

Hinsdale Central junior Camila Horowicz has undergone quite a change of pace this fall sports season.

She is not only competing for the first time with the cross country program, but that's after being part of the Red Devils' swimming program the previous two seasons.

In the pool, she was a sprint freestyler at 50 and 100 yards.

"The race was over before I realized what was going on," Horowicz said. "Pacing doesn't matter. You just go as hard as you can for the entire time."

Horowicz is a long-distance runner in track, but even that's been different. She often competes in the longest race, the 3,200-meter run, but cross country races are generally a mile longer.

After just three weeks of competition, Horowicz is having her best season to date. On Saturday, she had the team's fastest time during the team's first trip to the Minooka Invitational at Channahon Community Park.

The Red Devils, minus three of their usual top-five runners, still finished fourth (32 points) out of 16 teams in the format that combines the results of seven flight races. Ranked No. 5 in Class 3A this week by all three state polls, the Red Devils finished behind three top-20 teams -- Wheaton Warrenville South (17), Hoffman Estates (19) and Minooka (23).

Horowicz covered the 3.0 miles in 18:39 to take fourth in the No. 2 flight.

Sophomore Annie Zaher was fifth in the No. 1/top flight in 18:41. Junior Sara Folliard was third in Flight 5 (19:17), and sophomore Emma Sullivan (19:09 at No. 4) and juniors Sarah Brennan (19:40 at No. 3) and Val Yager (20:11 at No. 7) were fourth. Junior Susan Spencer (20:57 at No. 6) was eighth.

While Horowicz often has said how much she enjoys track, so far she has found something even better.

"Emotionally after cross country, I feel like I've accomplished more. I don't know if it's because it's a mile longer, but after I run a cross country race, I feel so good about myself," Horowicz said.

"I look forward to training now and look forward to practices, which is something I haven't been feeling for the past couple of years. Even in track sometimes I would be dreading hard workouts. Now it's a lot more positive about running in general."

The Red Devils had many positive experiences despite keeping out freshman Alexa Haff and junior Sophie May and having Becca Marcotte, their lone senior regular, miss the invite to take the American College Test.

Like Horowicz, Yager is a track runner competing cross country for the first time. Zaher, a track state qualifier in the 1,600, is running varsity cross country for the first time this season. Brennan and Spencer were promoted after going 1-2 for the junior varsity in the team's dual victory at Lyons Township two days earlier.

"We went into the meet not with any team goals because especially in a flight meets, when you're missing three of your top five runners, it's even more of an impact than even in a regular meets," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said.

"It's good experience. We used it as a chance for some people that don't typically run varsity or haven't this year, like Sara and Susan and Val, and for the other kids it was a chance to run a race on a nice course. They run a great meet."

The race proved to be the latest cross country challenge for Horowicz. After learning to race by working off more experienced and talented teammates,

Horowicz was on her own.

The race went off at the same time as the corresponding No. 2 boys flight race. Horowicz soon found herself truly alone – 11 seconds from third and 17 ahead of fifth place -- yet still ran a great time.

“It was really mentally challenging because the last few races I had my team with me at least the first two miles. Not having them there makes it different,” Horowicz said. “I tried to focus. My mind wandered during that race. You just don’t feel as encouraged when you have people around you.”

This also was the first time this season that the Red Devils were competing on a Saturday following a Thursday conference dual meet, which counts toward determining the final conference standings. The Red Devils have only one more Thursday-Saturday racing combination Oct. 3 and 5 with the home York dual and St. Charles North Invitational.

“Everybody was kind of hurting from (racing) Thursday. I was and just trying to get through it,” Horowicz said. “Considering how I felt and that (Saturday) wasn’t as good of a race, I was not too far off my best. It was surprisingly good.”

“It went better than expected. I just wanted to race and try to do my best in this. There weren’t many expectations.”

Most of the Red Devils were at least eight seconds behind the finisher directly ahead of them. Folliard, named the team’s Runner of the Meet, was five seconds from second place.

“Sara Folliard ran a great race,” McCabe said.

Sullivan had the closest finish, just three seconds behind third-place Minooka senior Moira McAsey. Sullivan tried to pick up her speed at the finish, but she happened to roll her ankle and wasn’t able to make a final surge.

Sullivan's effort still would have earned ninth in the No. 1 flight and contended for sixth at No. 2.

"I was pretty happy with it because I stuck through it the whole race," Sullivan said. "I've been taking little steps, getting better each week. I'm really happy because I know that I can do a lot better and I'm just excited to see where it takes me.

"Before the race and throughout the race, I kept on saying, 'Stay positive,' in my head. That just kept me going. It just pushed me to keep up the pace and pick it up the times where I was struggling."

In recent years, the Red Devils have competed in a flight meet later in the season at Wheaton North's Falcon Classic, but on that day this season (Oct. 5) they are attending the St. Charles North Invite for the first time. The Red Devils previously competed this weekend in Chicago at the Whitney Young Invitational.

Minooka head girls cross country coach Kevin Gummerson is the grandson of Roy Gummerson, McCabe's cross country coach at Oak Park-River Forest. McCabe has known Minooka boys cross country coach Nick Lundin since his days competing for LT.

"I really like those guys and they're good coaches. They do a great job with the meet so I was happy to be able to go to that meet," McCabe said.