

Glenbard West sophomore Sarah DeStefano proved to be the beneficiary of a gymnastics audible Saturday, Feb. 1.

Moments before the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet at Hinsdale Central, Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes altered his lineup.

DeStefano would be working all-around for the first time in a meet since Dec. 2.

"Yeah, what the heck? That was weird," DeStefano said. "It was like last minute. I'm so glad I competed all-around. I love doing it."

DeStefano earned a medal for taking fifth in all-around with a season-high 34.675 and helped the Hilltoppers to yet another strong meet as they finished second with 137.375 points and second in the final overall standings to defending state champion Lyons Township (150.15).

Sophomore Amber Broucek was third on vault (9.4) and fourth in all-around (36.475) and uneven parallel bars (9.375) and fifth on floor exercise (9.25) to earn four top-five medals. She was eighth on balance beam (8.45), her strongest event, because of a fall.

Senior Maggie Phillips and sophomore Mia Connolly also had top-10 finishes, and sophomore Amanda Rosch and freshman Cailey Cranny had top-15 finishes.

The Hilltoppers posted their second-highest score of the season heading into the York Regional at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 7. They are trying to advance to the six-team Wheaton Warrenville South Sectional at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11, and extend their streak of sectional team berths to 13 consecutive years.

"That has been our goal. Today was supposed to be our warmup to get us ready," Fuentes said.

"It was a very nice meet for us. We're getting to the point of having our full lineup, Sarah and Amber together for the first time as all-arounders.

This was great for (DeStefano) to make that comeback."

The Hilltoppers were coming off a 136.95 to 127.25 dual victory at Downers Grove North Thursday, Jan. 30, in a rescheduled dual meet after a season-high 138.15 at the York Invite Jan. 25.

Saturday's total came with the average scores of two judges on each event with floor scores consistently high and beam scores consistently tight. The Hilltoppers had season-high totals on vault (35.525) and floor (35.225), beating their marks from Thursday, and nine individual season-high performances.

"It's really encouraging, just pushing ourselves to go farther, I guess. We're working really hard," Broucek said. "We have lots of momentum."

DeStefano's return has helped. Hampered by an injured shoulder, DeStefano returned to action for the first time since Dec. 11 at the York Invite and competed on everything but vault. She also competed on three events at Downers North.

DeStefano didn't just add vault Saturday. She attempted a tuck Tsukahara – and she landed it for a sixth-place, season-high 9.1, 0.15 from fifth place. DeStefano also tied for seventh on floor (season-high 8.925) and was ninth on beam (8.375) and 12th on uneven bars (8.275)

"I haven't done a Tsuk (in a meet) for like a year and then I decided to just flip it today and it went pretty well. That's definitely my highlight," DeStefano said.

"I'm honestly excited to be back in all-around and slowly getting my stuff back. Being off for so long, it's coming together."

Broucek continues to make significant strides since returning to the lineup Jan. 11. She took third on vault behind two 2013 all-staters, LT junior Kelsy Kurfirst (9.675) and senior Michelle Cozza (9.475) and only was beaten by them and LT senior Katie Carling on uneven bars and all-around.

Broucek just upgraded her vault from a tuck to the pike Tsuk at Downers North and also earned a 9.4. Her second attempt Saturday was has been her best one so far.

"(At Downers North) I landed short so my ankles have been bothering me so I toughened that out," Broucek said. "(On uneven bars) I'm starting to kind of hit the bail (to) handstand and starting to get credit for it. I've been working on those hard."

At the 2013 Silver Meet, Broucek was third on beam, fifth in all-around and sixth on vault and uneven bars.

"I don't even remember conference meet last year. I'm not used to having so many meets still," Broucek said. "It feels the same to me, I guess. A meet's a just a meet to me. "

At Downers North, Broucek achieved a career-high 37.10 in all-around from two state-meet judges. Broucek would have been in contention for her third 37.00 meet ever Saturday if not for an uncharacteristic fall off beam, an automatic .5 deduction. Broucek was 10th on beam at state last year.

"For Amber, it was actually her first fall (off beam) of the year," Fuentes said. "We had a good conversation about when to hit and when to miss. We talked about college basketball, about the NCAA Tournament. There have been about 25 teams that have been undefeated in the regular season and lost in the tournament. It's when you fall that makes a very big difference. You never want to fall, but this is really going to sharpen her up."

Connolly also showed her progress from her freshman season by taking ninth in all-around with a season-high 33.30 and 10th on beam (8.175). She also was 11th on floor (season-high 8.65), 15th on uneven bars (8.05) and 17th on vault (8.425).

Phillips was ninth on vault (8.65) and 18th on beam (7.775), Cranny was

13th on beam (8.075) and had a season-high 8.1 on floor Rosch tied for 14th on floor (season-high 8.4), tied 17th on uneven bars (7.85) and tied for 18th on vault (8.4).

Competing on everything but uneven bars at the 2013 Silver Meet, Connolly didn't have a higher finish than 13th on floor.

"It's my highest floor score of the season, which I'm really happy about, and then in all-around I placed so that's really exciting. I'm definitely a lot better this year," Connolly said.

"We had really good vault and floor (as a team) today. I think if we work really hard and hit all of our routines at regionals, I think we can make it to sectionals."

The Hilltoppers had the second-highest team scores on all four events. The opened strong on vault and bounced back on floor immediately after competing on beam and counting their first fall for the first time since the Oswego Invite Dec. 28.

At the York Invite, the Hilltoppers had a meet-best 34.825 team event score beam.

"I can promise that we're not the No. 1 most talented team on beam at that meet in terms of athletes and the skills that they're throwing. We're probably not the second or third most, but we're consistent with our routines. The girls continue to do that, and we still had three hits today," Fuentes said.

"I'm not upset. I tell them the only time I ever get upset about any missed routines is if they have not been putting in the work at practice. It's still a four-inch (wide) beam. To be that consistent is a huge thing."

It's one of the factors in the Hilltoppers' favor as they try to get one of the two at-large sectional berths for non-regional winners.

St. Charles co-op (season-high 146.20), eighth at state last year, is

expected to win the York Regional. Glenbard West most likely will contend with DeKalb/Sycamore co-op (season-high 140.40), U-46 co-op (137.25) and Addison Trail (136.90) for the at-large berths.

Being in the last regional, the Hilltoppers will know what they need to score as a team. Individuals also can advance to sectionals automatically with top-five regional finishes or at-large by being among the 12 best remaining scores from the feed-in regionals.

"On a good day, not a great day, we're a 137. That puts us in about the top 20 in the state," Fuentes said. "We've built a great program and each team works to help maintain that," Fuentes said.

"That 136, 137, that's probably what it's going to take (to advance). We're a team that I always feel is built for the postseason. That's what we train for from day one. We know how picky those judges are when we get to the postseason and we train specifically for them. We want to be as sharp as we can be. We're definitely on the right path."

-- by Bill Stone