

RECAPS

STORY: Red Devils sweep Proviso West in final Silver dual

Hinsdale Central senior Meg Knister is doing much better this cross country season with some help from Claritin to combat her allergies.

Even when Knister felt below 100 percent prior to Wheaton North's Falcon Classic Sept. 29, she had success.

"I wasn't feeling very well the night before so I didn't think I'd do very well, but it ended up being my best race (20:15.7 for 2.95 miles)," Knister said.

Knister is finishing her high-school career on a high note. On Oct. 4, she ran for the varsity for the first time as the Red Devils defeated Proviso West, which did not field a full team, in their final West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual. The Red Devils, No. 13 in the latest Class 3A rankings by the Illinois Prep Harrier website, finished 4-2 in Silver duals.

Sophomore Molly Leahy was named the varsity's Athlete of the Meet by running a team-best 21:43 over the 3.09 miles. Leahy, senior Zoe Larson (21:45) and sophomore Tillie Kummerer (21:49) finished second through fourth.

Knister (22:07), senior Grace Cook (22:08), juniors Amanda Koronkiewicz (22:54) and Annie Wysopal (23:01) and senior Julia Tabaczyk (23:26) were the varsity's next five finishers in sixth through 10th.

"I was excited (running varsity) and kind of nervous than usual, just counting for the team. It's cool," Knister said. "It was a good race. It felt good while I was running.

"I tried to stay in contact with everyone else because (coach Mark McCabe) always tells us that makes you faster to stay with other people. I tried to do that the whole time. Lately, I've been running next to Grace the whole time so that helps us kind of push each other."

It was pretty hard not to find a teammate during this race. Since Proviso West did not field a full team on any of the three levels, there was just one huge race with all entries. The Red Devils' regular varsity runners did not compete.

"It kind of felt more like practice in the first half of the race because it was just all Central girls together in one group," Knister said. "That's kind of nice to run with my teammates the whole time."

For frontrunners Leahy and Kummerer, this also was their varsity debuts. Leahy has been working her way back from an iliotibial (IT) band (IT) injury that kept her out of two duals and an invite. She rejoined the lineup at Wheaton North's Falcon Classic Sept. 29.

"I was excited to have the opportunity (to run varsity). I wouldn't say there was that much added pressure because we all ran one race anyway," Leahy said.

“It wasn’t the most competitive environment, but it was still a good race and I was really looking forward to it. I was with Tillie and Zoe for most of it so there was still some competition. It was good for a dual meet. I was happy with my performance.”

There were some added challenges. Conditions were fairly windy with a storm approaching and it’s one of the few courses significantly longer than 3.0 miles. A first-year team member, Leahy also was unfamiliar with the course.

“Going into it, it’s a little harder to feel like it’s a race because there’s not that much competition or people at the starting line (from other teams). But you have to take every mile like a race and treat it like one despite everything, and that’s what I tried to do,” Leahy said.

This was the final dual meet for Knister and other seniors. For most of them, the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Oct. 6 at Schiller Woods will be their last competitive race for the Red Devils. The varsity race is at 10:30 a.m. with the junior varsity race at 11:30 a.m.

“I think (my goal is) to hopefully match my time at Wheaton or get a little bit better in the 20:00s or something,” Knister said.

Junior varsity race

Last season, senior Neena Joshi knew plenty about her Hinsdale Central cross country teammates’ races.

After competing just once in the Hornet-Red Devil Invite, she was diagnosed with a stress fracture in her foot and spent the rest of season contributing to the team by recording splits and times at races.

“I was able to be with (my teammates) before the race so I was able to see everyone’s different mental attitudes,” Joshi said. “I definitely saw the people that were more confident going into the race were definitely leading the pack. The people who were kind of not necessarily nervous but were just bringing themselves down, worried that they wouldn’t be able to finish, they were closer to the back of the pack just because they didn’t have a positive mental attitude. I’ve learned to go in, be confident with myself and just do well.”

This season, Joshi has competed in every race and she’s enjoying it.

Joshi was named the junior varsity’s Athlete of the Meet after helping the Red Devils defeat Proviso West, which did not field a full lineup. It was the JV’s first victory in Silver duals.

Junior Cristina Tye (24:00), senior Sarah Hillegass (24:04) and junior Sara Ramasastry (24:08) led the Red Devils’ JV on the 3.09-mile course. Joshi (24:22) and seniors Greta Hucek (25:04), Sarah Alvero (25:15), Mia Larson (25:24) and Julia Skalski (25:35) also broke 26:00.

“That was awesome. I’ve been on the team since sophomore year and I’ve never gotten Athlete of the Meet before so it was a big surprise for me. It wasn’t something I was expecting,” Joshi said.

“It feels really good, especially after being injured last season. Being in all of the races has really made a

difference. I really enjoy being active in the races this time, not just seeing the results. I'm really happy about it."

Because Proviso West did not field a full team on any level, there was just one race with all entries. It was somewhat emotional, too, because it was the last dual meet for the seniors.

Most seniors will have their final race at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Oct. 6 at Schiller Woods. The junior varsity race will be the final girls one at 11:30 a.m.

"Conference is going to be my last race," Joshi said. "We were all just talking about it. We're like, 'We only have three miles left of our cross country career.' It's crazy. It's weird."

Frosh-soph race

When freshman Emma Stapleton didn't make the girls tennis team, she decided to give cross country a try.

She competed in the 2.0-mile race at the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invite Sept. 1, but then she was sidelined by a strained iliotibial (IT) band near her hip.

"I just knew it hurt when I ran," Stapleton said. "I've been running on the track and then going to the trainer after practice and icing. I just started running normal practices last week so I was good to go."

In her return to competition Oct. 4 at Proviso West, it was not only her first 3.0-mile race but actually 3.09 miles to be exact. Stapleton responded with a solid performance that helped the Red Devils win the frosh-soph race over Proviso West, which didn't field a complete team. The Red Devils finished 4-2 in Silver duals.

Stapleton (22:22), sophomore Anya Patel (22:25) in her first race back and freshmen Maddie Sullivan (22:30) and Mackie Stevens (22:40) took first through fourth place with the eighth through 11th fastest times over all three levels. Freshman Anne Zaher (23:00), sophomores Jillian DeBoer (23:02), Rachael McCann (23:43) and Tori Burke (24:48), freshman Alex Lithgow (24:50) and sophomores Lauren Hannemann (24:57) and Clara Davis (25:02) were the Red Devils' next seven finishers.

Stapleton was named the frosh-soph Athlete of the Meet.

"It's just a surprise to me, how well I did. It's a good way to go back into the season, I guess, even though the season's almost over," Stapleton said.

"I was kind of psyched to see how it goes, and I thought I'd try to pace myself with some of the other people that I've been running with before and see how it went and I'd slow down if I had to but it went pretty well."

Stapleton has some running experience. She competed in cross country as an eighth grader at Clarendon Hills Middle School and competed in track in both seventh and eighth grade.

Perhaps the best part of her race at Proviso West was that she didn't experience considerable pain around

her hip.

“It hurts more after I run than during. It was a little sore after, but that was kind of expected,” Stapleton said.

The Red Devils compete at the WSC Silver Meet Saturday, Oct. 13 at Schiller Woods, Oak Park-River Forest’s home course. The sophomore race is at 9:30 a.m. following a freshman race at 8:30 a.m. that is only 2.0 miles.