

## RECAPS

### **STORY: Red Devils returning to Class 3A state meet as team**

Senior Becky Ventura and her Hinsdale Central girls cross country teammates arrived at a new sectional site Saturday, Oct. 27.

They left with a good old feeling.

After a one-year absence, the Red Devils are returning to the state meet as a team for the 10th time in the past 11 seasons after finishing third at the Class 3A Marist Sectional at Midlothian Meadow.

The Class 3A girls state race is at 1 p.m. Nov. 3 at Peoria's Detweiller Park. Hinsdale Central, which needed a top-five finish to advance, was 12th at the 2011 Lockport Sectional after numerous injuries decimated the lineup.

"It's always a proud moment when your team's a state qualifier," Ventura said. "(At last year's sectional) we were disappointed, but at the same time we knew we accomplished a lot. It was different from (Saturday) because now we are leaving the sectional meet with so much energy and positive excitement, as coach (Mark McCabe) likes to say.

"It's very different because I feel like the team has grown tremendously from last year and now we have a full team ready to show off our results from all of the hard work at state."

Senior and three-time individual all-stater Jill Hardies (17:27.6) finished second to Sandburg junior Carly Krull (17:05.3) in the 2.98-mile race, followed by junior Becca Marcotte (15th, 18:16.9), sophomore Sophie May (28th, 18:40.6), freshman Athlete of the Meet Emma Sullivan (32nd, 18:42.8), seniors Becky Ventura (42nd, 18:56.3) and Katie Gelman (46th, 19:00.9) and sophomore Sarah Brennan (54th, 19:12.7).

Hinsdale Central (119 points) finished behind Downers Grove South (64) and Sandburg (100) while Lockport (131) and Lyons Township (142) took the last two advancing spots. The Red Devils edged Downers South 42-44 to win the LT Regional Oct. 20, but the Mustangs used their complete lineup Saturday.

"You always go into sectionals with the No. 1 priority of qualifying for the state meet so we accomplished that goal," McCabe said. "Certainly, I thought we had a solid race, but nowhere near our best. There were a lot of good efforts in there. The key as we get to the big end-of-the-season meets is that everybody knows their teammates are giving it as much as they are and they have the same goals and the seven of them on race day can pull the team up."

While state berths have become a tradition, it's pretty much a new experience for most Red Devils. Besides Hardies, Marcotte is the only other one with previous state action with the 2010 team that was 17th. Marcotte was 87th as the team's No. 2 finisher.

"I guess state's always been like an expectation and last year was kind of an odd year. I think everyone was

kind of secretly expecting it to come (this year). As long as we're injury and illness free, we would reach our goal," Ventura said.

"(Last year) was just extra motivation. It has made us stronger. It made us a little more driven, I think. I think it was that much more important to us. Last year, we didn't go so this year we definitely have to."

As Hardies makes her fourth state trip, she appreciates sharing this one with her teammates again. That especially will be important because she's battling a painful injury in her left foot that might affect her speed but won't diminish her tenacity.

"I just think it's more fun to go as a team because you have your teammates surrounding you and not all that you're thinking about is your race. (Last year) I was really, really stressed out because that was all I was thinking about and I didn't have anyone there to calm me down or anything," Hardies said.

"I've had a lot of injuries, but this is probably the most painful one I've had. I just have one more week to get through, and I'm doing it for the team. I don't know how much I'd be able to get through this if I wasn't going with the team. Just having them there is really important, knowing I'm going to have to push myself to get through the pain so we can do as well as we can as a team."

Other members of this season's 12-runner postseason lineup are seniors Veronica Peterson and Allison Shaner and sophomores Sara Folliard, Susan Spencer and Molly Leahy, a first-year runner. In 2010, Shaner competed at the state meet and Peterson was an alternate.

The Red Devils entered this postseason with plenty of experience after using an all-underclassman lineup at the 2011 sectional that included Hardies, Marcotte, Ventura, Gelman and Brennan. In that race, Hardies again took second while Ventura was the team's No. 2 finisher at 59th.

Ventura was much happier Saturday about her contributions as the team's No. 5 finisher.

"I thought I had a solid race. It wasn't my absolute best, but I thought it was definitely memorable. I left happy but not satisfied," Ventura said.

"Last year I remember finishing the race and being like, 'Where is everybody?' No one (but Hardies) had finished yet, so it was a little surprising. I'd say this year definitely felt cool to be on the course knowing our whole team's out there giving it their all. We had a much better representation of our school at this year's sectional."

Even with the Red Devils' success Saturday, besides Hardies' foot problem, Marcotte and May were battling illness. Marcotte still managed her highest sectional finish in three outings and 77 places better than last year, when she was still affected by a left hamstring injury after sitting out most of the season.

Gelman easily beat her 148th-place finish when she passed out near the 2.0-mile mark because of an electrolyte issue that she has conquered this season. In just her third race this season and second on varsity, Brennan was 31 sectional places higher than 2011.

"Last year was one of those, I hope, once-in-the-coaching-career seasons," McCabe said. "It was just a

confluence of factors that all contributed to a disappointing season, but this team has put that in the distant past and pulled together and made a decision they were going to get the tradition back on track and they've done that.

"And they're not by any means just happy to get there (to state). They have some goals that they want to accomplish."

Hardies has a chance to become the first four-time all-stater in program history for top-25 finishes at the state meet, but she's been focused on even more after finishing fifth at state in 2011 and beaten by only two underclassmen. Six other underclassmen finished sixth and ninth through 13th.

Hardies previously was a program-best second at state in 2010 to then-senior Ariel Michalek of Oswego and 17th as a freshman. Fellow three-time all-stater and 2009 Hinsdale Central graduate Elaine Kuckertz finished as high as sixth in 2007 and 2008.

This week, Hardies probably will run just one day and do elliptical training the other days to protect her foot.

"It is obviously very painful, but my leg's not broken so it could be worse. My foot might be broken, but my leg isn't," Hardies said.

"It's kind of tough to grasp that maybe some of the goals that I've really wanted to accomplish aren't going to happen. But I know that I can still do pretty well. Obviously, I know winning a state championship isn't very realistic. Right now my main focus is the team, and it hasn't been that way basically since my freshman year."

Enter Sullivan. With the same hair color and similar styles, some people could have easily thought at the beginning of the season that Sullivan was the freshman sister of Hardies.

As she prepared for her first sectional, Sullivan wore a state meet warmup top from when she competed at the Illinois Elementary School Association state cross country meet for Westview Hills Middle School in seventh and eighth grade.

Sullivan knows this state meet will be an even bigger adventure.

"It's going to be such a fun experience, especially with my team because hanging out with them is such a blast," Sullivan said. "I'm looking forward to just racing my best race. I want to get a (personal record of under 18:42). I want our team to do really well down there. I'm excited to see what comes."

Hardies, a 2010 sectional champion, was side by side with Krull after one mile Saturday in 5:39. During the second mile, Hardies conceded the victory to Krull but intended to maintain second. At the 2.0-mile mark, Hardies (11:38) was 21 seconds behind Krull but 20 seconds ahead of Marist senior Maggie O'Laughlin (22nd at state in 2011).

Hardies ended up 22.3 seconds behind Krull but 20.8 seconds ahead of third-place Oswego senior Kelsey Hjorth (17:48.4). O'Laughlin (17:51.3) was fourth.

"I knew that realistically I was in so much pain that I wasn't going to be able to run as fast as (Krull) was. I was pretty happy with second, considering how much pain I was in, and it was a pretty comfortable second," Hardies said. "That was also kind of tough, being in pain and being alone, but I wanted to hang onto second for the team so it kept me motivated."

At the mile mark, Marcotte (9th, 5:45) and May (14th, 5:48) were among the top 15 but could not sustain their positions primarily because of their illnesses.

Sullivan (37th), Ventura (42nd) and Gelman (43rd) were in a tight pack in 5:55/5:56. Sullivan moved up to 31st (12:28), just behind Brennan, at the 2.0-mile mark.

"I was a little bit more nervous than most races because I knew state was on the line and I wanted to get there for my teammates so I pushed a little extra hard the last mile," Sullivan said.

Since their 2006 state title in the last season of two classes, the Red Devils have finished fourth in 2007, second in 2008, 11th in 2009 and 17th in 2010. The Red Devils have been ranked among the top 15 teams in 3A all season despite not having their full lineup or posting their best race.

"If everybody can choose their best race between regionals and sectionals and run that at state, and if Sophie and Becca are 100 percent recovered, that's going to put us in a real good place," McCabe said. "This team has a lot of upside so we're excited about that."

Ventura is excited about not only her first state meet but her first time attending the event. The Red Devils competed at Detweiller Park during the regular season at Peoria Woodruff's First to the Finish Invite Sept. 8 to get a feel for the course.

In her regular-season invite race at Detweiller last year, Ventura was the varsity team's lone entry. The progress she made last season gave her a glimpse of her ability and the importance of having teammates to train with and compete during races.

"I think first of all, it's just an exciting experience to be running with 25 of the top teams in the state," Ventura said. "I think the whole atmosphere of it all, lots of excitement, energy. It's cool to say I'm going to go down to state. You can't help but have a great race on a weekend like that."

"Definitely I think teamwise it would be very cool for us to get in the top 10 in state or even better. For all of us individually, we just want to have one of the best races of the season, especially the seniors. Coach always says to leave it out on the field. That's one of the goals, to get a (personal record) or close to it and when you leave that your senior year of cross country ended on a high note."