

Frosh-soph

Hinsdale Central freshman Olivia Carter wished she had a better idea of the course at the Minooka Invitational Sept. 21.

While Carter had a decent race, the finish somewhat snuck up upon her.

"I probably could have pushed myself at the end a little bit more. I didn't know the course as well as I should have," Carter said.

"I learned that I needed to better prepare myself, as in getting more sleep and stretching out more and kind of mentally preparing myself and knowing the course, too."

Carter responded with a better fundamental and tactical race Thursday, Oct. 26. She earned Athlete of the Meet honors and the Red Devils defeated Glenbard West 26-29 and host Oak Park-River Forest 24-35 at Schiller Woods.

Sophomore Anna Yang (19:55) was third in the 3.0-mile race behind OPRF freshman all-state contender Mary Blankmeier (19:08) and Glenbard West sophomore Abby Shaver (19:46). Sophomore Mackie Stevens (20:20) and Carter (20:22) were fifth and sixth, Maddie Sullivan (21:05) and Molly Caveney (21:13) were 10th and 11th and Emma Stapleton (21:57) and Abby Berberich (22:15) were 14th and 17th.

Carter's performance was indicative of the Red Devils' stronger overall showing compared to their West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual opener Oct. 19 at Lyons Township, a 23-37 loss. The Lions are 5-0 in Silver duals.

"Our frontrunners ran great, Anna, Mackie and Olivia," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "Maddie Sullivan had another good race and Molly Caveney really stepped up as that fifth runner today, closing that gap a bit."

Carter was ready for a great finish thanks to her course preparation, primarily attacking the large hill that runners must ascend three times during the race.

"I just wanted to push myself and do my best really," Carter said. "I really wanted to do well on the hill because I knew going into the race it was going to be a hard challenge. That was my goal. I think I accomplished that."

Yang's pre-race focus was pretty much the same, although in different terms.

"I just walked in like, 'I just have to run. Don't trip, don't fall, don't puke, just run.' That's my goal," Yang said.

"(The hill) was really steep and it was short. Once you went through it, it was over. There was no more. It wasn't like a really, long gradual hill. It was just straight up and then you get over it. I just used my arms a lot to pump myself up."

Much to Yang's surprise, she not only broke 20:00 for the second time in her first cross country season. She actually beat her previous best time from the much more flat Detweiller Park course in Peoria by one second.

"(And) at the end of the race, I didn't feel that tired," Yang said. "It really boosted (my confidence). I wasn't trying my (absolute) hardest at this meet and it's nice to know that it was something that you didn't expect to be that good."

The finish line proved to be a welcome sight for Yang, considering the homestretch at LT may have cost her a victory. She ended up eight seconds behind LT sophomore Claudia Lundgren, a state cross country alternate and state track competitor as a freshman.

"I got second. I was leading the third mile and then I didn't know where the finish line was so I lost it at the last turn," Yang said. "I kind of learned not to think too much, just run."

Junior varsity

Hinsdale Central juniors Sara Folliard and Molly Leahy returned to Schiller Woods Thursday, Sept. 26 with a different mindset.

As they prepared for the Red Devils' dual meets with host Oak Park-River Forest and Glenbard West, they knew at least one thing. They were ready for the course and the large hill that they must climb three times.

"It definitely helped me a lot because I remembered how to use that hill," Leahy said. "Even though it seems scary, it's actually pretty beneficial if you just push it up and then take it slow down. I definitely felt a lot calmer about it."

While there may have been some confusion during the race, there wasn't afterwards for the Red Devils. They comfortably beat the Hilltoppers 20-40 and the host Huskies 15-50.

Folliard actually won the 3.0-mile race in 19:50, beating Glenbard West senior Annika Manning by 10 seconds.

Junior Val Yager (20:30), Leahy (20:44) and senior Amanda Koronkiewicz (21:04) were third through fifth, junior Tillie Kummerer (21:12) and senior Alina Kloss (21:47) were seventh and eighth, and Maddy Melin (22:09), Sara Ramasastry (22:15) and Lauren Hannemann (22:24) were 10th through 12th.

How much has Folliard improved this season? While poor running conditions certainly have to be taken into account, Folliard ran a disappointing 20:38.4 at Schiller Woods for 23rd in the frosh-soph race at last year's conference meet.

Folliard is enjoying this year's consistent improvement, and Thursday's victory, but she still thought she should have run better.

"(Last year at Schiller Woods) was not a good race for me because it was raining and cold and I just wasn't ready for the race and just wasn't

excited at all," Folliard said. "Last year, and the year before, I wouldn't always do that well so I'd kind of go into a race and not really know how I was going to do, but not it's better because I know it's going to be a pretty good race, at least."

"Sara had a solid race. She wasn't happy with it and I can see why, but she knows there's a lot more there," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "She just didn't feel like she was competitive throughout. We've been talking all year that she has everything it takes to be a varsity runner. She's going to keep coming and put herself in that mix."

Figuring out the JV results during the race was not easy. Mainly because of the extended travel time for Hinsdale Central and Glenbard West, the teams decided to run all three levels in one combined race and sort out the results at the finish line.

When most conference duals are condensed, the frosh-soph still competes alone and the JV joins the varsity.

"For the JV and frosh-soph, it was a good opportunity for a more competitive overall race situation," McCabe said. "That's only going to help them to be in that (combined) race."

While Glenbard West's frosh-soph lineup wore green tops, the Hilltoppers' varsity and JV runners had the same white uniform tops, making it hard to discern who was winning the JV race.

"I thought I was in fifth maybe. I couldn't see the people ahead of me because the course curves a lot so you can't really tell where you are," Folliard said.

"I like it better when it's all combined because there's more competition so it's easier to go faster. If I had been in the JV race alone, I would have had a lead so I probably wouldn't have pushed myself as hard. It was better that I could see varsity ahead, try to keep up with them."

Thanks to her experience from 2012, her first cross country season, Leahy is enjoying a better fall, even though her summer offseason training didn't go as smoothly as hoped.

Leahy was more than a minute faster than last year's frosh-soph conference meet, when she was 29th in 20:53.5.

Interestingly, Leahy received a lift Thursday from Yager, who is running cross country for the first time as a junior.

"I still feel a little bit new, but it's just getting better each race now that I know the courses and the routine. It just helps a lot more to focus on each race," Leahy said.

The Red Devils also received a monster effort from Ramasastry, who was named the frosh-soph Athlete of the Meet.

"This was a really (good race for her). This was pretty lights out," McCabe said.

Leahy began running for the Red Devils in track as a freshman. She joined cross country as a sophomore and followed that with an even better track season this past spring.

"I had a really good track season. That definitely made me really excited for cross country," Leahy said.

In July, Leahy injured one of her Achilles tendons, then the other. She also was set back by illness. Only a couple of weeks ago did Leahy return to training with the team's full workout.

"I have to kind of make up for lost time. I definitely had some problems, but those things happen. I was happy that it was in the summer, not now," Leahy said.

"It's all behind me now and I'm doing a lot better. Despite the setbacks, just after having now a full year of training in both cross country and track, I feel a lot more confident with experience and just with how to race."