

Ellis, Knodle, 'Bago relay place second at state

By Reed Schreck

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CHARLESTON —

Rockford Christian junior **Molly Ellis** had just finished second in the 400-meter dash Saturday when she was asked about 2009.

“I’ve been thinking about next year,” she said.

And why not? After Manlius Bureau Valley senior Alisa Baron beat her in an IHSA Class A girls state track meet record time of 55.66 seconds, that leaves **Ellis** (56.60) as the top returning contender.

She hopes to be at least as busy next year as she was this time. She also placed fourth in the 100 (12.89) and helped the 1,600 relay (4:12.54) grab seventh.

“I’m exhausted,” she said after the 400 and before the relay. “But I feel good, I’m really happy.

“I was hoping for top five (in the 400), which I did” in a personal best.

Ellis wasn’t alone among Rock River Valley competitors as far as standing second on the podium Saturday at Eastern Illinois University’s O’Brien Stadium. Byron senior Brittany Knodle was runner-up in the pole vault, missing out on first because of misses, and Winnebago’s 3,200 relay (9:41.05) led nearly to the end before being edged by Eureka (9:39.59) to finish second for the second straight season.

Knodle cleared 10 feet, 6 inches on her third and final try. She passed at 10-3 because she was busy helping the Tigers take fifth in the 400 relay (50.84).

“I’m frustrated I couldn’t do my best,” said Knodle, who went 11-0 two weeks ago at Oregon. “It stinks knowing you’ve done better. You want to do your best at state.

“But it feels good. I’m excited.”

Sophomore Alexandria Palm put 'Bago in third before senior Katelynn Schneider gave the baton to sophomore Tessa Hoefle in first place. Hoefle extended the lead when handing off to junior anchor Hayley Thomas. Thomas led until the final 200 meters when

Eureka senior star Olivia Klaus passed her.

“I just couldn’t hold her off,” Thomas said. “I tried. Oh man.

“I’m disappointed because we wanted to win. But second is really good at state.”

Said Schneider: “If that’s the team that was going to beat us, there’s no way you can be disappointed. We’re extremely happy. We’re second in the entire state of Illinois. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Capturing thirds were Rockford Christian Life junior Holly Wiersema (10-3, pole vault), Oregon senior Allison Kereven (39-41/2, shot put) and Byron freshman Paige Knodle in the 300 low hurdles (personal record of 46.35).

Kereven began the day second but could not improve on prelims. She had placed ninth as a freshman, sixth as a sophomore and third as a junior.

“I’m pretty disappointed,” Kereven said. “I didn’t do good at all today.”

Knodle also was sixth in the pole vault in a P.R. of 9-9 and was on the 400 relay.

“It’s awesome,” she said of her first state meet. “It’s phenomenal.”

Christian Life senior Jenner Sio was fourth in the triple jump (37-3) after holding third entering the day. But she moved up one spot to eighth in the long jump by improving to 17-01/4.

“It’s all right, but not exactly what I was hoping for,” Sio said. “But it works.

“Performance-wise, my triple jump was good. I just wanted a higher place. And I made the long jump finals for the first time.”

Rockford Christian sophomore Courtney McKibben was fourth in the 100 high hurdles (15.73).

Lena-Winslow freshman Katie Jensen was sixth in both the 1,600 (5:18.52) and 3,200 (11:44.28), but made more of an impression in the latter. She took the lead at the mile and wasn’t passed until two laps remained.

“I was trying to follow the leader, but she wasn’t going as fast as I wanted,” said Jensen, who came in seeded tied for 16th at 12:09.64. “Then I burned up all my energy.

“I just wanted to go out and run as fast as I could. I got better than I was hoping for.”

Other place-winners included Sterling Newman junior Amanda Trancoso, fifth in the 800 (2:17.79); Pec co-op senior Danielle Buttell, seventh in long jump (17-8), and Lena-

Winslow junior Chelsea Rimington ninth in the shot (36-91/2).

Pecatonica was eighth (51.36) and Lena-Winslow ninth (51.40) in the 400 relay, and Byron ninth in the 3,200 relay (10:04.02).

Benton won the team title with 71 points, while Eureka was second (45) and Bloomington Central Catholic third (37). Byron was fifth (25) and Rockford Christian tied for sixth (23).

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