

DeKalb/Sycamore co-op junior Aleah Leman has great memories of her first IHSA girls gymnastics state meet in 2015, including her state championship on vault.

"It was very surreal," Leman said. "I wasn't really expecting much coming out in my rookie year but coming out and doing something like that – it was probably one of the best nights of my life."

Leman and her teammates could accomplish even more when they return to the state meet Friday and Saturday, Feb. 19-20, at Palatine High School. They are coming off a school-record 147.525 points that won the Glenbard West Sectional Thursday, Feb. 11.

Leman won all-around (38.425), uneven parallel bars (9.675) and balance beam (9.55) and freshman Madison Hickey won floor exercise (9.625). They and freshman Lauren Leman, Aleah's sister, earned individual state berths automatically with top-five sectional finishes or at-large. Senior Zoe Cole, junior Katelyn Nelson and freshman Kendall Tucker also were part of the sectional lineup.

They posted season-high team event scores on vault (38.00), floor (37.175) and uneven bars (37.10) and surpassed the 146.30 they scored Dec. 11 and in winning the Glenbard East Regional Feb. 1.

"I felt like we did absolutely incredible. We felt strong. We felt confident in ourselves," Aleah Leman said. "We still have a few things to clean up but we definitely are improving as we go deeper into postseason."

In the eight-team state field, DeKalb/Sycamore is in contention for its first top-three state trophy after making its first team trip in 2015 and finishing seventh (142.125).

DeKalb/Sycamore posted the state's second-highest sectional score to Prairie Ridge co-op (149.55 sectional score), which is expected to defend its state title. Carmel (146.275) and Glenbard West (146.175), second at the sectional, also have scored consistently high this season. The rest of the field is Barrington (144.95), Fremd (144.60), which counted numerous falls at sectionals, Lake Park (144.35) and Downers Grove South (143.875).

"I think after Prairie Ridge, it's anybody's (guess). There are five of us that have a chance to take one of those two (remaining) spots," coach Andy Morreale said. "That's by far our highest score. What's good about the team is when they do make some mistakes, they come right back."

Aleah Leman qualified for state in all five events. Besides her sectional titles, she was second on vault (9.825) and fourth on floor exercise (9.375).

Hickey advanced in three other events by taking third on vault (9.725), fourth in all-around (37.275) and easily advancing at-large on uneven bars by tying for sixth with a 9.325. Lauren Leman advanced individually with her second-place 9.55 on uneven bars.

"I was nervous at first, but when we got out there, it was just so exciting," Hickey said. "I'm

really excited about state because I know all of us can do everything and we can also do stuff consistently. Last year, I went and saw them (as a spectator) and it was actually really exciting. (Leman's vault title) was crazy."

At sectionals, Glenbard West freshman Maddie Diab won vault over Leman with a school-record 9.925 Kasamatsu – the highest sectional vault score in the state. Leman landed a layout Yurchenko, which won the 2015 state title with a 9.825.

Leman captured the all-around title by .35 over Diab (38.425) and that was with losing .1 on floor by going out of bounds on her first tumbling pass. On beam, Leman won by .3 over the second-place Diab (9.25).

Besides Leman's state vault title in 2015, she was second on floor (9.625) by .1 to current Barrington senior Abby Hasanov and tied for fifth in all-around (37.20) with current Hinsdale South senior Maddie Nowak behind four seniors. Leman also was 10th on uneven bars (9.4). At this year's sectional, Leman posted the highest scores for all-around and uneven bars and was second on vault and third on beam. She scored a season-high 38.60 in all-around at regionals.

"All of my skills, all of my routines (this year), I'm just so much more confident and I'm so much more ready to go," Leman said. "I really want to go for the title. I really want to win and so I feel really confident that I have a chance of that this year."

Leman was most pleased by her solid beam routine. Usually the team's last or next-to-last performers on events, Leman recently switched to second in the beam lineup to assist her nervousness.

"Definitely it's been a struggle the past couple of years on beam, just getting confidence in myself and my skills," Leman said. "I've really come out in the postseason and shown confidence and consistency and I've really gained a lot of confidence from that."

Hickey had the state's highest sectional floor score, .125 ahead of Hasanov and Prairie Ridge senior Maddie Solka (9.55). Hickey wowed the crowd by landing double back flips on her first and last passes.

"I was most excited about vault and floor and bars – everything. I was just really excited that I did my very best. It is one of my best meets so far," Hickey said.

"I'm proud of Madison. She's going to be a force," Morreale said.

The overall score also received a boost from the return of Lauren Leman to all-around for the first time since Dec. 22. She has been battling a foot injury and slowly worked back into the lineup.

At regionals, Lauren Leman only competed on uneven bars. Her sectional all-around total of 36.475 with one fall off beam should have advanced to the state meet, but because she did compete in all-around at regionals she was ineligible for individual advancement.

Lauren Leman added a season-high 9.275 on floor. Tucker had a season-high 8.55 on beam. "I think this week was the first week (Lauren Leman) full tumbled on floor so she did a good job," Morreale said.

Aleah Leman and Nelson return from last year's state lineup as well as sophomores Emily Jovanovich and Nilsa Matarangas, who are alternates this season.

At state, team competition, the all-around finals and individual event preliminaries are Friday. Qualifiers among the top 10 preliminary scores advance to Saturday's individual event finals, which are held one event at a time (vault, uneven bars, beam, and floor). The final event standings are based solely on Saturday's scores.

"I think we definitely can finish top three," Aleah Leman said. "We are strong. We are confident. We have absolutely everything we need to get top three. I think if we go out there and do what we did (at sectionals) and clean up a couple of things, we'll be easily top three."