

Frosh-soph race

Hinsdale Central freshman Olivia Carter gradually has gained confidence with the longer 3.0 miles courses in high-school cross country races.

"I've been kind of getting used to running the 3.0 miles and I think that I know when to almost push myself," Carter said. "I have a more positive outlook going into the race because I know I can do it based on my previous times and places. That helps me."

On Saturday, Oct. 5, Carter took another step as she was fifth in the frosh-soph race at the St. Charles Invitational at Leroy Oakes Forest Preserve by covering the 3.0 miles in 20:09.6.

Sophomore Mackie Stevens was eighth (20:25.2) and freshman Molly Caveney was 20th (21:02.9), followed by sophomore Emma Stapleton (30th, 21:44.1), Taylor Reinhardt (38th, 22:00.0), Brooke Secola (53rd, 22:30.8) and Tracy Wohlever (76th, 23:22.3).

"I was really happy with my finish and really happy with the race and how I felt during it. I kind of felt mentally and physically prepared before so it was a good race," Carter said.

"Going into the race, I just really wanted to break a 20:20. I guess my main goal was I just wanted to push myself and make sure that I worked really hard throughout the race and didn't fall on the second mile. I did kind of, but it's OK."

Carter was 10.6 seconds from fourth place and 8.1 seconds ahead of fifth. Stevens pulled out eighth by .2, and Stapleton was named the frosh-soph Athlete of the Meet.

Even without their full lineup, the Red Devils (101 points) were fourth, seven points from third-place Minooka.

"Olivia, Mackie and Molly ran great races," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "Maddie Sullivan ran into breathing problems again (and dropped out), but hopefully now that the humid weather is gone these last couple of weeks, she'll be fine.

"We have a top-five, frosh-soph group that's a really strong team. Molly's been closing the gap as the fifth runner. I think she'll continue to do that."

Carter's first 3.0-mile race for the Red Devils so far has been her most satisfying, a 19:40 for 3.0 miles at the First to the Finish Invite Sept. 14 at Peoria's Detweiller Park, annual site of the state meet.

The St. Charles North Invite was the first time Carter finished first for the Red Devils in any race. Carter generally has been right behind Stevens and sophomore Anna Yang, a first-year runner who was promoted to the varsity race.

"I think I ran normally what I would have done, even if (Yang) was there. It didn't make that big of a difference," Carter said.

On Thursday, Oct. 3, Yang (20:06), Carter (20:23) and Maddie Sullivan (20:40) took second, third and fourth, but York edged the Red Devils 27-30 at Katherine Legge Memorial Park. The Dukes took fifth through ninth with the Red Devils' Stevens (21:05) and Caveney (21:11) in 10th and 11th.

Sullivan suffers from vocal cord dysfunction, which can affect her breathing during races. Although she was hampered by breathing problems Saturday, Sullivan has improved as the season and the autumn weather have progressed.

"Once it's gotten cooler, I've gotten a lot better because (my breathing) doesn't affect me as much anymore. I'm actually able to run as fast as I can," Sullivan said.

"I think I've improved a bit (this season) because my group pushes me more (in training). All of the freshmen are really fast this year so they're all really good and they push me a lot."

Open race

Although Hinsdale Central junior Susan Spencer put in the preparation for a strong cross country season, she began to be consumed by a stretch of disappointing races.

"I needed a little tough love, I guess you could say, from my parents and coach (Mark McCabe)," Spencer said. "They were just like, 'You know if you're going to do this sport, do it well,' so I tried to follow that."

On Saturday, Oct. 5, Spencer was back on top with the Red Devils as she finished second in the junior varsity race at the St. Charles North Invitational at Leroy Oakes Forest Preserve.

Spencer (20:12.4 for 3.0 miles) was among three Red Devils in the top 10 and in the top 20 as they rolled to the team title in their first time at the invite.

"I think we did really well as a team for our first time ever doing this, to come in first time and win two out of three races (varsity and JV)," Spencer said. "It was a good race for moving up so that was, I guess, my strategy in that race, just keep moving up."

Juniors Sara Folliard (4th, 20:25.5), Molly Leahy (7th, 20:35.7) and Val Yager (9th, 20:43.8) also were in the top 10, juniors Maddy Melin (20:58.7) and Jillian DeBoer (20:59.5) were 12th and 13th, and junior Tillie Kummerer was 19th (21:29.6), followed by Cristina Tye (32nd, 22:09.8), Rachael McCann (33rd, 22:11.0) and Laila Drury (45th, 22:59.9).

The Red Devils (30 points) easily finished well ahead of second-place Geneva (59).

"There were six really good races. From top to bottom, Sara was (fourth yet)

probably the one that was a little off, but still solid," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said.

"It was a real direct talk with Susan. I always feel uncomfortable having those talks because it depends on the person how they're going to respond. Susan is very astute and good at looking inward and figuring things out and not getting offended or upset but processing it and dealing with it and coming out better on the other end. I'm really proud of Susan this year, not just in terms of her racing but the leadership she's shown with the other (three team) captains. She's really stepped up in every way."

Saturday also marked a personal triumph for DeBoer. It was the first time she completed a race this season after anxiety issues had been causing her to drop out on the course.

DeBoer's performance included a personal record time. She and Tye also shared JV Athlete of the Meet honors.

"Finally I finished. I've been having issues with racing, but Saturday was really fun," DeBoer said. "I finally did it. I pushed through it, and it was awesome."

"It was a real highlight – just the fact that she finished it," McCabe said. "She's been having anxiety issues when she races and she hadn't finished a race all year. She goes out and not only finishes but just ran great."

With the exclamation point courtesy of DeBoer, this was arguably the best combined performance by the Red Devils' strong JV in a race this season.

"I remember while I was running I could see how good we were finishing with Sara and Susan right in front of me and I knew Val was right behind me," Leahy said. "Even though we weren't really packed together, we all pushed up to the front throughout the race. There was nobody who fell short. Everyone performed equally well or better (than usual)."

Leahy was the Red Devils' frontrunner throughout the first mile of the race, putting herself among the top five. Spencer joined her during the second mile and Folliard soon afterward.

"The first two miles were probably the most competitive I've ever been. I was very into it," Leahy said. "In the third mile, I didn't know where the finish was and I kind of slowed down and kind of lost focus. Even though the third mile wasn't my best, it was definitely one of my better races."

The finish was a bit confusing for Spencer, too. Because of her moving up through the race, Spencer didn't find out until afterwards that she finished second, 15.1 seconds behind Geneva junior Marin Leone (19:57.3) and 10 seconds ahead of third-place Batavia junior Jenny Muehlbauer (20:22.4).

"I started off really slow. I thought I was actually in fifth when I finished, which makes me kind of mad because if I did know (Leone) was in first, I probably would have attacked it a little harder," Spencer said. "Still, it was fine. I'm really happy."

With her new attitude, Spencer was apprehensive about the race only because she had raced well Thursday, Oct. 3, in the Red Devils' 26-29 dual victory over York at Katherine Legge Memorial Park. Spencer also was second in that race (20:25 for 3.0 miles).

"I was worried about Saturday because I raced OK on Thursday. (I thought), 'I'll be tired,' but it worked out," Spencer said.

"I just had a different mental approach going into these last couple of races. I went out too fast in the first couple of other ones. I wasn't as happy with my races and I kind of was disappointed in myself and I guess that kind of affected the races after that, and then I got the tough love and snapped back into it, back into racing mode."

DeBoer also succeeded thanks to a different approach. She confronted her anxieties beforehand instead of having them arise during the race.

"I was crying and freaking out before the race. Then my teammates helped me a lot and then it was just all over with," DeBoer said. "During the race, I was just good to go and I had my head in the race and everything.

"I knew all of my teammates were up in the front. The whole time I was with Maddy Melin and we were just running together. We just both knew we were having a great race and working off each other was awesome."

DeBoer has no trouble with simply running or training hard. She is a cross country and track veteran but this is her first season training with the top training group.

"It's just been racing. Running is a very mental sport and it's just been getting into my head a lot and so I just stopped during races," DeBoer said. "(I've learned) just to calm myself or let myself freak out a little bit before the race so that during the race I don't have a freak out, and just to stick with a teammate and not leave them."

In the dual victory over York, Spencer finished second to the Dukes' Maddie Fabry.

Leahy (20:30) and Yager (20:57) were third and fourth, Melin (21:12) and Amanda Koronkiewicz (22:19) were seventh and 10th and McCann (23:29), Drury (22:32), Sara Ramasastry (22:38) and Tye (22:53) were 12th through 15th.

-- by Bill Stone