

Hinsdale Central freshman Alexa Haff won her first high-school cross country race Sept. 7.

Then Haff finished a close second Sept. 14 at Peoria's Detweiller Park, site of the state meet.

Then Haff waited to compete again.

And waited.

Haff sat out both races last week, a dual and an invitational, as a proactive measure to deal with slight soreness.

"We wanted to be better safe than sorry. I didn't feel myself and I would rather not risk it," Haff said. "It always pains me to miss races. I wish I could be out there with the girls and everything. I was getting ready to race. I was getting pretty antsy."

Haff's excitement to return to racing Sept. 27 was climaxed by a strong kick. It clinched a victory in the Red Devils' West Suburban Conference Silver Division triangular with state-ranked Glenbard West and host Oak Park-River Forest at Schiller Woods.

The Red Devils beat OPRF 15-45 but lost 26-30 to Glenbard West, third in state last year and ranked higher than the Red Devils in all three weekly state polls.

Haff covered the 3.0 miles in 17:40 to hold off Glenbard West sophomore Lindsay Graham (17:45) and junior Lisa Luczak (17:55), both all-staters in 2012.

"We pretty much stuck together through the whole way and towards the end I just gave it my best and I guess it paid off," Haff said. "Obviously, you like to win. It feels good but I think after you win, you have to let it go. If you do great, if you do horribly you have to move on and try your best the next time. It's all about improving."

Senior Becca Marcotte (18:36), junior Camila Horowicz (18:45) and sophomore Annie Zaher (18:57) were fifth through seventh, and sophomore Emma Sullivan

was 11th (19:13).

"It was not our best effort but there's some real bright spots and shows what we're capable of in the future," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said.

"(Losing) 26-30 to one of the best teams in the state and nation is nothing to be embarrassed about, but at the same time we're very, very close to being at a real high level so we look forward to that in the weeks to come."

With just a couple of slight changes in places, the Red Devils might have beaten the Hilltoppers, who still have not had senior and defending state champion Madeline Perez compete for them this season. Marcotte was just one second behind Glenbard West sophomore Grace Rogers (4th, 18:35). Sullivan was eight seconds behind Glenbard West's No. 5 runner, sophomore Kathryn Kenwood (9th, 19:05), a first-year runner in her varsity debut.

"That's what we went in thinking we could do (win). Sometimes it works out your way, sometimes it doesn't," McCabe said.

"Alexa and Camila ran outstanding races. I think there are a couple of people who are just about there. I would put Becca and Emma in that boat. Annie had a little bit of an upset stomach but still did what she needed to do."

The Red Devils and Hilltoppers met previously the annual home and season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invitational.

There, Haff won her first high-school race with Graham and Luczak third and fourth. Zaher sat out that race and Marcotte dropped out during the race, both as a result of illness.

Since she sat out the Sept. 19 race at Lyons Township, this was the first high-school weekday meet for Haff.

"I kept on asking the girls questions. I was like, 'Do we put our sweats on now?'" Haff said. "I kind of forgot how things worked, but it works out well, though, I guess."

The overall Silver title is a 50-50 combination of standings in the dual meets and the Silver Meet Oct. 19 at Proviso West. Glenbard West has won or shared the last two overall titles, winning outright in 2012.

Horowicz, a new cross country runner this season, said she somewhat felt the grind of another weekday meet after two meets in three days the previous week with LT and the Minooka Invitational Sept. 21.

The Red Devils were off from competition this weekend.

"We definitely didn't do as well as we wanted to (as a team). At this point of the season, everyone is kind of tired and hurting and it's hard to race," Horowicz said. "It's a little bump in the road. I feel like (we'll be ready) when the meets that actually matter come around."

The past two falls, Horowicz was a member of Hinsdale Central girls swimming team, which also determines the overall Silver champion through dual results and a conference meet. Horowicz said the swimming team also trained through the dual meets as much as possible and focused on peaking for sectionals and state.

"There was no adjustment. Once you got there, you've like, 'We've got to beat these people,' " Horowicz said. "We had dry land practice in the morning and we'd have our meet. We would train through (the duals). We wouldn't have an off day before it. In swimming, you have to do that. As important as the dual meets were for conference, getting the training in was a lot more important."