

RECAPS

IHSA Sectional

Bill Stone
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Hinsdale Central junior girls cross country runner Katie Gelman fell unconscious briefly near the two-mile mark of Saturday's Class 3A Lockport Sectional.

Her first memory was a woman from another school hovering over her, making sure she was safe. The second was a need to get up and complete the 3.1-mile course.

"I've been looking forward to that race for a really long time and I wanted to run it and I wanted to run well," Gelman said. "I knew I couldn't, but I wanted to finish. I really wanted to. That was my first concern."

Gelman was 148th out of 155 finishers, but she typified the spirit and perseverance of a frustrating Hinsdale Central season in which numerous injuries and health setbacks were the main culprit toward not qualifying for state as a team.

Junior Jill Hardies, second at state in 2010, is among a large group of contenders for the 3A individual state title, but the Red Devils did not advance after taking 12th (300 points), 139 points from the necessary top-five finish.

In their first meeting since taking 1-2 at the 2010 state meet, Hardies (18:20) took second to defending state champion and Oswego East senior Ariel Michalek (18:01). The Red Devils' other finishers were junior Becky Ventura (59th 20:48), freshmen Susan Spencer (77th, 21:10) and Sarah Brennan (84th, 21:20), sophomore Becca Marcotte (92nd, 21:37), freshman Tillie Kummerer (115th, 22:33) and Gelman (148th, 25:46).

"I was proud of the girls for the way they competed at the sectional. The girls that raced did their very best," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "It was an unusual year in that we were missing many people at the end of the season that we were initially thinking were going to be part of that lineup. The kids that did race, who otherwise might not have, really stepped in and did well for the team."

Hardies qualified for her third state meet by being among the top seven individuals who were not members of the five advancing teams. The Red Devils had advanced to state as a team the past nine seasons in a row.

"The team has been there with me the last two years. It's great to have them and know when you're running, you're running for them so I won't have that," Hardies said. "By the same point, they'll all be there and support me and I'll run for them, even though I won't necessarily be scoring (team) points. I'm trying to stay positive. I know my friends and teammates are coming to watch and do nothing but support me."

Hardies, seniors Grace Klein and Taylor Troy, junior Allison Shaner and sophomore Becca Marcotte returned from the 2010 state lineup, which finished 19th, but injuries severely limited the other four returnees.

Marcotte rejoined to the lineup late in the regular season, competing four times, mainly to help the team but still was feeling the effects of a hamstring injury from the summer. Troy competed at regionals and Klein at the conference meet, but both still felt far from their best and didn't continue through the postseason. Shaner never competed this season.

As a result, the Red Devils had a complete non-senior lineup Saturday with many runners who grew immensely as competitors in assisting the varsity lineup.

"We had more varsity injuries in one year than we've had in the last 10 years put together literally. And they were all different things. And we were a team that was thin depth-wise to begin with," McCabe said. "We said this was the first time we haven't qualified (since 2001) and that means next year is the opportunity to begin the streak anew."

Gelman struggled finishing two other races this season and initial feeling was that it was because of a lack of electrolytes in her system. She hoped to discover more answers when she visited a doctor Tuesday. "Katie's got a lot of heart and she's very dedicated to the sport and love running. When we get this figured out, she's going to be an important part of our team (in races)," McCabe said.

Hardies should continue her streak of top-25, all-state performances to join 2009 graduate Elaine Kuckertz as the program's only runners to achieve all-state at least three times. Hardies was 17th in 2009.

What makes this opportunity even more exciting for Hardies is she is now tapering her training after playing catch-up most of the season because of time missed recovering from shin splints.

Saturday was just her fourth consecutive race since Oct. 6 and the fifth she's completed the entire season. How much faster she can run is unknown even to her.

"Hopefully it'll be my best race of the season by a lot," Hardies said. "I've got goals from the beginning of the season before I got hurt. They might be harder to reach because I missed training. If I try my best, every race I've progressed and this week we're taking it easier and sharpening my kick."

Hardies ran a phenomenal state race in 2010, getting edged by Michalek (16:32 to 16:34) with the second and third-fastest times in state finals history since the girls race was increased to 3.0 miles in 2002. Last year, Hardies beat Michalek at sectionals by six seconds and wouldn't mind a reversal of fortune at state this year.

"She's feeling good about the race (at sectionals)," McCabe said. "I think she's going into state with the attitude that there's no clear-cut favorite. There's a number of girls that are going to be in that top group, and she's certainly one of them."

Only three of last year's top eight at state were underclassmen, the other being fifth-place Prospect junior Brooke Wolfe (Saturday's Schaumburg Sectional champion), but there are 17 all-staters from 2010 who

competed at sectionals. Lake Park junior Kaylee Flanagan (9th at state) was undefeated this season until taking second at the Niles West Sectional eight seconds behind New Trier junior Courtney Ackerman, a two-time all-stater. Ninth at Niles West, York junior Emma Fisher (24th at state) has beaten Hardies twice this season, both with course-record times.

Add to that group Naperville Central senior Amanda Fox (9th at state in 2009), the Hornet-Red Devil Invite and Wheaton North Sectional champion with a sub-17:00 time.

"It might be a surprise race like last year. I think, like last year, there's probably eight people who could win the state title. It'll just depend on the day," Hardies said.

"I want it to go out hard. I don't want the pace to dawdle at all. I want to run faster than last year but it was perfect weather so the times might be harder to hit. I could be third and really disappointed about my race or get sixth and know I know I ran really well. It's just a matter of how it plays out, how I race, how everyone races."

Hardies gained confidence Saturday in that she was able to lead Michalek for the first two miles before the tough, hilly course made a difference the final half-mile. Because of Hardies' shins, a much flatter Detweiller course will be more to her advantage.

"I'm not that mad about my race. I wish that last mile I could have pushed myself a little harder. I couldn't do the hills (well) because of my shins. I really haven't had the chance to have that strength background on hills and at the end, the hills really caught up to me. (But) every race since I've come back, I've improved a little bit. And I haven't tapered at all."

Among the most improved runners on the team this season was Ventura, who emerged into a solid contributor in her first varsity season. She competed in all but one varsity meet, Wheaton North's Falcon Classic Oct. 1, before getting her first taste of postseason competition.

"I definitely thought it was one of my better races of the season because, obviously the time wasn't good, but the effort really showed because it was a lot harder course," Ventura said.

"That was my first time ever running at sectionals. I guess coach kind of described it as positive excitement. Knowing that it could have been the last race of the season, I was just excited to go out and give it everything I had. I knew it was a good, competitive environment and if I embraced that, it would go well, which it did. It was really fun. It was a nice course, nice to look at when you're running, so I enjoyed it a lot."

What's really exciting is Ventura's best races should be ahead of her.

"She's really stepped up her level of performance this year. If the season had to end at sectionals, it was a great way to end," McCabe said. "This was kind of the first indication of what's coming in the future for her."

At the beginning of the season, Ventura was the Red Devils' lone varsity runner at the Peoria Woodruff Invite Sept. 10 and their only varsity finisher at the Hornet-Red Devil Invite Sept. 3 once Hardies dropped

out at the one-mile mark.

“It was a little weird, but some of them were good in a way because it was my first year running varsity. It was a good way to work into it, just get used to a more competitive race,” Ventura said.

“I love track so I’m kind of excited for this year of track. I think I have more in me so that’s good, more to show. I think it’ll be really good next season and in upcoming seasons.”

Now with plenty of varsity experience, Spencer and Brennan already are well ahead of schedule. In their absence on the frosh-soph level, Kummerer, who joined the postseason lineup Saturday, made strides as a frontrunner and leader for that group.

Gelman struggled finishing two other races this season and the initial feeling was that it was because of a lack of electrolytes in her system.

That included her conference race. Gelman was on the verge of all-conference honors but then struggled and fell with about just 25 meters and ended up 36th. She hoped to discover more answers when she visited a doctor Tuesday.

“Katie’s got a lot of heart and she’s very dedicated to the sport and loves running. When we get this figured out, she’s going to be an important part of our team (in races),” McCabe said.

Like Ventura, Gelman already is talking track, too.

“I’m definitely going to do track. I’m already excited for track,” Gelman said. “Obviously it was disappointing this season because I don’t think I got to really finish what I know I’m ready to do, especially at conference. I think once I get (my health issues) taken care of, and I’m sure it’ll completely be taken care of by this time next year, I’ll do what I’m capable of, especially at conference, and be able to finish the race.”

A healthy Gelman should emerge as a strong runner in 2012. It’s the kind of mentality that the Red Devils hope to bring next season as a group.

“We certainly went in (to this season) with high hopes and because of all of those issues performance-wise, it didn’t play out as we hoped. We talk about those types of things all of the time, overcoming adversity,” McCabe said.

“One of our quotes this year at the summer camp (in Lake Geneva) was, ‘Fall down seven, stand up eight.’ You get up one more time than you fall, and then you’re a success. When you actually have to live through it, it’s especially meaningful. We also talk about, going into next year, building off not based on things that stood in our way but where we would be standing. We’ve got high hopes already and what happened this year will fuel that fire.”