

## RECAPS

### IHSA Regional

Bill Stone  
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Hinsdale Central freshman Susan Spencer wished she could have felt better during her first postseason race Saturday at the Class 3A Lyons Township Regional.

"I was like, 'Oh, I hope I can complete this race.' I've been sick so breathing wasn't a great thing," Spencer said. "I'm just glad I could finish the race because I really wanted to walk out of it. I had to push through and finish it for the team."

The results didn't show it. Spencer improved her time on the course by roughly 18 seconds and helped the Red Devils finish fourth in Western Springs and advance to the Lockport Sectional at 11 a.m. Saturday (Oct. 29) at Dellwood Park.

Hinsdale Central junior Jill Hardies (17:30.33) won the 3.0-mile race by 14.13 seconds. Sophomore Becca Marcotte was 18th (19:03.78), followed by Spencer (23rd, 19:22.22), juniors Becky Ventura (25th, 19:34.93) and Katie Gelman (30th, 20:03.32) and senior Taylor Troy (38th, 21:01.19) in her season debut. Junior Morgan Mulhern, also making her season debut from injury, dropped out about one-quarter of a mile into the race.

The Red Devils (97 points) finished behind the three ranked teams in the most recent DyeStat Illinois and the Illinois Track and Cross Country Association 3A polls, LT (35), Downers Grove South (46) and Downers Grove South (70). Hinsdale South (131) and Argo and Reavis (187 each) also advanced.

"We expected to be in the top four and we ended up fourth," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "Jill certainly ran well, and I thought Susan had another step forward. She'd been a little sick (last week)."

Spencer wants to run faster, but Saturday's perseverance is indicative of the kind the Red Devils need at sectionals to achieve a top-five finish and return to the state meet as a team Nov. 5 at Peoria's Detweiller Park.

While LT, Downers South and state-ranked Lockport are expected to take three of the qualifying spots, the Red Devils are among a huge group seeking the remaining three, along with the likes of Downers North, Sandburg, Marist, Mother McAuley, Neuqua Valley and Oswego. Lockport and Marist won their respective regionals.

"There's probably about six or seven teams going for those fourth and fifth spots and we're one of them," McCabe said. "If we run our race on the day that we're capable and are ready to run, we'll be in the hunt."

Spencer hopes to help. Despite McCabe saying the LT course was softer and even soggy in patches Saturday, Spencer easily improved upon her time from the West Suburban Conference Silver Division

Meet Oct. 15.

“(The Silver Meet) was probably the worst race of my life,” Spencer said.

For sectionals, she should be rejoined by freshman teammate Sarah Brennan, who also ran with the varsity at the Silver Meet. Other state alternates are senior Grace Klein, junior Zoe Larson, sophomore Rose Huang and freshman Tillie Kummerer. There also will be the support of Mulhern, who is Spencer’s “big sister” as part of team bonding and camaraderie.

“She’s had this injury for a really long time and I was really sad because it was her first cross country race ever and she couldn’t finish it. Hopefully we can get her better for next year,” Spencer said.

Second at the 2010 state meet, Hardies continues to get healthier and stronger. That translated into a dominant performance Saturday in her third race back from injury, finishing comfortably ahead of LT senior Lisa Gordon (17:44.46).

Hardies was only slightly slower than her 17:22.9 that took second at the Silver Meet. Unlike that race, Hardies returned to her strategy of taking the lead and setting the pace. Downers South freshman Amanda Thate (3rd, 17:56.67) tried to keep up but tailed off by the end of the opening mile.

“After the 2-mile mark, I just kind of tempoed it because I knew I had the win. If I didn’t have to, I wasn’t going to go all out when the next two weeks are really important,” said Hardies, who won the 2010 LT Regional in 17:26.00.

“(The previous week) physically I felt like I was hurt, and I wasn’t. But this week, my form felt like it did last cross country season and finally I felt like I was racing like normally do and it just felt great.”

Marcotte also continues to progress and was only seconds slower than at the conference meet. Gelman was seconds faster than at the Silver Meet, when she collapsed 25 meters from the finish but managed to walk into the chute.

Hardies, Marcotte, Troy and Klein were part of last year’s sectional lineup at Dellwood that took fourth and got the Red Devils to state as a team for the ninth year in a row.

Hardies won that meet over current Oswego East senior Ariel Michalek (18:16 to 18:22 for 3.1 miles), but Michalek then won the state championship by two seconds over Hardies (16:32 to 16:34 for 3.0 miles).

Saturday will mark the first time the two have competed against each other in cross country since then. Even if the Red Devils aren’t able to advance as a team, Hardies should qualify as one of the top seven individuals not among the five qualifying teams.

“I think we’re both going to push each other. (And) two Lockport girls are really tough and there are a couple of other girls who are newer to the scene. Hills usually are one of my strengths so Lockport is really a course to my benefit,” Hardies said.

“(As a team) we all need to step it up and race better to make it to state. We’re all working hard and

tapering this week in hopes to make it. It's a longshot for us to have the races of our lives to make it. Still, I'm optimistic about it. Nobody was expecting us last year, and we got fourth."

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