

Senior Amanda Koronkiewicz didn't consider her cross country regular-season finale Thursday, Oct. 10, also being her last race at Hinsdale Central's home course of Katherine Legge Memorial Park.

"It wasn't until I got home that night I was thinking about it. Wow, that was my last time," Koronkiewicz said. "I was not bummed, but it was just kind of sentimental, just thinking about it. It was a good way to go out, I guess."

Koronkiewicz had just competed for the first time on the varsity this season, and she was part of the Red Devils' victories of 20-30 over Downers Grove North and 15-50 over Proviso West.

Freshman Alexa Haff won the race comfortably in 17:52 for 3.0 miles over Downers North sophomore Kaitlyn Bonfield (18:47).

The Red Devils' Annie Zaher (18:56) and Camila Horowicz (19:01) were third and fourth, Becca Marcotte (19:20) was seventh and Koronkiewicz (20:45) and Tillie Kummerer (20:53) were 12th and 13th.

Usually a strong runner for the junior varsity, Koronkiewicz could recall previously competing for the varsity only two of three times before. The Red Devils were without Emma Sullivan in addition to Sarah Brennan and Sophie May, who have been out with injuries.

"My first varsity race of the season, and I just felt good because some of my teammates were out, but I was glad that I was able to step in for them and be there for my team," Koronkiewicz said.

This was the first time that Haff competed at KLM since opening the season by winning the Hornet-Red Devil Invitational Sept. 7 in 17:29.88. The Red Devils competed at KLM against York Oct. 3, but Haff has been only competing once per week and instead ran at the St. Charles North Invite Oct. 5, which she won. Horowicz, Zaher and Marcotte finished 1-2-3 in the dual.

Downers North's No. 1 runner, sophomore Grace Maletich, did not compete Thursday to rest a slight Achilles injury.

"I wasn't really sure about the level of competition. I just went out and tried my best and then I just kept going," Haff said. "You can't have a PR every time. I think I tried my best under the circumstances. As long as you try your best, you should be happy with yourself."

Haff said she was concerned with Bonfield but she actually was back farther than Haff knew. Zaher just missed catching Bonfield by nine seconds while Horowicz was five seconds ahead of fourth-place Downers North senior Meghan Bonfield.

"I wasn't sure how far behind (Kaitlyn Bonfield) was. I was trying to look back and I couldn't really tell. I was getting paranoid with it, thinking, 'I'm hearing footsteps behind me,' and stuff. I just kept going pretty much."

Koronkiewicz received a lift from having the JV race at the same time as varsity. She finished four seconds ahead of junior Maddy Melin, who was the Red Devils' No. 4 finisher in the JV race.

"I didn't go into it thinking I had to be some superhero for varsity. I just approached it as I would like a normal JV race," Koronkiewicz said. "I knew place wise I would still be in my pretty normal spot. I didn't approach it as some superior meet in that I had to be a superstar and stress myself out."

While this hasn't been her fastest season, Koronkiewicz think it's her healthiest. She's only missed two meets this season but because she was physically absent, not ailing. She missed the First to the Finish Invite Sept. 14 in Peoria to attend her grandmother's 90th birthday party and the St. Charles North Invite Oct. 5 to take the American College Test (ACT).

Koronkiewicz is part of a small senior class of nine competing seniors in which Marcotte has been the only varsity regular.

"I remember my freshman year there were nine seniors and they were such a huge part of the varsity team and there were so many on JV, too," Koronkiewicz said. "It's weird not having such a prominent senior leadership place, but I think we're making it work. We have a tighter varsity group as well so we don't need to necessarily have a designated leader at all times."

The Red Devils prepare for the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Saturday, Oct. 19, at Proviso West. The varsity girls race is scheduled for 12:30 p.m.

The Red Devils could earn at least a share of the overall title if they win the meet. The final standings are a 50-50 combination of regular-season and Silver Meet standings, and the Red Devils finished second in duals to two-time defending champion Glenbard West with a 5-1 record.

The top 16 finishers also are individual all-conference medalists, such as Marcotte (11th) and May (13th) in 2012. Only six of last year's medalists were seniors, but five were in the top eight, including graduated champion Emma Fisher of York.

Glenbard West senior Madeline Perez, the defending state champion and second in the Silver Meet, would be the overwhelming favorite to win – if she runs. Perez is expected to compete, but she has yet to race since her competition at the New Balance Nationals in June.

The only runner to beat Haff in a race this year was Buffalo Grove sophomore and returning all-stater Kaitlyn Ko at the First to the Finish Invite by 1.7 seconds. Because Glenbard West is in a different sectional, Perez and Haff would not meet again until the state meet.

"I'm anxious and excited at the same time, but I think I'm ready so that's good," Haff said. "I think just as long as I try my best I'll be happy with myself. Whatever happens, happens, I guess."

-- by Bill Stone