

[Print Page](#)By KEVIN DRULEY – [kdruley@kcchronicle.com](mailto:kdruley@kcchronicle.com)

# Elation, deflation at sectionals

## Disappointing showing for hobbled Batavia

STREAMWOOD – Jess Nier leapt into the arms of any St. Charles East coach or teammate who would catch her on Saturday afternoon. Counterpart Natalie Tarter of Batavia winced with an ice pack some 100 yards away.

Nier needed fellow Saints to keep her from running wild all over the infield. Tarter asked another Bulldog to help her up.

Every elation at the IHSA Class 3A Sectional girls track meet required an equal and opposite deflation. Seniors Nier and Tarter counted among the 17 Tri-Cities athletes to qualify individually for next week's state meet at Eastern Illinois University, but both had different ways of acknowledging it.

"I've been doing hurdles since freshman year, I've run all four sectionals, and I've just been working so hard," Nier said. "To get this time was just unbelievable."

Now Tarter:

"It was just, 'Finish the race and you'll be able to go down next week,'" she said. "Hopefully things will get better."

They have to, right?

Third at state a year ago, the Bulldogs have stumbled despite returning a nucleus that includes Tarter, a Wisconsin signee and defending 300 hurdles champion. Junior Kathryn Warner and senior Melissa Norville flanked Tarter, too. Then injuries set in.

Tarter continues to fight a pulled hamstring and knee problems down the stretch, limiting her to only the 100 hurdles on Saturday. Warner competed in one outdoor meet in April before a left hip fracture sidelined her for the season. Alexis Sampson stayed on the shelf until her outdoor debut last week. The litany of sorenesses and sicknesses could continue.

"I hate playing that card," Batavia coach Chad Hillman said. "We tell the kids not to make any excuses, because teams go through this kind of stuff. I think it might have been a little rougher than what most teams get, but we don't want to make excuses for anything."

Her frustrated demeanor after the meet aside, Norville offered a bright spot for the Bulldogs as a triple qualifier in the 100 hurdles, 300 hurdles and triple jump.

East junior Maya Rittmanic boasted the same distinction, moving on in the long jump, high jump and triple jump.

Ditto for Geneva junior Alissa Dappas, who used her success in her sectional debut in the 100 hurdles as a launching pad in the 300 hurdles and 4x400-meter relay.

"After the 100 I was just so surprised," Dappas said. "I was like, 'All right, I'll just do the rest now.'"

Geneva scored 93 points to take second behind champion Hoffman Estates (99) and finish ahead of third-place East (84.5). The Vikings continue to tout their depth after topping Batavia by 89 points at the Western Sun Conference meet last week.

"We have a very competitive team all around in the distance, sprints, in the field," said senior Erica Miller, who advanced in the 400 and 4x400 relay. "We just push each other to the max and we're always there for each other supporting everyone."

East senior Lizzy Hynes, admittedly more laid-back in her final high school season, won the 1,600 and 3,200 to go to state in both events for the second successive year. Her comfort zone included at least a seven-second margin of victory in both finals.

Nier knew the opposite in the 300 hurdles; her time of 46.3 made the state cut by a mere .04 of a second. Allie Devor (shot put), Mallory Abel (3,200) and Danielle Kuzniewski (200) were the Saints' other qualifiers.

"We had a lot of success today," Hynes said. "It's really exciting. I'm glad a lot of girls kind of just brought it together."

Pole vaulter Allie Pace will join Geneva's Charleston contingent along with Taylor Wickware in the 400, Megan Heuer and

Kelly Shogren in the 1,600, Sarah Heuer and Liza Tauscher in the 3,200 and the Vikings' 4x800 relay team.

Sophomore Meredith Beird was St. Charles North's lone qualifier in the pole vault despite jumping 9-6, just below the state standard of 10 feet. It was the next best showing after Pace, who cleared 11-6.

Workouts figure to take on a different form for Beird and most state-bound athletes in the next week, with Tarter a notable exception. Feeling a pop while overtaking her fourth hurdle on Saturday, she won the event but immediately knew the 300 – and a possible state title defense in that event – was out of the question.

More rest appears in her plans heading into state, a repeat of her itinerary before sectionals.

"I basically took the whole week off this week and I'm still hurting," Tarter said. "So I'll go to physical therapy and just have to see."

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