

Open race

Hinsdale Central junior Sara Folliard had more than enough motivation for a great performance Saturday.

Folliard was competing in the open race at Peoria's Detweiller Park, the annual site of the state meet, for Peoria High School's First to the Finish Invitational.

After a strong summer of training, she should have competed on her home course in the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invitational Sept. 7, but she sat out because of illness and had to be a spectator.

"I was looking forward to it and was sad that I couldn't run, but there's always more opportunities later," Folliard said. "Because everybody else had a chance last week, I had to make up for my lost chance today."

Folliard enjoyed a top-10 finish to lead the Red Devils in the open race, and she was glad to share the success. Junior teammate Susan Spencer ran with Folliard most of the way, as they finished sixth and seventh on the 3.0-mile course.

Up to the final dash to the chute, Folliard (19:18.98) and Spencer (19:29.23) were an inseparable Devils duo.

"We were right next to each other for the whole race. We didn't plan it," Folliard said.

"I was kind of following her in the beginning and then I ran next to her and then we just stayed like that the whole time, passed people at the same time, and then we'd surround them. They wouldn't try to pass us again because there were two of us. It was fun. I just pretended it was practice."

For most of the Red Devils in the open race, it was their Detweiller debuts. Freshman Olivia Carter received the 18th-place medal (19:40 manual time), but she was among a small group of top-20 runners omitted from the final results.

While the remaining Red Devils have accurate chip times, their individual places only can be approximated.

First-year sophomore team member Anna Yang (26th, 19:56.76)

also broke 20:00. The Red Devils' other entries were sophomores Mackie Stevens (64th, 20:48.18) and Tillie Kummerer (68th, 20:50.83), freshman Molly Caveney (70th, 20:56.64), junior Molly Leahy (78th, 21:07.82), freshman Abby Berberich (91st, 21:23.09), sophomore Emma Stapleton (103rd, 21:44.72) and freshmen Alyson Chatterjee (107th, 21:49.34), and Taylor Reinhardt (110th, 21:52.91).

In the team standings, the Red Devils were fourth, just ahead of Lyons Township.

Spencer was pleased for a near duplicate of her 2012 open race at the invite with a better time. In that race, Spencer was seventh (19:34), a place she often seems to get at invites, with current junior teammate Sophie May (19:39) right behind her in eighth.

"It was really nice to be running with Sara Folliard. It was like we were both feeling good and just kind of used each other," Spencer said.

"It was awesome. We never spoke the entire race. We just knew because we train together every day and we're always in the same running group. She came up next to me, and we kind of looked at each other for a split second. We just kind of knew, 'We're going to run together this whole race.' "

It was quite a duo. They especially enjoyed passing runners on either side and then coming back together. At one point of the race, Spencer got cut off by a runner coming around a turn and momentarily lost contact with Folliard.

"Sara and I ended up passing that person. Then I came into the inside. I was on the other side of Sara so we kind of switched spots," Spencer said.

Folliard hopes that this is the beginning to a strong cross country season. She ended the track season with her most satisfying race to date, a personal-best 12:11 in the 3,200-meter run at a junior varsity invitational at Naperville Central. She also received a lift during summer training as she began resolving an iron deficiency issue.

"I didn't feel like I did as well as I could have in track so then I was kind of irritated about it and decided I was going to do better in

cross country," Folliard said. "I want to definitely get under 19:00, maybe lower than that."

Spencer also is hoping to bounce back from what she considered a disappointing track season in which she mostly ran 800s. She also is serving as one of the four team captains with seniors Becca Marcotte and Amanda Koronkiewicz and junior Sarah Brennan.

"This is a good starting point, and I feel healthy, which is good. At least nothing hurt," Spencer said.

Spencer said running with Folliard helped her from drifting through the middle of her race. Now Spencer needs to work on her finish.

"Sara just took off that last 100 and I was like, 'Yeah, I can't sprint,' but I tried and I didn't get passed, which was good," Spencer said. "I just have to push past the mental block of finishing. If I could just pick up the pace, I think I'd be in a better spot."

Carter is among a large group of freshmen with experience in cross country -- and already as teammates. Carter, Caveney, Berberich and Tracy Wohlever, who made the trip but did not compete, all attended Clarendon Hills Middle School.

The freshmen received an overview of the Detweiller course and advice from McCabe and the upperclassmen. Carter immediately was pleased by the terrain compared to the Red Devils' challenging and hilly home Katherine Legge Memorial Park course.

Carter was 31st at the Hornet-Red Devil Invite at KLM in 20:44.44. On Saturday, Carter easily passed her pre-race goal of breaking 20:00.

"That's probably the best (race) I've had," Carter said. "I think that I pushed myself harder in this race today than I did last week, even though I think I did pretty well last week. This was a lot easier, and flatter especially."

Primarily a soccer player at first, Carter began cross country in sixth grade. She also did club cross country and track meets with the Chicago Flyers. One of her Flyers teammates was Grace McCabe, Mark McCabe's daughter.

"I always liked to run so (sixth grade) was my first time trying out,"

Carter said. "I hope to improve a lot and drop time and just do my best and have a lot of fun. That's important to me."

-- by Bill Stone