

Senior Camila Horowicz may only be in her second season of competing with the Hinsdale Central girls cross country team, but the thought of her final race on the Katherine Legge Memorial Park home course Saturday, Oct. 25, still had quite a finality to it.

"It's very strange, knowing that this is the last time we're ever going to run here," Horowicz said. "It's just very sad. High school is almost over, and it's real now."

Horowicz and the Red Devils left with good feelings. They won the Class 3A Hinsdale Central Regional behind individual champion Annie Zaher to easily advance to the Marist Sectional at 11 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 1, at Midlothian Meadows.

Zaher, a junior, covered the 3.0 miles in 17:57.2 to lead a 1-2-3 finish with freshmen Grace McCabe (18:00.8) and Reilly Revord (18:05.7). Seniors Sara Folliard (19:08.4) and Horowicz (19:15.2), were ninth and 11th, followed by junior Emma Sullivan (19th, 19:45.7) and senior Molly Leahy (26th, 20:20.8).

"It's really sad that this is our last time here because this has been our home course for four years of high school. It was where I had my first cross country race of high school (the Hornet-Red Devil Invitational) so it's really sentimental to know that I'm done," said Folliard, a four-year team member.

"I'm really excited because I think our team has potential to do a lot of great things. We've all just gotten real close this season and we've all just done great things so I'm excited for it to continue."

The Red Devils (26 points), ranked No. 2 in 3A behind defending state champion Glenbard West, won the nine-team regional comfortably over fellow state-ranked teams Downers Grove North (41), Downers Grove South (61) and Lyons Township (106).

This is their second regional title in a row. They will try for only their second sectional title ever with Lockport expected to be their biggest competition. The Red Devils' only sectional championship team went on to win the then-Class AA state title in 2006.

"We always set our individual goals going in before races and we thought we could do that (finish 1-2-3) and we handled it well," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "The regional is a meet where your goal is just to get through and get to the sectionals and then state. You want to get through healthy and with a good effort but certainly you're not expecting your best race at regional. For the race we wanted to run, it ended up just fine."

Sophomore Alexa Haff, second at the 2013 3A state meet, sat out her second straight meet to rest a minor injury but is probable for sectionals. The Red Devils used only six varsity runners at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Oct. 25, but Doyle joined the lineup Saturday after taking second in the junior varsity race to help the Red Devils share the overall title on that level.

"(Haff is) making progress so we're hoping she'll be healthy for this weekend. We're eagerly looking forward to her return," McCabe said.

In Haff's absence, Zaher led the Red Devils' regional domination, leading at the mile (5:37) with Revord second (5:45) and McCabe third (5:48) just ahead of Downers Grove North sophomore Emma Moravec. By the two-mile mark, Zaher (11:43) led by 19 seconds over Revord (12:02) with McCabe and Moravec side by side (12:07).

"Our goal was definitely to put a lot of our runners in the top five and win the regionals. We met our goals today so that was good," Zaher said. "We did what we had to do today. I don't think anyone ran their best race today, but everyone did a decent job with what we were given."

This was only Zaher's second individual race victory. She won at KLM Sept. 18 in the Red Devils' dual victory over Downers North, another race in which Haff did not participate.

"Basically, there aren't that many (different) overall winners in the cross country season," McCabe said. "To win a race is something you want to enjoy and not take for granted."

The scenario this fall is somewhat similar to the track season for Zaher. In May, Zaher won the 3A state title in the 1,600-meter run after usually finishing second in very competitive races, including her state preliminary heat. In her last race at the Silver Meet, Zaher was the team's No. 1 finisher but third overall behind two Glenbard West runners.

"A little different than state track," Zaher said. "It felt good to win. It was a race with not much competition so I really had to key off of my teammates. That was interesting."

Grace McCabe took second in a high-school race for the first time after another top-five finish (5th) at the Silver Meet. Top-five regional finishers are considered all-regional medalists.

"That was our frame of reference. With Alexa gone, we had to step up," McCabe said. "Conference had more competition so I pushed more. There wasn't as many people here so top two was a good place to be."

Revord was .9 ahead of Downers North sophomore Emma Moravec (4th, 18:06.8). Revord especially was excited to finish top three after being ninth at the Silver Meet.

"I went out a little too fast, but it was a step from conference, just a better day in general," Revord said. "The course was really well worked on and done over the week so it was nice running today. I'm just ready to kick some butt at sectionals."

Folliard and Horowicz are the only seniors in Saturday's race who were part of the 2013 state lineup. The state lineup also included Haff, Zaher and Sullivan.

Last year, KLM played host to the sectional. Under the current agreement with the IHSA, KLM will be the host site for a regional or sectional for at least the next three seasons.

"It's nice because this is our home course and you feel special when (a regional is) on your own course," Horowicz said.

At the Silver Meet, Folliard was an all-conference, her first varsity all-conference honors. Horowicz, who was 5.0 seconds from 10th Saturday, was 30th.

"I ran pretty well in this one," Horowicz said. "I've only had a couple of races (this season) so for what I've been running, this is good, definitely a lot better than last week."

Horowicz shared the team's Athlete of the Meet honors with Grace McCabe. After being with Sullivan through the first two miles, Horowicz moved up five places over the last mile.

"It was a good step forward for Camila," Mark McCabe said. "She's not quite back where to she'd like to be, but each week is good, steady progress. I think sectionals will be another step forward."

Horowicz competed in four of the eight regular-season meets. She sat out the first two of the three regular-season KLM races, including the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invitational Sept. 6, and three of the first five races overall.

Horowicz trained through the early going of the season to help make sure she would remain healthy for the postseason. McCabe said part of the reason was because a difficult, hilly courses like KLM can be the most detrimental to her history of iliotibial (IT) band injuries.

“We’re a very close team and it’s going to be a good (end to the) season,” Horowicz said. “We’ve been putting so much work in for this and now this is when we get our reward.”

Folliard has many fond KLM memories. Her favorite was her previous home race Oct. 9. She ran a personal-best 18:05 as the Red Devils defeated Glenbard West 25-30, a victory that helped them share their first overall Silver title since the 2008 second-place state team.

Several Hinsdale Central football players added to the atmosphere for Saturday’s race. They cheered by the creek that runners have to step through along the west side of the course and then came en masse to the finish line.

“We had a good turnout. That was great,” Folliard said. “(The creek) wasn’t that deep and the banks weren’t too muddy so it was good.”

-- by Bill Stone