

Glenbard West junior Lisa Luczak is one of the top girls cross country runners in the state who finished sixth in Class 3A last year.

Yet when the Hilltoppers took part in Wheaton North's Falcon Classic flight meet Saturday, Luczak once again competed in the No. 2 flight.

"I just kind of approach it as if I was in the first (No.1) race and was going to do my best," Luczak said. "(I thought), 'I need to win this flight. If I were on a different team, I would be in the first flight so I have to win this flight and run my best.' "

For the second year in a row, Luczak captured the No. 2 flight title as the Hilltoppers (31 points) finished third in a powerful 33-team field that included defending 3A state champion Naperville North.

Glenbard West sophomore Lindsay Graham finished fourth in the No. 1 flight in a team-best 17:41.5 for 2.97 miles.

Luczak (17:54.0) also broke 18:00. Sophomores Grace Rogers (18:19.3 at No. 3 flight) and Kathryn Kenwood (18:52.9 at No. 6) both finished third, freshman Janie Nabholz (18:49.7 at No. 5) was fourth, sophomore Abby Shaver (19:44.1 at No. 7) was seventh and junior Megan Ozog (19:03.8 at No. 4) was ninth at No. 4 in her return to the lineup.

Up-and-coming New Trier, fourth at state last year, pulled out the team title over Naperville North 15-18 behind four flight victories. Glenbard West was well ahead of Wisconsin teams Arrowhead (46) and Neenah (54) and the next Illinois team, Wheaton Warrenville South (6th, 57).

Luczak was the only runner not from New Trier or Naperville North to win a flight. Meanwhile, Glenbard West coach Paul Hass said that this was only the second time that all seven Hilltoppers had top-10 finishes in their respective flights.

"I'm very proud of the way the girls ran hard, especially after they ran hard Thursday (Oct. 3 against Downers Grove North)," Hass said.

"They put a great effort in. The times don't really matter. The course was muddy and slow for everyone. It mattered going in and competing against good competition and I think they did a good job of rising to the occasion. Even though some girls were not 100 percent, they gave it their best effort."

Luczak's title repeat wasn't easy. Her flight included another returning all-stater, Naperville North junior Elly DeTurris (14th in 2012). They battled back and forth most of the first 2.5 miles until Luczak outkicked her over the last 400 meters.

"I kind of like the pressure (to win) because it really forces me to really go after it," Luczak said. "We were battling. It was a pretty tight race."

Last year, Luczak was in the No. 2 flight as eventual state champion Madeline Perez took eighth in the No. 1 flight. Graham is a move-in this year from Glenbard East.

Neenah senior Jennifer Parker (18:00.1), fourth in the No. 2 flight last year, passed DeTurris (18:02.0) to finish second in the flight Saturday.

"Lisa Luczak had an amazing finish," Hass said. "With 300 to go, she was in second place and with 200 to go she was in second. With 150 to go, she found an extra gear."

Overall, Luczak had the sixth fastest course time of the day with the others all coming in the No. 1 flight.

"I think I could have been in the top five for flight 1," Luczak said.

"I was happy with my place. I wasn't so much happy with my time, but I know no one had really great times because it was hot and a little longer."

Luczak won last year's No. 2 flight race in 16:54.3 with New Trier junior Mimi Smith second in 17:12.9.

Every winning flight time Saturday was at least 18.6 seconds slower than 2012. The course was altered somewhat because of construction and also had been hit by rain Friday night, resulting in some cautious footing around the several turns. High humidity added to more challenging racing conditions.

"Last year, I felt like I won it a little bit easier so I felt like this year, even though the same effort was there, last year I did better in general with my time," Luczak said.

Graham was coming off comfortably taking first in Thursday's dual at Camera Park and had the Hilltoppers' fastest opening mile Saturday (5:40).

Smith (17:18.5) won the No. 1 flight impressively by 6.5 seconds over Yorkville junior Skyler Bollinger. In two major invitationals Sept. 7 and 21, Graham and Smith finished just ahead of each other in reverse order by a matter of seconds.

"Then she beat me by 25 seconds at this. That was kind of like not fun, but I did my best," Graham said.

"Lindsay held onto fourth and didn't give up," Hass said.

Out of the No. 3 flight, Rogers shared the 18th fastest time overall with the No. 4 flight winner, Naperville North sophomore Ella Guppy.

"I felt like I had a good race. I was more focused on the place (than time)," Rogers said.

Rogers got off to a slow start but had one of the day's most impressive finishes to take third behind two freshmen, New Trier's Molly Schmidt (18:09.3) and Naperville North's Claire Hamilton (18:18.6).

"I started off pretty far back for the first mile and then I just think I moved well throughout the race," Rogers said. "I could have been in a better spot earlier, but I was pretty happy with how I did. Towards the end, I caught up more to the second-place runner but I couldn't catch her. It's all a blur now."

Rogers ran a team-best 5:58 split after the second mile.

"She had a great kick," Hass said. "She kept on coming. She kind of ran out of real estate, but she was within a second of second place."

This was Rogers' first flight race. Last year, Rogers competed at the Falcon Classic but in the frosh-soph open race, taking a team-best fifth out of 477 finishers.

It was only her second high-school race after recovering from a back injury. She debuted two days earlier and won the frosh-soph race in a dual meet with Downers North.

"I didn't really like (the flight race). I like running by Megan (Ozog) and Janie (Nabholz) and Kathryn (Kenwood)," Rogers said. "It was different. There are different people you want to keep after, but I love running with teammates."

First-year runner Kenwood also put on a vicious kick with a 6:16 post 2-mile split and was just 3.8 seconds from second. Nabholz was 9.8 seconds from third. Ozog, who sat out Thursday's dual, improved from taking fourth at Flight No. 6 in 2012. Shaver competed in last year's frosh-soph open race.

"Kathryn Kenwood did an amazing job. She was in sixth place and ended up third, passing people all of the way. And Janie Nabholz finished very strong," Hass said.

Glenbard West defeated Downers North 20-30 Thursday to remain undefeated in West Suburban Conference Silver Division duals.

Graham (17:31) and Luczak (17:43) took first and second in the 2.92-mile race. Rogers (18:27), Nabholz (18:45) and Kenwood (18:47) were fourth through sixth, and senior Annika Manning (19:23) and sophomore Christina Sedall (19:27) were 10th and 11th.

Manning and Sedall were the Hilltoppers' top finishers at the Falcon Classic in the junior-senior and freshman-sophomore open races, respectively.

Perez, who hasn't competed this season, is expected to join the lineup soon.

"She's running with us in practice and we're excited to see her finally take the course and finish her college visits. We're excited she's returning and it's great to have her running with us again," Hass said. "Hopefully, by the conference meet (Oct. 19 at Proviso West), she's ready to run. She's going to have to race her way into race shape, but you can't do that until you start racing."