier (140) yet well ahead of top-10 ranked O'Fallon (4th, 224).

"Third wasn't as good as we were hoping for, but everyone really did great," Lisa Luczak said. "It's just one of those things where you have to be happy with how you did, even though your place might not have shown it."

At last year's state meet, the Hilltoppers were excited to get third at Detweiller and a team trophy. They hope to contend for another one Nov. 9.

"We didn't run poorly. We just didn't run our best," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said. "We have seven more weeks before we have to do it for real (at Detweiller for state). We were probably a little bit tired from (our conference triangular) Thursday, but there's no excuses."

The Hilltoppers await the return of senior defending state champion Madeline Perez, who has yet to race this season. Sedall, who had been battling illness, made her first appearance since the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invite Sept. 7, and Ozog was battling a cold. Even Lisa Luczak, placing as high as she did, is adjusting to new orthotics and behind her 2012 times at this point.

Also to consider is that Saturday's invite had 58 teams and 497 finishers in the varsity race alone, compared to 25 teams and 209 finishers in the 2012 3A state field.

"We still got third out of 70 teams. Three years ago, if we got third (at this invite), we'd be ecstatic right now and now we're disappointed. It tells you how far we've come as a program," Hass said.

"Lindsay Graham ran amazing. Her performance was incredible. Lisa Luczak ran well. Again, maybe she might not be totally satisfied with it time wise, but she's coming back. Megan, Grace and Janie just didn't have the performances that they had (at the Lake Park Invite Sept. 14). They felt that maybe they had a twinge left at the end that they didn't use in the middle of the race. Those are things we're learning. We're still a young team."

A move-in from Glenbard East, Graham burst onto the cross country scene at state last year when she finished 20th in a lifetime-best 17:01. She became only the sixth all-state runner in Rams' history.

Her Detweiller debut wasn't as memorable. Competing at the Peoria Invitational, two weeks after the Richard Spring Invite, she was 13th but

ran 18:00.45.

"I just came off an injury and I had a really bad race so I think that's why my dislike for this place started," Graham said. "It's the uphill for that long stretch, the downhill for that long stretch. I think it was just kind of windy today, and I didn't really feel that great, honestly, so maybe that was part of it. I felt great at state last year and I was like, 'Oh, I love this place.' I don't."

Yet Graham battled Detweiller and a field with four other returning 2012 all-staters like a warrior Saturday. After Smith had passed Graham to claim second at the Hornet-Red Devil, Graham returned the favor Saturday and outkicked Smith down the stretch.

Graham's time was just one second slower than her state time – and three seconds from a pre-race goal.

"It would have been nice to be under 17:00. That seems to happen every time. Hopefully, next time I will be (under), but, yeah, it's progress," Graham said.

"Mimi and I were together with 800 to go and I knew she was going to release a mad dash at the end. I know I'm improving because someone I was behind (Smith), now I'm ahead of so the improvement's there, just the time is not quite."

Yanek was 12th at the invite last year in 17:37. Since then she won state track titles in Iowa in the 1,600 and 3,200-meter runs and even won a 4,000-meter race in early September at her school's invite, 48 seconds ahead of returning Naperville North all-stater Elly DeTurris.

Yanek's time Saturday still was significantly slower than Perez's second-place 16:29 at the invite as a junior before going on to win state in a Detweiller course-record 16:02.

"(Yanek) was phenomenal. She was so far ahead," Graham said. "It's good to know she won't be at state. I looked at the (invite) preview on MileSplit so yeah, I knew she was good."

Detweiller also proved to be a place for Luczak to emerge among the state's elite in 2012. After two strong invite performances, she turned even more heads when she took fifth at the Richard Spring Invite in 17:00 behind three seniors.

"Since that was one where there were so many (runners), people actually realized that I was one of the top people in the state. That was one of my favorite meets since it was finally like a breaking out point for me," Luczak said.

"This course always just makes me excited. Last year was one of those races that just made me so happy. This year, I can't say it made me as happy but it's so nice always to run it and to be able to run. It's always a fun race."

More fun should be coming. Luczak said she is back to full-mileage training, although she still hasn't been able to do them at her previous pace. Even last year, when Luczak went on to take fifth at the state meet in a personal-best 16:45, she strained her hamstring a couple of days before and, at least for a fleeting moment, was concerned she wouldn't be able to compete.

"I was really scared but I was able to run. The next day, I couldn't do that well, but I was able to do the meet," Luczak said.

"I felt good (Saturday). It's just so annoying not being where I was last year, but I keep on feeling better every meet so it's getting there. I'm having fun so I guess that's what counts. Hopefully, when Madeline's healthy, I'm healthy, everyone will be great."

In her Detweiller debut as a freshman, Rogers also was extraordinary, a personal-best 17:44 as the team's No. 4 state finisher (59th). The atmosphere was quite different Saturday with warm temperatures instead of cold ones and a 5 a.m. bus departure that morning instead of an overnight trip.

"It was weird running here. It seems different than state, kind of," Rogers

said. "It's probably not my best race, but I'm going to learn from it. I think everyone did pretty well. It's cool coming down with the whole team, different from state. It's a really fun meet for after we're done, we're all putting on tattoos and hanging out. It's fun to be with the team."

Rogers was injured for last year's invite. Ozog finished slightly faster than last year's September race, when she was 51st in 18:28. Ozog was within a second of the same distance from Rogers as they had at Lake Park.

Palatine, the Hornet-Red Devil champions, had the most impressive pack of the day, going 15-16-18-19-26 within a seven-second range with its No. 6 finisher 29th. New Trier also had a strong pack, going 31-32-32-44 behind Smith after the second-place Hilltoppers were two places and 29 points ahead of the fourth-place Trevians at the Hornet-Red Devil.

New Trier was fourth at state last year, nine points behind Glenbard West, after winning the 2011 championship but graduated two all-staters.

Palatine was fifth at state and graduated its lone all-stater but five other returnees from that lineup were among the Pirates' top six Saturday.

"Palatine ran incredible (Saturday). That's probably the best Palatine team I've seen in my career, and they deserved to win," Hass said. "New Trier did just as well. You've got to bring you best (to state Nov. 9). When that time comes, that's when we'll be ready to run our best, I think."

Ortiz's final race at Detweiller proved to be a special one. One of only five seniors on this year's team, Ortiz competed for the varsity for the first time at an invite.

"Last year for Peoria, I was going to be on varsity and then I got sick the night before (and didn't go) so I was really disappointed," Ortiz said.

"I didn't think I would ever get that chance again. I was really happy and fortunate enough to get that chance. I like running with varsity because you're running with faster people so you push yourself more to stay with them so it was a lot of fun."

5

**Ortiz earned her spot in the Hilltoppers' West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual opener Thursday against host York and Proviso West. The varsity defeated York 17-40 and Proviso West 15-50.**

**In the junior varsity race, Ortiz covered the East End Park 2.83-mile course in a team-best 20:45 for fourth place overall.**

**The effort put Ortiz among the top-12 that day and in the Peoria varsity lineup. Three of the girls who finished with a faster time in the frosh-soph race Thursday remained at that level Saturday (sophomores Kathryn Kenwood, Abby Shaver and Nicole Berneche). A fourth, sophomore Caitlin Reick, did not compete Saturday because of illness.**

**Ortiz's goal this season is to beat her lifetime best of 21:02 for a full 3.0 miles.**

**"I didn't think I was going to be on (varsity) and then on Thursday I ended up going pretty well," Ortiz said. "I just felt really good so then I found out I was on varsity the next day. I was really surprised but very happy."**

**Graham (16:58) and Lisa Luczak (17:21) dominated the race and Rogers was third (18:02) by two seconds over York junior Dayle Mueller. Ozog (18:26) and Nabholz (18:35) were fifth and sixth, and Manning (19:06) and Arduino (20:14) ninth and 13th.**

**The Glenbard West JV lost to York 17-40 and beat Proviso West 15-50. Ortiz and fifth-place Julia Kochert (21:11) were followed by Morgan McEnroe (11th, 22:18), Abigail Dibadj (14th, 22:30), Faith Bischoff (16th, 22:55), Emma Gambol (22nd, 23:46) and Madelyn O'Gorman (27th, 24:05).**