

Hinsdale Central senior Mackie Stevens has been working on faster second miles in her cross country races.

Continuing that pace to the finish results in the race of her life at the New Balance/Naperville Running Company Twilight Meet Wednesday, Oct. 7, at Naperville North.

While sophomore Reilly Revord was an impressive fifth (17:15.7 for 3.0 miles) in a field of several strong all-state contenders, sophomore Grace McCabe (25th, 18:03.9) and Stevens (26th, 18:04.3) finished next to each other in the top 30. Junior Molly Caveney was 60th (19:05.2), followed by freshman Taylor Waldron (70th, 19:26.6), senior Emma Sullivan (71st, 19:27.9), freshmen Kayla Byrne (72nd, 19:29.7), Bella Pisani (80th, 19:50.2) and Caitlin Chval (83rd, 19:53.1) and sophomore Sophia Horowicz (86th, 20:11.5).

Revord earned an individual medal for placing among the top 20. For Stevens, it was a personal-record time even with the numerous turns and some tough-to-navigate areas on the 3.0-mile course.

"I've had this plan to make sure and push it through the whole race. Today I definitely executed that how I wanted to," Stevens said. "I just kept telling myself that I needed to do it so when postseason comes, I know that I can do it. I know that I am capable of it so this is a huge breakthrough for me."

Teams were allowed as many as 10 entries. Byrne, Pisani and Chval made their varsity debuts at the invite. Waldron made her varsity debut at the St. Charles North Invitational Oct. 5, when she was the team's No. 6 finisher.

The Red Devils (173 points) were eighth in a powerful 10-team field that included the top three ranked teams in Class 3A and Yorkville, the top-ranked 2A team. Defending 3A state champion and top-ranked Naperville North (56) won over Yorkville (73), Minooka (100) and Glenbard West (107), ranked No. 3 and 2 in 3A, respectively. Wheaton Warrenville South (132) was fifth.

"I thought it was two champion-level races for Reilly and Mackie," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "For Mackie, the best race of her life, and Reilly just a great effort. She put herself in it right from the start, which was the goal, and ran strong the whole way. And it was good experience coming into a race like this for our freshmen after running on the frosh-soph level all year."

Besides the caliber of competition, the atmosphere of the race was livelier than usual. Races began at 5 p.m. with the varsity girls the fifth of six races. Hinsdale Central did not compete in the earlier frosh-soph and junior varsity girls races.

The 7:30 p.m. varsity girls race was completely under the lights. The runners finished the race one lap around the outdoor track and finishing with a sprint along the football field. The awards ceremony on the track was accompanied by loud music.

When Stevens entered the track, she could see from the clock at the finish line that she was in contention of breaking 18:00.

"I don't like to focus on times too much just because the courses aren't comparable. But I was definitely really happy with myself and definitely happy with the way my race was executed," Stevens said.

"This race was really fun and I think the atmosphere and running under the lights was a huge component of how I did and how my teammates did tonight."

Mark McCabe said the atmosphere was good experience for the Nov. 7 Class 3A state meet.

"Tonight was an interesting race, a different kind of race," Mark McCabe said.

"Focusing on what was going on, there were a lot of distractions. All of the different races, all of the team camps are among spectators, the music, the people. There are a lot of distractions if you let those detract from your focus."

The individual race was a who's who of the early favorites to win the individual state title. Naperville North senior Judy Pendergast won the race in a personal-record 16:15.2 ahead of Glenbard West sophomore Lindsey Payne (16:29.9), only two seconds shy of her PR. Minooka junior Ashley Tutt (16:52.2) and sophomore Emily Shelton (16:58.1) also broke 17:00.

Revord and Grace McCabe put themselves among the frontrunners in sixth (5:35) and 11th (5:38) at one mile. Revord was 17 seconds behind Pendergast and 11 behind Payne but seven seconds from third and one second from fourth.

Pendergast was ninth at last year's state meet and won the 3,200-meter run at the 3A girls track state meet in May. Payne, Tutt and Shelton were respectively fifth, sixth and 29th in state in 2014.

On Sept. 12, Pendergast won the 3A race at the First to the Finish Invite with the fastest girls time at Peoria's Detweiller Park in any race other than a state meet (then-PR 16:18.9). Revord was sixth in that race (17:03.0) with arguably her strongest race ever.

On Wednesday, Revord lost contact with the top four but battled to maintain her place and her pace despite going most of the latter part of the race by herself. Revord was still almost nine seconds ahead of sixth-place Naperville North

sophomore Sarah Schmitt (17:24.6).

Stevens also is hoping to build upon her performance. She was 36th at one mile and moved into the top 30 within the next three minutes. She began closing on Grace McCabe during the finish in the stadium.

"In the two races leading up to this, I'd really find myself fade in the third mile but in this race I made sure that I pushed it the third mile," Stevens said. "I just continued my second-mile pace into that third mile and pushed myself. That was my main goal and I'm really happy with how I accomplished that."

-- by Bill Stone