

Senior Molly Leahy and her Hinsdale Central girls cross country teammates could have seen its triangular meet against host Oak Park-River Forest and Proviso West Thursday, Sept. 25, as an easy day.

That wasn't the case, even when Leahy spent most of the race running without anyone near her.

"One of the things (Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe) tells us is not to waste any race opportunities," Leahy said. "We don't get many chances to race so every opportunity is a good one."

Several Red Devils took advantage of their opportunities as the Red Devils defeated both opponents 15-50 at Schiller Woods to improve to 3-0 in West Suburban Conference Silver Division duals.

Freshman Reilly Revord won her first high-school race by covering the 3.0 miles in 18:25. With freshman Grace McCabe and senior Sara Folliard second and third in 18:49 each, followed by senior Sarah Brennan (19:21), junior Emma Sullivan (19:42) and Leahy (19:48), the Red Devils' varsity swept the first six places.

All three levels had a rare single race together and the Red Devils swept the first 15 places overall. In most Silver duals, the varsity and junior varsity race together after a frosh-soph race.

"I really liked (combining) it. It didn't necessarily make that much of a difference, but it was just fun to run with your teammates and know everyone was there, especially the sophomores and JV," Leahy said. "It's an opportunity again to go out there and use each other and try to get better times, work together and see where everyone's at."

The Red Devils did use the opportunity to rest their usual top-two finishers, sophomore Alexa Haff and junior Annie Zaher, as well as senior Camila Horowicz, who is working her way back from injury.

As a result, Revord, usually within range of Zaher, found herself reminiscing about

her days not so long ago as a standout undefeated runner for Clarendon Hills Middle School.

“It was different running without Annie only because I usually have somebody in front of me to run off of. It kind of reminded me of my middle school days a little bit, kind of running by myself,” Revord said. “It was really fun. It wasn’t a very small race so then I was able to cheer on a lot of my teammates as they came across the finish.”

Leahy had plenty to cheer about. Her time was just shy of her personal-record 19:41 Sept. 18 on the even hillier Katherine Legge Memorial Park home course.

Taking on Schiller Woods, known for a giant hill that runners must contend with multiple times, Leahy ran her fastest course time “by a lot,” compared to her races there as a sophomore and junior.

“I worked really hard over the summer so I’m definitely already seeing my racing taking step forward,” Leahy said.

“Personally, (Thursday’s race) was pretty good. It was definitely a step forward. There wasn’t necessarily that much competition and it was kind of a low-key meet but I’m happy to run that time at such a low-pressure race, just to keep my practice for when I’m in a more competitive situation. Now I know how to push myself alone so it’ll be better when I have more competition.”

The varsity runners provided motivation and a pace gauge for several top JV and frosh-soph runners. Revord and Grace McCabe, a strong runner herself for Westview Hills Middle School, worked off each other during the opening mile.

“It was kind of like a good, quality run day for me and Grace to stick together through most of the race,” Revord said. “It was like a regular day to train, like a practice but just with other people and other teams.”

Junior varsity

Another year of girls cross country experience is paying off for senior Val Yager and junior Anna Yang.

"I would say that I'm more familiar with things. (But) I don't know if it makes it any easier," said Yager, who joined the program as a junior along with 2013 state competitor Camila Horowicz.

"Actually, it's kind of nice to know what's going on and how to warm up and all of that stuff. Even knowing the courses is kind of nice. I know sometimes I'd worry if I got lost. It's nice to have ran most of the places I've gone to before."

On their return to Schiller Woods Thursday, Sept. 27, Yager, Yang and the Hinsdale Central junior varsity enjoyed 15-50 victories over host Oak Park-River Forest and Proviso West in West Suburban Conference Silver Division action.

Yang (20:17) and Yager (20:35) took first and second among JV entries on the 3.0-mile course. Seniors Susan Spencer (20:47), Marissa Meyer (20:49) and Tillie Kummerer (21:16), junior Lauren Bloomfield (21:37) and senior Laila Drury (22:13) took the next five places.

In a somewhat rare instance, all three levels had a rare single race together and the Red Devils swept the first 15 places overall. At most Silver duals, the JV competes along with the varsity after a frosh-soph race. The varsity and JV places and team results are then sorted out afterwards.

"I actually loved that. For me, it's nice to be running with those girls on varsity and frosh-soph as well. They all help to push me further," Yager said. "I think it's a chance to get pushed by your teammates and run even faster. Honestly, I ended up kind of racing with lots of different girls and different points. I would run with some of the frosh-soph girls and just being able to see the (varsity) girls off in the distance kind of helped to motivate me."

Taking all runners into account, Yang and Yager were eighth and ninth overall. Yang finished just behind freshman and frosh-soph winner Sophia Horowicz (Camila's sister), who also ran 20:17.

"I stuck with her around the last pass of the race, around the second mile or 1 1/2 miles. I was with her for a bit and then at the homestretch she kicked in front of me," Yang said.

"I felt like I pushed hard the last half of the race, which is always a good thing to do, but I think I should have gotten our faster. Even though there were not a lot of people (ahead), I passed a good amount. Personally, I liked how we all ran together because it was kind of cool to see how I was, in what position and all of that."

Yang and Yager are happy to be running again after rough track seasons during which they barely competed – and neither because of injuries.

Yang experienced breathing problems related to a cold and is considering undergoing tests to determine if she has asthma.

While her times are not as fast as 2013, Yang achieved her first race victory Thursday and cut 10 seconds off her race from the previous week. She also was pleased that she conquered the large Schiller Woods hill that greets runners towards the end of each lap.

"It was good knowing where I was running and the hill was less freaky as I remember it," Yang said. "It's going pretty well. I'm having problems with breathing, but I'm going to have that checked soon. I'm still doing fine for my meets."

Yager also had a frustrating spring after she faced an issue with the amount of iron in her blood right as the indoor track season was beginning. With improved iron levels, Yager hasn't missed a meet this cross country season.

"It made me realize how much I like to race because sometimes you forget week

in and week out. I get more excited than I used to. Coach (Mark McCabe) always says it's about positive excitement and that's what I'm trying to focus on," Yager said.

"I'm really getting back into it. I really love it this year. My teammates are so awesome. They're all so great. Watching them race and being able to race with them is really inspirational. I'm really excited for what's to come."

Frosh-soph

If there's any question that Hinsdale Central sophomore Tracy Wohlever and freshman Andie Davis have improved immensely this season, just check out their T-shirt collection.

They are among the early first-time recipients this season of the team's Athlete of the Meet given after each race to at least one runner on each of the three levels.

Wohlever, hampered by a strained hip flexor in 2013, received hers following the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invitational Sept. 6.

"Given that I didn't have the opportunity so much to run in a lot of meets last year because of my injury, it felt really good to strive for that," Wohlever said. "That was one of my goals this season, to get Athlete of the Meet in one of the many meets so I'm happy that I got that at the Hornet-Red Devil Invitational."

On Thursday, Sept. 25, Davis added her name to the list after her performance that helped the Red Devils sweep the frosh-soph races 15-50 over host Oak Park-River Forest and Proviso West at Schiller Woods.

Freshman Sophia Horowicz won the 3.0-mile race in 20:17 with sophomores Molly Caveney (20:44), Olivia Carter (20:49), Wohlever (20:50) and Taylor Reinhardt (21:16), Davis (21:43) and freshman Sophia Karris (21:57) sweeping the next six places.

It's been a whirlwind season for Davis, a former Level 7 club gymnast who joined the summer running program in mid-July after she moved from Colorado.

"I'd say (it was) a body of work award because it wasn't my best time," Davis said. "It felt really good because I've been working really hard. I feel like I've improved a lot over the season and it just felt really good because I feel like I really deserved it."

The race was slightly different than usual. Instead of the frosh-soph competing on its own before the varsity and junior varsity like most duals, the three teams combined all of their runners for one giant race with the three level's results sorted out afterwards.

The Red Devils had the top 15 finishers for the meet with Horowicz seventh, and Caveney (10th), Carter (12th) and Wohlever (14th) among the group. The other No. 8 through 15 overall finishers were the JV frontrunners.

Wohlever took advantage to run a season-best time.

"It definitely helps to run in a pack of girls. I felt like we were all pushing each other," Wohlever said. "I really liked having the combined race because it gave me a chance to push myself with other girls as well. I ran with (senior JV runner) Val Yager (20:35) and a couple of other girls from the frosh-soph."

"I actually thought (the combined race) was pretty good because I was able to pace myself," Davis said. "I think in the beginning I went a little too fast because I was with the varsity, but then I slowed down a lot because I knew that wasn't my level. I paced off of Sophia Karris because she's in my running group. I was able to kind of stay near her and it was a good pace for me."

Every race is even more of a learning process for Davis. This is her first time as a full-time runner after she quit gymnastics in March.

"During gymnastics, we kind of did some running during warmups. I really liked the running part and I thought I was pretty good at it and I'm not in gymnastics

anymore so I decided to do running instead," Davis said. "It also has been hard with (a new) school so I'm not quite used to the workload. I'm starting to get used to it and I'm getting more sleep than I had before."

Davis has made significant improvements from a 3.0-mile time of around 27 minutes at the team time trial. On Sept. 20, Davis ran a personal-record 21:29.8 at Argo's David Brady Invitational for 14th in the frosh-soph race. She was the No. 6 runner for the Red Devils, who won the invite team title with 23 points.

"(My goal is) probably under 21:00 because that's the minute range I'm in right now," Davis said. "It's dropped a lot since (the time trial) so I've improved a lot."

Last season, Wohlever cross trained for about three weeks during the middle of the season and returned for the final meets, including conference. She did not run track, but with healthy summer running and uninterrupted training, Wohlever also is seeking faster times. Thursday marked her first time under 21:00.

"I was not expecting my time when I crossed the finish line. I definitely felt like I was moving along but I had no idea I would end up getting my time," Wohlever said. "It's been a fun season so far and I'm looking forward to pushing myself further on this season in training with the rest of the team. I'm hoping to get somewhere over the season under 20:30."

-- by Bill Stone