

Junior varsity race

Hinsdale Central junior Sara Folliard's cross country race nearly was for the varsity at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Saturday, Oct. 19, at Proviso West.

Instead, the Red Devils only had six entries on varsity and Folliard remained as one of the top runners for a powerful junior varsity lineup seeking a conference championship.

"I thought (running JV) made me more excited for the race and a little bit less nervous because I knew that I was going to be in the top of the race and that's always really fun," Folliard said. "And I like getting ribbons."

Folliard couldn't have done much better as she finished second over the 3.07 miles, but she was left slightly kicking herself about what might have been. Juniors Molly Leahy and Val Yager, a first-year team member, were fourth and 10th to also earn all-conference honors for top-16 efforts.

The Red Devils (55 points) finished second to Lyons Township (46) and shared the overall conference championship with the Lions.

Folliard (19:25.9) was edged down the stretch by York junior Hannah Wahlgren (19:24.8), whom she later found out is a great 800-meter runner. Wahlgren also was 15th on varsity at the 2012 Silver Meet, one of 10 non-senior all-conference runners, and is working her way back from injury.

"She was supposed to be their No. 1 varsity runner and she just came back," Folliard said.

"I thought I definitely was going to be in the top three and I think if I'd left (Wahlgren) earlier in the race, I would have had a better chance of winning, but she had a really fast kick and I couldn't get her. We ran the whole thing together pretty much. It was just the two of us until the last like 200 meters of the race, but then she started getting away."

Leahy (20:19.3) secured fourth behind Glenbard West senior Annika Manning (19:57.3). Yager (20:32.9) pulled out the last top-10 spot by 1.9 seconds.

Junior Maddy Melin was 17th (20:51.9), 5.1 seconds from 16th, and senior Amanda Koronkiewicz (22nd, 21:03.7) and junior Tillie Kummerer (24th, 21:07.4) also were in the top 25. Junior Susan Spencer (44th, 21:55.4), seniors Cristina Tye (47th, 22:01.5) and Alina Kloss (53rd, 22:19.8), junior Laila Drury (59th, 22:28.4), senior Rose Huang (61st, 22:32.7) and juniors Rachael McCann (66th, 22:42.1) and Lauren Hannemann (72nd, 22:51.5) and senior Sara Ramasastry (74th, 22:54.9) all broke 23:00.

"Sara had a great race, nearly a conference champion. She and I talked about this afterwards that I think she realizes there is a lot more there than it ended up to be," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said.

The overall Silver standings are a 50-50 combination of dual meet and Silver Meet results. The Red Devils shared the overall title with the Lions because Hinsdale Central won their dual 25-30 Sept. 19 in Western Springs en route to a 6-0 record.

This is the JV's first title since three in a row from 2007 to 2009, the last year Hinsdale Central won a conference title on any of the three levels. LT scored 5-7-9-12-13 Saturday with five juniors.

"I think we should all be really proud of what we've done this season because we did win every JV race, every dual meet the whole season," Folliard said. "Even though it's sharing the conference title, it's still first place."

Folliard put herself in position to win. She was among a group of five frontrunners that crossed the mile in 6:13. Folliard and Wahlgren reached the 2-mile mark in 12:45 with a four-second gap on Manning.

Even with a somewhat strategic race, Folliard's 19:25.9 would have placed her 21st in the varsity race as the Red Devils' No. 5 finisher.

"Sara knows that she has a great finish (kick). I kept saying to her, 'When you feel like taking control, do it,' " McCabe said.

"What she did was make the mistake that we all do sometimes of thinking, 'I can sit on this girl and outkick her.' Little did she know this was Lundgren running her first big race of the year and she's an outstanding 800 runner and she's got some wheels of her own. Sara matched her stride for stride right for the finish, but Sara was capable of moving a little bit sooner."

Saturday's performance and mindset was a complete turnaround for Folliard and Leahy compared with last year's frosh-soph Silver Meet, in which they were 23rd and 29th, respectively, as the team's No. 3 and 4 finishers. Folliard also has improved low iron levels since then that she was unaware of until the track season.

"I think I had more motivation going in because I knew if we were all on top of our game, we could win the conference title," Folliard said. "I had more of a goal in mind, whereas last year it was just like, 'OK, I'm going to run my race.' That was about it."

Leahy has become more competitive all the way around. After first finding the fortitude to challenge frontrunners over the past month, Leahy was able to remain up there Saturday.

"It was really great. I definitely exceeded my expectations and I was really happy with my finish," Leahy said. "Today was the most aggressive I think I've ever been. Usually I can really compete in the beginning but then at the end I kind of lose focus. Today I didn't. I held onto it. It's definitely a step forward in terms of my competitiveness in the future."

Senior Maley Messina (128th, 24:54.0), who just broke 25:00, and Leahy were the JV Athletes of the Meet.

"We had a lot of really good races (on all levels) but none was better than Molly Leahy's," McCabe said. "I was so proud of her, the way she raced. She finally put together a full race. She went out a little more conservatively and it really paid off for her because she ended up passing, passing, passing a lot of other people that went out way too hard. If you would have looked at her at the 800 mark in probably 20th place, you wouldn't have any idea that she was going to end up

fourth."

Leahy moved past two LT runners into fourth during the third mile. While far from third, Leahy had to hold off LT junior Sam Stuba (20:22.4), one second behind her after two miles, and Downers Grove North junior Jenna Murphy (20:23.0), who slightly went ahead of Leahy with about 550 meters remaining.

"I was really proud because I usually have a really bad kick so I was happy today that I could hold them off," Leahy said. "Last year, I remember not competing. I was kind of like settling and just kind of like, 'Oh, I think this is fine.' This year, I think being on JV and having such a good season, we all just felt that competitiveness and aggressiveness and we knew we could get out there and win it."

Yager's tenacity was among the keys to her strong debut season after competing for the first time in track in the spring. When she combines that attribute with race experience, she could enjoy an even better senior season.

"I wanted to (be in the top 10) but you never know," Yager said. "I didn't really have a clue. I was just like, 'I'm going to go in there and do my best and see what happens. It was just really fun to be with all of my friends and get to run every weekend and get to do a sport that I love. I had no expectations going in because I've never done it. I was like, 'I don't even know if I can run 3.0 miles,' so I exceeded my expectations."

On Saturday, Yager was a solid top-10 finisher after being 14th at two miles (13:23), just ahead of Koronkiewicz, and 17th at one mile (6:26), three places behind Koronkiewicz.

"(Yager) was top 10, all-conference for her first year, and she's got to be proud of that, but she knows she let the race get away from her in the first half of the race. She was coming, coming, coming, but it was a little bit too late," McCabe said. "If she had been a little more aggressive in the first part of the race, she would have been in the top five, but she's brand new to this. She's still learning."

Melin also made huge gains this season. Melin, who ran most of her race with Kummerer just behind her, was 19th at two miles (13:29), just behind Downers North junior Zayna Jan (16th, 20:46.8), the last all-conference honoree, after being 24th at the mile in 6:31.

"Next year, I could see Maddy being in the top five in this race," McCabe said. "It's not her first year of cross country, but I think it's her first year or becoming more serious. When her belief level equals her level of talent and competitiveness, we're going to see really good things from her."

Frosh-soph race

At the 2012 West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet, sophomore Mackie Stevens wasn't even among the Red Devils' top-10 team finishers in the frosh-soph race.

On Saturday, Oct. 19, Stevens was 10th overall in the same race at the Silver Meet at Proviso West.

Stevens joined two newcomers to the program, freshman Olivia Carter (6th), and Anna Yang (8th) in earning all-conference honors by placing among the top 16. In 2012, Stevens was 55th as the Red Devils' No. 11 finisher.

"It's 100 percent better," said Stevens in comparing Saturday to 2012.

"Last year, I just didn't know if I wanted to do this sport. I was like, 'Hmm, why don't you just try and go run.' This year, it's actually nice. It's coming together well. A lot of improvement – it was just a good year altogether. I think I grew as a runner, understanding how to be consistent, run my races."

Carter (20:14.8 for 3.07 miles), Yang (20:22.5) and Stevens (20:29.5) led the Red Devils (82 points) to third in the meet behind Glenbard West (37) and Lyons Township (38) and a tie for third in the final overall standings with York (99), which was fourth Saturday. The overall Silver standings are a 50-50 combination of regular-season and Silver Meet results.

Freshman Molly Caveney was 24th (21:18.2), followed by freshmen Taylor Reinhardt (35th, 22:03.2) and Abby Berberich (36th, 22:04.2) and sophomores Emma Stapleton (42nd, 22:24.7), Courtney Cash (77th, 24:08.5) and Kate Klygis (113th, 27:19.9).

Carter, the frosh-soph team's Athlete of the Meet, admitted the going into the race she wasn't really sure what she had to do to get all-conference. She did so easily.

"If somebody has told me that (I'd be sixth) at the beginning of the season? I'd kind of be shocked and (thinking) what are you talking about?" Carter said. "I

felt like I definitely improved throughout the season by a lot. And it's been a really nice experience."

"I was chasing after Olivia and Mackie was chasing after me so I think we really helped close in the gap," Yang said.

While Carter and Yang put the finishing touches on great first cross country seasons, Stevens can be encouraged by how much she progressed, and how much more she possibly could have done Saturday.

Known for a vicious kick at the end, Stevens moved up significantly from 22nd at the mile (6:31) with Caveney right behind and 15th at 2 miles (13:26) but still more than 15 seconds from 10th.

Stevens ran the final 1.07 in 7:03. She was .6 ahead of 11th place and 1.2 seconds ahead of 12th, a pair of LT freshmen.

"Mackie, I think, had a good, solid race, top 10 in conference. You can't be too unhappy with that, but there was more there," Hinsdale Central coach Mark McCabe said. "When Mackie goes out and puts herself in it right from the start, that's when she runs her best races. Today, she was a little bit too conservative early on and then she finished like a maniac."

Carter and Yang were top-10 fixtures throughout the race. At the mile, Carter was battling for third with two LT runners in 6:17 behind Glenbard West sophomores Abby Shaver (19:53.5) and Kate Dorsey (19:36.2), who eventually were second and first. Yang was 10th in 6:19 with a large gap on 11th.

"I was so proud of Olivia Carter because she put her nose in it. She was aggressive. She went out and she held it nicely," McCabe said.

At two miles, Carter shared fifth in 12:58 with LT freshman Colleen O'Connell a stride behind and Yang eighth in 13:02.

In the end, O'Connell (20:13.5) pulled out fifth by 1.3 seconds over Carter as the top two finishing freshmen. Yang was 4.7 seconds from seventh and 2.3 seconds ahead of ninth-place Oak Park-River Forest's Mahal Schroeder, the other top-10

freshman.

"I felt really good and I felt like I did my best," Carter said. "I was pretty nervous just because it was kind of the last race of the season. I wanted to do my best. I wanted to perform to the best of my ability."

Even by mid-season, Carter, Yang and Stevens began to form quite a trio in duals and major invitationals. While Stevens started the season in the fastest training top group under McCabe, Carter and Yang improved so much that they recently joined that training group.

"I said to both (Carter and Yang), once they get the consistency of training with us in that group, they're going to see huge gains," McCabe said. "They're both running great, but they're going to see huge gains when they get that strength that they need to carry it all the way through."

Three other Red Devils earned all-conference honors Saturday in their first season of cross country -- freshman varsity race champion Alexa Haff, junior Camila Horowicz on varsity and junior Val Yager on junior varsity. Sophomore Annie Zaher, the Red Devils' third varsity all-conference runner, joined cross country last season with no previous experience in a run-oriented sport.

Yang said she already is feeling her progress, not only during but before races.

"I got less nervous (Saturday). I was more focused than some of my other races," Yang said. "In past races, I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm running this race,' and in this race I was just like, 'I'm running.' I'm not freaking out, which was good."

"I came to cross country knowing absolutely nothing and now I actually know how to do stuff and how to think."

Freshman race

The Hinsdale Central girls cross country program took advantage of a large freshman class and a longer race Saturday.

Brooke Secola (23:00.0 for 3.07 miles) and Tracy Wohlever (23:12.6) were 19th and 21st as the Red Devils entered the freshman race for the first time in recent memory after previously entering all of their freshmen in the proceeding frosh-soph race, which allows unlimited entries.

There is no overall Silver champion at the freshman girls level, but the top 16 finishers are recognized as all-conference medalists. In previous years, the freshman race also was approximately one mile shorter, but all four levels ran the same distance and course Saturday.

The Red Devils' other finishers were Bonnie Budelman (30th, 23:58.0), Alyson Chatterjee (33rd, 24:01.6), Sayali Amin (36th, 24:13.0) and Lamya Augusthy (43rd, 24:36.6), Asia Chrones (44th, 24:38.8) and Maura Drew (45th, 24:55.9) and Tara Keane (25:04.5) in 43rd through 46th. The Red Devils (104 points) were fourth among the four conference schools that had entries in the race.

Lyons Township's Mary Nutter (16th, 22:32.5) was the last all-conference finisher and the 11th in the race for the first-place Lions (17), who had the top three finishers and seven of the top eight.

-- by Bill Stone