



Invites a really big show, unique competition

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Published: 5/1/2009 4:30 PM

They are the bread and butter of the outdoor girls track and field season.

The experimentation of the weekday dual and triangular meets is set aside for teams and individuals to make statements for the masses. The multiteam weekend invitational offers a dynamic as enriching as it is noteworthy as the outdoor campaigns build to a crescendo with conference meets and the state series.

The formats vary in only the slightest of degree; adult admonitions of "down in the infield" to temporarily wayward athletes are as ubiquitous as the performances are typically outstanding. The sense of expectation elevates correspondingly when coaches peruse the seeding schedule, the arbiter of flights and heats.

The 400-meter dash, for example, at Glenbard West caught the eyes of all the 16 participating coaches last Saturday in Glen Ellyn.

"All of the coaches were buzzing about the 400," Naperville North coach Chuck Hoff said. "You had to be under 60 seconds to make the fast heat. It's the one race everyone wants to see."

Unfortunately for coaches and competitors alike, the race never materialized; the final six running events were canceled due to persistent lightning strikes.

Track invites provide a measuring stick for progression, and one of their most valuable weapons is intelligence reports for foes otherwise seen only at the state tournament. Barrington and Hinsdale Central are traditionally talent-laden squads that have enjoyed much success at the state level. They were the two programs under the most watchful eyes last weekend at the Sue Pariseau Invitational.

The Fillies are the two-time defending champions of the Pariseau Invitational and are coming off a state title and runner-up finish the last two seasons. Throughout the area, on the other hand, coaches marvel with a mixture of envy and surprise at the arsenal Hinsdale Central coach Pat Richards unveils year after year.

"They are the cream of the crop," Hoff said of the Red Devils.

"They have the best dual-meet team in the state just about every year," Wheaton Warrenville South coach Rob Harvey added.

"Our girls haven't really clicked yet this year," Richards cautioned.

The desire for maximum point production underscores the coaching philosophy of most, and the end result is clear for all to see.

"I think track kids are unique in that they truly look for competition," said Geneva coach Peter Raak, whose program is on an ascent for elite status. "They work so hard (during the week) to show what they've got that one time."

The results can be eye-popping. At the Gus Scott invitational earlier this season, McKinzie Shulz and Lizzy Hynes offered convincing testimonies. The latter, a four-year standout for St. Charles East, dazzled in the 3,200 meters with a scintillating time of 10 minutes and 33.4 seconds.

"She was pretty much running by herself the whole race," said St. Charles East coach Denise Hefferin.

The Boston College recruit came back to break 5 minutes in the 1,600 meters but was overshadowed by Schulz, the Benet wunderkind. Schulz, coming off the lowest time of the year in the open 800 meters with her 2:11.5 posting, turned

back Hynes by almost five seconds to record another state best at 1,600 meters.

Which accomplishment was the most impressive?

"I had that very conversation with Rob (Harvey)," Hoff said. "(We were in agreement) that it is much easier to go from longer to shorter. There is also a much longer rest period (from the 3,200 to 1,600 than the 800 to the 1,600)."

Last Friday night in Batavia, Natalie Tarter, the defending Class AA state champion in the 300 hurdles, made her invitational debut for the Bulldogs. The Wisconsin-bound star set a new state season low in the 100 hurdles (14.64 seconds converted) and breezed to another title in the 300s.

"Her foot speed looked incredible," Batavia coach Chad Hillman said.

The following day at Glenbard East, Waubonsie Valley senior Shakeia Pinnick, headed to Arizona State next fall, turned in a 56.49-second 400 meters to deny an equally quick race by Schulz. With the three-week whirlwind of conference, sectional and state set to begin next week, the performances only magnify the invites' invaluable training ground.

"That's what usually happens at this time of the year," Hoff said.