

Frosh-soph race

The first back-to-back cross country finish for Hinsdale Central sophomores Mackie Stevens and Anna Yang was a little bittersweet.

At the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invitational Sept. 7, Stevens pulled out 25th place for the last individual ribbon in the frosh-soph race. Yang was 26th.

At Saturday's Minooka Invitational, their consecutive finish was much higher. It also was a lot more satisfying all the way around.

Yang (20:05) and Stevens (20:07) were second and third over the 3.0 miles as the Red Devils won the team title in their first appearance at the invite 35-74 over defending champ Wheaton Warrenville South.

"That was really great. It was just everyone (contributing) and some of our girls had their best races that day," Stevens said.

"It's really fun (running with Yang). It's great to have her on the team. It's something you can kind of go off during the race."

Hinsdale Central had four top-10 finishers with freshman Olivia Carter (20:13) and Maddie Sullivan (20:18) sixth and eighth, and freshman Molly Caveney was 16th (21:07). Emma Stapleton (21:57) and freshman Taylor Reinhardt (22:06) were 25th and 29th.

Six Red Devils earned individual ribbons with top-25 finishes. Stapleton pulled out the last one by two seconds.

With her breakthrough race, Sullivan was named Runner of the Meet. That's just one example of how much better this lineup could become.

"Maddie Sullivan ran the best race she's ever run," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "We're just knocking on the door of that frosh-soph level of really putting together a top five to seven runners that can be real competitive."

In some good déjà vu from Thursday's West Suburban Conference Silver

Division dual opener, Yang and Stevens were second and third in the frosh-soph race also in 20:05 and 20:07, but for 2.97 miles, but host Lyons Township won the dual 23-37.

At Minooka, they were well behind Wheaton Warrenville South sophomore Stephanie Gorski (19:25), and Stevens was three seconds ahead of two Minooka runners.

Saturday was just another solid race for Yang, a first-year cross country runner who was a hurdler for the track team in the spring.

"It's gotten less nervewracking, I guess, but it's still nervewracking," Yang said.

"(Stevens has) helped me pace. She has a really good kick so at the end I'm almost like, 'Run harder, sprint faster,' because Mackie has an awesome kick."

The two actually bring out the best in each other even though they don't unite until the end. Stevens said she usually runs a faster first mile, but Yang has a stronger middle portion of her race and often moves in front. After that, it comes down to Stevens' stronger third mile, and her kick that she only displayed as an 800-meter runner for the track team.

The Hornet-Red Devil Invite turned out to be the beginning of a beautiful running relationship.

"I didn't even see (Yang) most of the race. Towards the finish line, I saw her and was like, 'Oh, I'll go run up with Anna. I'll go get with her for the finish,' and I ended up passing her," Stevens said.

"When I ran my first race, I thought I was at the bottom but then I was top 26, which was two seconds away from Mackie. That really surprised me," Yang said. "(On Saturday) we were two seconds apart -- again."

Yang already has broken 20:00 once for 3.0 miles, running 19:56.76 in the open race Sept. 14 at Peoria's Detweiller Park, the site of the state meet. Her transition has been an easy one primarily thanks to summer running, which she combined with summer track training.

"They had (track) every other day so it wasn't like you were super sore versus cross country. Once the school year started, I was like, 'OK.' I was already used to it," Yang said.

Stevens ran cross country as a freshman but with little summer preparation. She gained confidence when she finished second in the 2-mile freshman race at the Whitney Young Invitational, the invite the Red Devils used to go to this week of the schedule before coming to the Minooka Invite.

"I was happy with myself (getting second). That was the moment that I was like, 'Sure, I can do this sport,' " Stevens said. "Having the track season and summer running and then starting the season, it's a lot better to know how to run races and to be in shape for the season and everything."

Open race

Hinsdale Central junior Maddy Melin faced a challenging start to her cross country race at the Minooka Invitational Saturday.

"My shoe was untied the whole entire time. It came untied, I'd say, a minute after we started going, and I was freaking out about it," Melin said. "I was asking (Hinsdale Central coach Courtney Wallace) about it as she was cheering me on. I pointed out my shoe and she said, 'Oh it was fine.' "

Melin felt like her shoe was flailing, yet she remained stronger than ever. Melin was named an Athlete of the Meet after she finished 18th in the open race (21:00 for 3.0 miles) as the Red Devils' No. 2 finisher.

A strong 400-meter runner for the track team, Melin had arguably her best cross country finish over her final 100 Saturday, with a little help from Wallace.

"I just went," Melin said. "(Wallace) started yelling at me and I didn't really pay any attention to her but she's screaming, 'Go Maddy, sprint, sprint.' She really wanted me to so I did it. Motivation is key."

No team scores were kept, but the Red Devils placed four in the top 20 with junior Molly Leahy (16th, 20:53), Melin, Tillie Kummerer (19th, 21:04) and

Amanda Koronkiewicz (20th, 21:05), all of them earning individual ribbons by placing among the top 25. The Red Devils had another strong pack nearby with Alina Kloss (26th, 21:41), Abby Berberich (29th, 21:47), Rose Huang (30th, 21:47), Brooke Secola (31st, 21:51), Laila Drury (32nd, 21:54), Lauren Hannemann (35th, 22:01) and Cristina Tye (36th, 22:01) among their top-11 finishers.

This was Hinsdale Central's first trip to the Minooka Invite. The varsity level is a flight meet, in which results from seven races are combined for team totals.

With three usual JV runners promoted to the flight races (Sara Folliard, Susan Spencer and Val Yager), the performance by the remaining JV runners was that much more satisfying.

"On the JV, Maddy Melin was definitely the race of the day," Hinsdale Central head coach Mark McCabe said. "That puts her in the top five at our JV level, and I think she can move even higher. She's just starting to kind of realize what she can do."

Melin was focused on soccer as a freshman and played for the Red Devils' soccer program that spring. Last year, she joined cross country and track for the first time. Melin did have some distance experience on her own with community 5k races since she was a freshman.

"(After this track season), I did summer running and then after some days I would also run a second time by myself. I wanted to do really well this year for my junior year," Melin said.

"I kind of feel (I'm improving). I'm trying to push myself harder and harder each time to get a better time. I'm all about getting a better time. I really want to get (under) 20:00."

This season, Kloss is a first-year cross country runner but who also has run several 5k races and competed in the sport her final two years at Clarendon Hills Middle School.

Even last year, Kloss said she considered joining. She tried this year's summer running camp and knew from there she wanted to continue with the sport.

"This year I wanted to be on the school team, and I love it so far," Kloss said. "It wasn't a hard transition at all, actually. It's kind of like the same running (as a 5k), but it's better because you're running with other people. It's more fun."

Teammates do make a difference. Melin said Kummerer put her in position for her great race.

"We helped each other during the whole entire time, trying to push each other to go faster. That's when I decided to sprint it," Melin said. "She's the one that kept me on pace."

Apparently, Melin was unaware that Kloss was working off of her. While Kloss said she wasn't consciously leading the trail pack, the fact that the next Red Devils behind her finished within 13 seconds probably wasn't by accident.

"(Melin is) really fast. I kind of use her as my pace marker. I kind of push to get up to her," Kloss said. "We're in the same training group when we run. We really work well as a team where we motivate each other in practice."

At full strength, the JV enjoyed an emotional 25-30 dual victory at Lyons Township Thursday. Kloss ran a personal-best for 21:50 over 2.97 miles as the lineup's No. 7 finisher and was named the Red Devils' Athlete of the Meet.

Even back to competing the full 3.0 miles Saturday, Kloss ran another personal best by eight seconds. About the only disappointment was that she was edged by the two other runners who ran 21:41 for the final two individual ribbons.

"I kind of had it in my mind that I wanted to try and get another personal record. I was going for that," Kloss said. "I always get nervous before races, but I physically felt great and doing well on Thursday just motivated me to try harder."