



Bischoff



Perez

Senior Faith Bischoff competed for the Glenbard West girls cross country team as a freshman and thoroughly enjoyed her new sport.

Because of time conflicts with the fall musical, she decided not to return as a sophomore.

“Now I tell the girls, ‘You better come back next year or else you’re going to regret it,’ because I did,” Bischoff said.

“It’s definitely a learning lesson in high school, about expanding your horizons. You’ve got to figure out what you want to do and I figured it out. I wanted to be part of a team and come to practice every day, clear my head and have fun with the girls.”

Bischoff returned in 2012 rejuvenated and became an integral contributor to one of the strongest programs in the state.

Her dedication has been recognized and rewarded this season. Bischoff was named a senior team captain for the Hilltoppers along with defending Class 3A state champion Madeline Perez.

In annual team tradition, the captains were revealed in front of everyone simultaneously by head coach Paul Hass and assistant coach Mark Staron at the Saturday morning team breakfast following their hardest work of training just before the start of school.

"I was like, 'I don't know,' and then when my name was announced, it was like a sigh of relief and a sigh of like, 'This is awesome,'" Bischoff said. "Being a captain of such a respected team and how well we do, it's an honor, definitely.

"It means a lot. I was honored when (Hass and Staron) told me that I was going to be captain with Madeline. I feel like I'm a good leader and Madeline and I work very well together. We both bring two different dynamics and we work hard to keep the team together in a positive atmosphere around all of the girls."

The Hilltoppers are expected to contend for their second straight top-three trophy at the 3A state meet Saturday, Nov. 9, in Peoria. They only need a top-five finish at the Lake Park Sectional at 1 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 2, to officially qualify for state.

At the Fenwick Regional Oct. 26, the Hilltoppers won their first regional title since 1983 with Perez taking first at regionals for the second year in a row.

Bischoff did not compete in the race, nor is she part of the IHSA-mandated 12-person state series roster. A top runner for the junior varsity, Bischoff was among several spirited Hilltoppers who drove on their own to Schiller Woods to cheer on and support the team.

"The thing that's so great about Faith is she's a lot more vocal than I am. I like to say I lead more by example and she definitely will get out there," Perez said.

"She's just so supportive. She's just definitely what you're looking for as a captain and it's been really fun to work with her in that sense. I think the nice thing is we're both kind of different people so we're able, in that sense, to cover all aspects of everything."

Glenbard West team captains are selected mainly through general observation. There are no specific discussions or essays among the seniors.

Bischoff said she tried to assist the underclassmen during summer running and the pre-season, especially the incoming freshmen, by answering questions or just helping them acclimate to the team.

Bischoff acknowledges the possible anxiety of joining a high-school team as a freshman, especially one that begins in the fall, and she wanted to replicate the kindness that older girls showed her when she first joined. Bischoff also understands the possible awkwardness of returning after a year's absence.

"Faith's overall warm and engaging personality makes coming to practice fun," Hass said. "I think the fact that the team remained 100 percent intact (with no one quitting) since the first day of school is a testament to the atmosphere Faith promotes in her interaction with teammates."

Perez also is very team-oriented but brings another element through her excellence as an athlete, and one that has been earned. Last year, she won the 3A state title with a girls all-time record performance on the Detweiller course after being an all-state 15th as a sophomore and 29th at state as a freshman.

"Madeline's positive attitude towards competing and competition is infectious," Hass said.

"Whenever asked, Madeline has willingly assisted in teaching younger runners certain drills and has served as an exceptional model for the team when it comes to race preparation and communicating with her coaches in the appropriate manner. Her statements of encouragement to the team resonate that much more when they come from a defending state champion."

Camaraderie especially is important for the Hilltoppers. While a decent sized program, they have just 43??? runners this season and only five of them are seniors – Perez, Bischoff, Annika Manning, Madelyn O'Gorman and Amanda Ortiz.

Perez, Manning, O’Gorman and Ortiz have been with the program all four years. Even as a freshman, Bischoff remembers there being fewer than 10 runners in her class.

”I would be happy for any of the senior girls to help lead our team because we all have the capability to do it,” Bischoff said. ”I respect the other senior girls so much. They’re all so awesome and I love hanging out with them.”

All four classes must unite for true program success. At the regional, the Hilltoppers used one senior (Perez), two juniors (Lisa Luczak and Megan Ozog), three sophomores (Kate Dorsey, Kathryn Kenwood, Grace Rogers, Abby Shaver) and one freshman (Janie Nabholz).

Kenwood is a first-year team member. Junior Lindsay Graham, one of their top runners who did not compete, is a move-in this season from Glenbard East.

”The girls on this team are like nobody else. We connect so well,” Bischoff said. ”We’re a little smaller than a lot of other teams. We know each other’s names. I love being part of a team where I can connect one-on-one with somebody and they can connect one-on-one with somebody (else). On some teams, there are class differences. As I captain I want to make it a goal that everyone’s equal.”

The captains have been touching base weekly, usually on Sunday, to discuss team issues and responsibilities. The lengthy list includes T-shirt designs, team pasta parties and the big sister, little sister groupings in which older, more experienced runners and younger runners are specifically bonded as ”sisters” to motivate and support each other throughout the season.

One slight challenge has been that Perez did not compete until the conference meet Oct. 19 to recover fully from a calf injury. She sometimes was on a different practice schedule because she needed specific rehabilitation. Perez’s family still played host to the team’s first pasta party prior to the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invitational Sept. 7. Bischoff’s home was later the site of a pasta party.

”It’s been an awesome year and I wish I could have been here for more of the races to be a part of that,” Perez said. ”It’s a really special team and to be

named captain was an honor. Working with Faith is awesome. We had a fun time doing it and I hope the girls enjoyed our leadership as well. It seemed like everyone embraced us really well and we were able to work with all of the girls.”

Before high school, Bischoff never had been on a cross country team before. She played soccer but had never done distance running.

Preparing for her freshman year at Glenbard West, her mother suggested a fall sport and that she try summer running as a possibility.

”I’m like, ‘What? No. They wake up so early. They’re going to be so much faster than me,’ ” Bischoff said. “A week after it started, I decided to do it and I just fell in love with the sport. I was nervous (at first). I was like, ‘This is awesome. I can say I ran four miles, six miles straight.’ ”

Bischoff’s other big love before high school was the performing arts. She acted in middle school and community theater, took singing lessons and even played a couple of instruments.

Bischoff had a strong freshman cross country season, including a still personal-best time of 21:43 at the Richard Spring Invitational at Detweiller in September.

As a sophomore she wanted to try out for the fall school musical “13.” The unfortunate tradeoff was Bischoff could not be part of the musical and be on the cross country team. Too many practice conflicts.

As it turned out, Bischoff did not receive a part. By the spring, she was back running with the track team.

”It was a very small cast, which was totally understood, but it was a sign that I belonged on the team,” Bischoff said.

Bischoff returned with what she felt was a strong junior year and hasn’t looked back. While she hopes to support Perez and the Hilltoppers to more state meet success, Bischoff also hopes she has left some lasting memories for her teammates as well.

"I hope that coming into cross country, the freshmen, the sophomores and even the juniors have the same hopes and same feeling that I did going in as a freshman, and as a junior, going into a team and feeling welcome. That's what I want to bring," Bischoff said.

"I'm so honored to be chosen as a captain of the cross country team and I hope I'm having a very strong influence on the girls."

-- by Bill Stone