

By the time junior Kathryn Kenwood competed at the Wheaton North's Girls Classic Saturday, Oct. 4, the Glenbard West girls cross country team already was on a successful run.

Junior Abby Shaver had dominated the Junior/Senior Open race that opened the meet. In the following varsity flight races, sophomore Janie Nabholz preceded Kenwood by capturing the No. 5 title.

"Definitely Abby winning was great. We were so excited because she was so excited," Kenwood said. "I was going into it with a positive attitude – and when Janie won I was like, 'All right. I can do this.' "

Kenwood added to the Hilltoppers' great overall day as she won the No. 4 flight and helped them capture the overall team title at St. James Farm Forest Preserve in Warrenville.

The Hilltoppers' winning total of 13 points is among the lowest scores ever in the invite's 30-year history to the 9 in 2004 by eventual state champion Naperville North.

The invite uses a different format for the varsity level. Results from seven flight races are combined equally to compile team totals.

Glenbard West won four consecutive flights. Freshman Lindsey Payne captured the No. 2 flight (17:49.6 for 2.97 miles) after victories by junior Grace Rogers (No. 3 in 18:03.2), Kenwood (18:15.1) and Nabholz (18:24.6).

Junior Lindsay Graham ran 17:13.0 for second in the No. 1 flight and was the top finisher among Illinois runners. Graham only was beaten by nationally-ranked St. Ursula Academy (Cincinnati, Ohio) senior Annie Heffernan (17:00.6), the Division I Ohio state cross country champion in 2013. Senior Megan Ozog was third at No. 6 (19:04.5) and junior Kate Dorsey was fourth at No. 7 (19:05.1).

"I ran the flight race last year. I kind of knew what I was getting into this time," Kenwood said.

"It was different without having Lindsay Graham in front of you, where you look up and see her half a mile ahead. It felt good to be in the lead. It made you push yourself because I could actually win this. It's a great feeling at the finish line."

Glenbard West is the defending Class 3A state champion and has been ranked No. 1 in 3A throughout this season. Defending Class 2A state champion Yorkville (19 points) and Naperville Central (25) were second and third.

Glenbard West also won the Junior/Senior Open race and was ninth in the Freshman/Sophomore open race. Both open races used the conventional race format and scoring.

"It was awesome. When I was warming up, I was watching one of my teammates win their race," Rogers said. "It was really an inspiration and made me feel good, and then hanging out in the tent, I heard Abby Shaver won the junior/senior race. It's so cool to know how good the team is."

Still, this was the first time the Hilltoppers ever have won the meet. New Trier edged Naperville North 15-18 for the 2013 title, but neither team participated Saturday. The Hilltoppers, third at the invite with 31 points, was followed at state by Naperville North in second and New Trier in third.

"The girls in all levels ran extremely well and it was one of our best team efforts of the season. I thought each girl in the flights ran extremely hard and competed well against some very good competition," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said.

"It was nice to finally win that meet for the first time in school history, and to do so with such a low score is a tribute to the talent and dedication of the girls. I could go on and on about the outstanding performances of the girls who ran."

Graham, Rogers, Kenwood, Nabholz and Ozog also were part of last year's flight lineup. The only flight winner in 2013 was senior Lisa Luczak, who won the No. 2 title for the second year in a row but continued to sit out Saturday to recover from an Achilles tendon injury. Luczak's last race was Sept. 13.

"I think everyone took advantage of having the possibility of winning an individual race. I think we tried to run smart so that we could win each flight," Graham said.

"I think that the flight meets are really fun," Nabholz added. "It's really cool to do and see how everyone did compared with other runners that are ranked at the same number. I feel like everyone just ran really well. Everyone was focused on doing their best and I think that showed."

The Hilltoppers also showed a great amount of resiliency. Saturday's conditions included faint flurries in the beginning and cold temperatures combined with some tough junctures of the course because of wet areas.

"It didn't affect us too much, I don't think. As long as we kept our sweats on, it was fine," Nabholz said. "I just didn't let that bother me too much because everyone has to deal with the cold."

"Really, we made each other laugh a lot. We just kind of joked around about it and a lot of people grabbed blankets. Definitely we tried to remember once we were going to get out there and once we warmed up, we'd be fine," Payne said.

"(But) it was awful, to be honest. When we left West, it started to snow on us. It was hard because my race wasn't until 10:13. My feet were literally frozen. When we went to go warm up, I couldn't feel them. During the race, it was OK, but that was cold. I've never been so cold in my life."

Nabholz and Payne enjoyed their first victories for a high-school cross country race. Payne has been on the varsity since the start of the season while Nabholz only ran two-frosh soph races in 2013 before being promoted to the varsity.

Nabholz's 19.2-second victory over was the largest among the Hilltoppers' four champions. Kenwood won by 15.8 seconds and Rogers and Payne won by 7.9 and 7.2 seconds, respectively.

In the same No. 5 flight last year, Nabholz was fourth in 18:49.7.

"I wasn't really sure how I'd do because I got fourth (in 2013), but it's good to see the improvement from last year," Nabholz said. "I didn't really think about winning. I focused more on doing my best but thought of how I improved from last year and was hoping to do my best and hopefully get 1, 2 or 3."

Rogers and Kenwood previously have won races with the Hilltoppers on the frosh-soph level. Kenwood, competing in the sport for the first time last year, became a varsity regular after her dual victory over York.

"Mr. Hass told us if we run smart I have the potential to win, but I can't let that get into our head. I was up with the top group in the beginning so I knew there was a chance," Kenwood added.

"I didn't know if I'd win it," Rogers said. "Mr. Hass was not asking anyone to go and win it, not even get (personal records) but run your own race and you had a chance to do very well, and I kept that in mind."

Graham knew that winning her flight would be quite a task. Not even including Heffernan, the flight included four fellow 2013 all-staters in either 3A or 2A.

Last year, Graham was fourth in the No. 1 flight in 17:41.5, but the only finisher ahead of her in Saturday's field was Yorkville junior Skyler Bollinger, 16th at 2A state in 2013.

Then Graham found out about Heffernan and did some research.

"Mr. Hass told me a couple of weeks earlier (Heffernan's team was coming) and I didn't think too much of it. Then the night before I looked it up and I was like, 'Oh my gosh. I've heard of her,' and she was really good," Graham said. "The girl was really, really good so I'm happy I stayed pretty close to her. I think all of the times across the board were pretty slow so I wasn't too mad about that."

Graham ran smart and her own race. It was a blistering start and after 300 meters Graham was last among the 26 runners.

By the mile, Graham was second in 5:40 and trailed Heffernan by five seconds. Graham caught up to her at the two-mile mark in 11:32 (5:52 split) before Heffernan "majorly pulled away."

Graham finished 32.9 seconds ahead of the third-place Bollinger, who was second and 16.5 seconds ahead of Graham in the 2013 flight.

"I learned the importance of starting slowly. Everyone sprinted at the beginning and I didn't mind being last. I have to be confident in my strategy," Graham said.

"I think I've gotten better at handling wind. Because I'm doing hills (for workouts), my legs are stronger. I tried not to think about the wind and knew everyone had to deal with it as well. And I've been cross-training and think I've been becoming stronger overall."

Payne's victory was a big step for her racing savvy. Like Graham, Payne started out conservatively but elbowed her way through the woods to get toward the front pack by the end of the first mile.

The race finally came down to Payne and Lockport senior Emmie Hahn, 59th at 3A state last year. Just when Hahn pulled ahead by about 5 yards, Payne found another gear.

"When I heard their coach say, 'Keep surging,' then I knew what to do. I was just praying she would die," Payne said. "That was when I had to dig deep and really think. At that point, we had about 3/4 of a mile left and I was hoping. I was really thinking I was going to get second.

"At the end, (Hahn) started to gradually slow down and I caught up to her and then it was like a dogfight. At the 400 point, Mr. Hass was like, 'You've got to pass her now and dig deep.' I started to pull away from here. All of her coaches were like, 'Get her. Get her.' I just gave everything I had and the last 300, I really pulled away. It was the closest race I ever had. Usually in competition, I don't have anybody on my back but it was really good experience to know what it's going to

be like the next meets because they'll be harder, but it was hard."

Payne had missed two previous invites this season because of club soccer action for her Naperville Soccer Association Under-15 team. Payne doesn't have that much cross country experience from her days at Hadley Junior High, but this race proved to be a great teaching tool.

Payne finished in 5:50, her fastest mile of the race and two seconds faster than her opening mile.

"I was actually really, really happy with it. That was probably one of the best races I've run yet," Payne said. "The competition was really hard. I haven't run such a strategic race. I don't really think about every step. It was really hard not running with my teammates. I never do catch Lindsay Graham, but I kind of use her as a guideline.

"I was most happy about this race because I really didn't think I was going to win it. I was really doubting myself when I was running. On top of that, it was a different kind of race. It's cool to know that I could do it without my teammates."

The race bond among Rogers, Kenwood and Nabholz probably is greatest because they are the heart of the Hilltoppers' Wolfpack behind Graham, Payne and senior Lisa Luczak, who remains out with injury.

Apart from each other Saturday, the split among them was 21.4 seconds. Still, Rogers (5:51), Nabholz (5:52) and Kenwood (5:55) had very similar one-mile splits and Rogers and Kenwood both ran 6:18 for their second miles.

"It was definitely different," Rogers said. "We were talking before and (said) it was sad we're not going to be running together, it's not going to be the same, but also it was a good opportunity once a season to have this meet."

Rogers also competed in the No. 3 flight in 2013 and finished third (18:19.3), but the teams with the two runners who beat her did not return Saturday.

On Saturday, Rogers was pushed throughout by several runners, including second-place Lockport senior Haley Beaumont (18:11.1), 77th at 3A state in 2013. Known for her strong finishes, Rogers turned on the burners in the final 800 meters to prevail.

"I think with like half a mile left I just tried to pull away and then I really had no idea they were behind me when there was like 300 to go," Rogers said. "On frosh-soph, I won a few, but I don't think I've ever won a race like this. I was so happy with myself and it just felt really good."

Kenwood made arguably the biggest performance leap at the meet. Kenwood was in the No. 6 flight last year and finished third (18:52.9).

Saturday's times by Kenwood and Rogers would have beaten the fourth-place finisher in the No. 2 flight.

"I actually felt really good," Kenwood said. "I was nervous going into it because Grace and Jamie help push me in the middle of a race. But Mr. Hass talked to me before that I have to run my own race and I did that."

--by Bill Stone

Junior/Senior Open race

At the 2013 Wheaton North Girls Classic, junior Abby Shaver had to run alone as Glenbard West's varsity entry in the No. 7 flight.

At the invite Saturday, Shaver once again found herself alone.

This time it was because Shaver rolled to the title in the Junior/Senior Open race by an astounding 37.4 seconds after covering the 2.97 miles in 18:43.5. The Hilltoppers also captured the team title.

"It's really cool to win a race," Shaver said. "Junior year, it's just kind of a turning point for me. In my later years of high school to win a race like I did a couple last year, it's a real confidence booster for me.

"I think there was more pressure (last year) because I was alone and not running with teammates and there was less people. This race, I was one of the girls in it and with all of my teammates so I think there was a lot less stress for me in that aspect."

Junior Caitlyn Reick (4th, 19:31.4) and senior Hannah Arduino (9th, 19:47.7) also finished among the top 10, and juniors Nicole Berneche (24th, 20:04.2) and Christina Sedall (28th, 20:11.1) were among the top 30 to comprise the Hilltoppers' top-five finishers. They and seniors Julia Sakach (41st, 20:31.9) and Bridget Caffrey (63rd, 20:49.1) and junior Maddy Burt (82nd, 20:59.3) all received ribbons for finishing among the top 100.

The Hilltoppers (66 points) finished ahead of second-place Wheaton Warrenville South (73) and Lyons Township (79) to join the varsity in the winner's circle. Saturday marked the first time the varsity had won the invite.

"The top flights ran lights out, as did Abby Shaver who ran one of the fastest times on the team in winning the open race by a substantial margin," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said. "I could not be more pleased with the work ethic and

performances of Abby Shaver not only in this meet, but all season. She is really coming in to her own as a runner.”

The junior/senior lineup had the distinction of competing first at 8:30 a.m. and with lousy conditions – flurries, cold and wind and wet portions of the course.

“It was snowing earlier, but it was a fun meet,” Berneche said. “I wore Under Armour leggings and brought a lot of warm clothes. I liked running first more because you don’t have to be stressed out for the whole meet and you can cheer for everyone else after you’re done running.”

Their perseverance and success set the tone for a great day by the program. On the varsity level, which combined the results of seven flight races, the Hilltoppers won the invite for the first time with four flight champions and just 13 points.

“I think it really did (generate momentum). We always do our huddle before the race and we talked about the weather’s bad and just to go and try our best and give it our all,” Shaver said. “I think that attitude set the tone for the rest of the races because we weren’t alone with the weather. I think our success helped them.”

The race was crowded in the early going but by the first 800 meters Shaver was up front with three or four other runners and ran the first mile in 5:53. The leaders thinned out quickly and Shaver built up quite a lead to prevail easily over second-place O’Fallon senior Angela Buch (19:20.9).

“I knew I was in first place, but second place, I thought, was right behind me,” said Shaver, whose third mile was 6:20. “I think that kind of helped me race a little bit faster so it was probably a good thing. I thought she was right behind me, but it turns out she wasn’t.”

Shaver ran one of her fastest times ever, more than a minute faster than the 2013 invite (19:44.1), where she was seventh in the No. 7 flight.

Even though actually running along Saturday, Shaver ran the Hilltoppers’ sixth

fastest time for any of the races. It was fast enough to finish second in the varsity's No. 7, 6 or 5 flights.

"I felt pretty good. It was really cold, but I went into it thinking that I could be in the front few people of the race," Shaver said. "I didn't know I could win, but I was thinking I'd try my best and I got a pretty good time."

Berneche said she benefitted from being right behind Arduino through the opening part of the race. At one mile, Berneche was the Hilltoppers' No. 4 runner in 6:26, just four seconds behind Arduino, who had the Hilltoppers' 10th fastest time Saturday. Reick opened in 6:06 and had the team's ninth-fastest time overall.

"I tried to start out smart. I tried to kind of stay with Hannah at the beginning and try to get a good position in the first mile," Berneche said. "I didn't really see her after the first mile, but it was pretty crowded."

Berneche fell 12 seconds behind Arduino after two miles but had three sub-7:00 miles (6:26-6:55-6:43) to post the team's 12th fastest overall time at the event. Last season, Berneche came on strong to earn one of the five spots as an alternate for the 12-person state series lineup.

"Well, I know the courses a lot better (this season) and I have run a lot of the courses already so I'm also trying to use the races to get better," Berneche said. "I think last year I was really nervous and this year I am more confident."

Frosh/Soph Open race

Glenbard West freshman Mary Kate Shaver could have used plenty of excuses to have a difficult race Saturday, Oct. 4, at the Wheaton North Girls Classic.

Despite terrible weather and often race companion Claire Dibadj not competing, Shaver was 24th and the team's No. 2 finisher in the Frosh-Soph Open race (20:08 for 2.97 miles) behind freshman Claire Kenwood taking 16th (19:50.1).

"That was my best time, actually, and I was really surprised. I thought I would be slower given the weather," said Shaver, who now hopes to break 20:00. "The entire time I just focused on speeding up when I thought I was struggling so I think that helped my time overall."

Kenwood, Shaver and Jana Manalo (40th, 20:39.6) earned ribbons for finishing among the top 100. Rebekah Crail (112th, 21:41.7), Grace Zemenak (125th, 21:56.1) and Jillian Locke (144th, 22:23.4) rounded out the top seven for the Hilltoppers, who finished ninth (260 points).

"It was definitely not the best conditions. We're really close as a team and just giving each other a pep talk beforehand, we said no matter what happened, we were really supporting each other," Shaver said.

Kenwood ran more aggressively and put herself in position for a top-five finish, but she became nauseous down the stretch and vomited with about 200 meters left.

"I was in sixth and I was really pushing, trying to get fifth," Kenwood said. "I was hoping to get better (than 16th). That's why I went out faster than my last race and got myself in the position I wanted to be in. I was pretty nervous so I think that had something to with (becoming sick)."

In her last big meet at the Richard Spring Invite Sept. 20 at Peoria's Detweiller Park, Kenwood was 14th after a 6:25 first mile on a more flat course than

Saturday. On the more treacherous St. James course, she was 6:17 at the mile.

"I definitely know how to start a race a little bit better now because I was in great position so that was good," Kenwood said. "I guess I just told myself to push through the weather and run my best. Everyone had to run in it."

Shaver often has finished near Dibadj in races, but in Saturday her focus turned to Kenwood. They had a nine-second split at the first mile and Shaver ran another sub-7:00 second mile (6:56) to stay within 18 seconds.

Both runners finished in 6:46. Manalo's third mile was a lineup-best 6:45.

"It was definitely a very mental race for me just trying to keep myself going, not having necessarily my teammates right next to me," Shaver said. "It was great being able to see (Kenwood). That also kind of kept me trying to push myself harder. It's surprising for me to see her because it's such a winding course. It was good to have a familiar face I could try and pace myself with."

Shaver and Kenwood are among several freshmen with older sisters on the team. Junior Abby Shaver won the Junior/Senior Open race to start the invite and junior Kathryn Kenwood captured the varsity's No. 4 flight race.

Mary Kate Shaver is among a small group of runners feeding in this season from St. Petronille School.

"It's definitely been different from sports I participated in in middle school," Mary Kate Shaver said. "It's a lot more of a commitment but it really helps me. The team is just so close-knit, it helps me transitioning into the whole high school experience so I just love it."

-- by Bill Stone