

Just a little more competition brought out an even more impressive performance by Glenbard West junior Lindsay Graham Tuesday, Sept. 9.

Graham became only the second girls cross country runner to break 17:00 on the Hilltoppers' 2.92-mile home course at Camera Park in winning the District 87 Invitational.

Graham's 16:58 is third all-time to two times ran by graduated 2012 Class 3A state champion Madeline Perez in 2011 (16:53) and 2012 (16:56). At the team simulation race at Camera Sept. 3, Graham ran 17:14, 17 seconds faster than her 2013 best, to share the then third-best time with Perez.

"I wanted to beat my time from last week of 17:14. (And) beating 17:00," Graham said. "I felt pretty good. It was good that I did so well. I just wanted to beat my time from last year."

The Hilltoppers dominated the one-level race, taking the first 10 places in beating Glenbard North and Glenbard South 15-50. Glenbard East did not compete.

While senior Lisa Luczak took second (17:39), freshman Lindsey Payne (17:57) improved upon her No. 5 all-time Camera time for frosh-soph runners after an 18:02 at the race simulation -- the fastest race simulation time by any freshman in program history.

Junior Grace Rogers (18:32) led a strong pack with junior Kathryn Kenwood (18:34) and senior Megan Ozog (18:39), followed by junior Kate Dorsey (18:43), sophomore Janie Nabholz (18:56) and juniors Abby Shaver (19:13) and Caitlyn Reick (19:42).

Senior Hannah Arduino (13th, 20:23), freshman Claire Kenwood (14th, 20:32), juniors Nicole Berneche (16th, 20:48) and Christina Sedall (17th, 20:50) and sophomore Annie Pasterz (20th, 21:10) also were among the top 20. Freshman Mary Kate Shaver (21:37) and juniors Nicole Rogus (21:46) and Maddy Burt (21:57) also broke 22:00.

"I actually like (one big race) because you can pace with varsity girls, but there are

also frosh-soph girls right where I am, too," said Arduino, one of several big time droppers from the simulation race. "It's like, 'OK, there are more girls to gauge how fast you're going."

Graham improved upon simulation time with a consistently stronger performance. Her first two mile splits of 5:40 and 6:01 were improvements by four or five seconds, respectively. She then finished with a flurry in 5:14 -- a 10-second improvement.

At the season-opening Hornet-Red Devil Invite Sept. 6, Graham covered those hilly 3.0 miles in 17:03.48 to finish second to Hinsdale Central sophomore Alexa Haff (16:52.79), second at state last year.

"Especially after last week, I was really tired at the end so I made it a goal (Thursday) to hammer it until the end," Graham said. "The second mile, I tried to slow down a little so I could finish hard."

Graham is in her second season with the Hilltoppers after competing for Glenbard East as a freshman before her family moved. Besides Thursday's race, she also holds the No. 3 frosh-soph time (17:42) and also shares the No. 10 Glenbard West overall time with Luczak (17:31).

"That's one of (Graham's) season goals, to break 17:00 at Camera," Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said. "That's pretty awesome, and it's still a fairly warm day and it's still early in the season as well.

"I thought Lisa (Luczak) ran well. Lindsey was hurting a little bit and ended up battling pretty well. (And) I'm very happy to see Megan up there with the (team's) Wolfpack again."

Several other runners enjoyed big cuts of simulation times. Arduino, the Hilltoppers' No. 13 finisher that day (21:05) improved to their No. 11 finisher Thursday by dropping 42 seconds. Her 6:44 first mile was a 22-second improvement.

"I think definitely it's just the thrill of competition pushes you a little harder," Arduino said. "I definitely wanted to work on using downhills, using every aspect

of the course and probably because we raced here before (this season), I know what to do. That made it a little easier."

Arduino said that having faster teammates in front of her also made a difference.

"It's always nice to have someone to keep an eye on, keep you encouraged, a goal that you can see," Arduino said. "My goal as far as time is I definitely want to get under 20:00 -- at any course."

The Wolfpack made some strides after a 1:08 split between the team's No. 1 and 5 finishers at the Hornet-Red Devil Invite and two-minute split from No. 1 to 7. Even with Graham's significant time drop, Tuesday's split between No. 1 and 7 dropped to 1:45 and the split from No. 5 to 7 was only nine seconds.

All-stater Rogers, Nabholz, Kathryn Kenwood and Ozog were the team's No. 4 to 7 finishers for the state championship lineup. Hass believes this year's pack should continue becoming even stronger, also considering that Nabholz was hurting a little bit Tuesday and not as high a finisher as usual.

"It's always an emphasis, trying to get that pack," Hass said. "Megan Ozog had a huge split Saturday so she really buckled down and was great today. The constant is Kathryn Kenwood. She's amazing. She is running so consistently and really pushing the middle part of the laps. That's the key for us. Grace Rogers is getting stronger, too, and hopefully she can keep on keeping on with Kathryn."

Rogers said she definitely felt better Thursday than the Hornet-Red Devil, when she was 25th overall as the Hilltoppers' No. 5 finisher.

"Last week, I don't think I ran too smart, maybe went out too fast for myself. I felt like I died at the end of the race and today I felt like I ran a good race," Rogers said.

"(Our Wolfpack) really helps out. Everyone's pushing each other. Sometimes you're running with one person on the team and it's hard to keep pushing yourself, but when you're all together, you're like, 'This is like practice because we all run together.' It makes it easier on yourself but at the same time we're pushing each other."

No. 7 team finisher Dorsey also considered herself a benefactor of the Wolfpack. She dropped 30 seconds from her simulation time, most of it coming over the final two miles.

"That (Wolfpack) helped me keep up. During the race simulation, I kind of lost them by the two mile and I feel like I really couldn't stay with them. I was exhausted," Dorsey said. "I think having them there (Thursday) pushed me to stay with me. They're the state runners so I wanted to try and keep with them as long as I could."

While Graham continues to put herself among the favorites to win the state title Nov. 8 at Peoria's Detweiller Park, one of her high-school goals will have to wait until next year.

The Hilltoppers have only one more race at Camera this season Thursday, Sept. 18. It's their West Suburban Conference Silver Division opener against Oak Park-River Forest and York but they won't be geared toward running their absolute best times.

They also are focused on performing well just two days later at their annual regular-season trip to Detweiller to compete in Peoria Notre Dame's Richard Spring Invitational. Palatine, fourth at state last year, is expected to be the main competition.

"We're tempo-ing (our race at the triangular) because we have a meet Saturday so next year I'll try to get the (Camera course) record," Graham said.

-- by Bill Stone