

Glenbard West junior all-arounder Sarah DeStefano is responding to injured teammate and good friend Amber Broucek lately being limited to two events.

The first meet that it occurred on Senior Night against Downers Grove North Thursday, Jan. 22, DeStefano posted a career-best 35.85 all-around total.

“That was my best meet. I was happy with it overall,” DeStefano said. “I think just having to step up because Amber got injured, I think I finally got everything to come together. It was just like a huge puzzle. I just got it.”

On Saturday, Jan. 24, DeStefano once again made big contributions and shared moments on the awards stands with the Hilltoppers as they finished second at the York Invitational with 138.80 points.

DeStefano finished fourth (35.025) as the Hilltoppers’ only entry in all-around, the only event in which individual medals were honored. For the team event awards, Glenbard West finished first on the uneven parallel bars (34.80) and second on floor exercise (35.30) and balance beam (34.175).

Glenbard West only was beaten by Lincoln-Way co-op (141.025) in the 11-team field with Lake Park third (137.85). Unlike many invitationals, the invite used the average score from two judges per event.

This was the final meet for the Hilltoppers prior to the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet, which also is at York at 11 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 31.

The regional then occurs at 6 p.m. Monday, Feb. 2, at Glenbard West. The Hilltoppers, the highest sectional seed (No. 4) in the field with No. 5 Glenbard North, Glenbard South and Glenbard East, is striving to return to sectionals as a team after just missing in 2014 following 11 consecutive trips.

“(The York Invite was) just a nice, solid meet for us, kind of a dry run right before the conference meet, which is nice, the same gym, same equipment,” Glenbard

West coach Carlos Fuentes said.

“(DeStefano is) really starting to come into her own, becoming that solid second all-arounder for us. Right now, with Amber out, it’s great to have someone like that step in and take the load on.”

DeStefano was not alone. The Hilltoppers further displayed their depth Saturday with senior Catherine Daflucas and freshman Kendall Rewerts joining other varsity regulars in juniors Amber Rosch and Mia Connolly and sophomores Alison Oakes, Cailey Cranny and Kylie Lach.

Daflucas, usually a key component in the junior varsity I lineup, vaulted in her first varsity appearance since Dec. 5 when DeStefano only was competing on uneven bars and beam and just before Broucek made her season debut Dec. 10.

Rewerts, who just returned to the lineup for the JV I Thursday, competed on beam and floor.

“Our squads kind of got changed around for this so it was kind of weird because it’s a squad meet,” DeStefano said. “It’s kind of a different group of people but we still worked really well together. We all just push each other no matter what. I think we’re a pretty close happy family compared to other teams.”

The day before the Downers North dual, Broucek injured her ankle during practice, adding to issues with her back and shoulder.

Broucek only has been competing uneven bars and beam, but she and Fuentes said she probably could have competed all-around the past two meets if necessary. Still, her status for the conference meet is uncertain, especially with regionals just two days later.

“(Fuentes) just wants me to be super healthy for conference and regionals,” Broucek said. “I don’t know what I did. I just landed weird and then I tried getting up and walking and it was just shocking pain.”

"We haven't really tried too much on it. I think if she has to, she could push through the pain, but right now it's just rest," Fuentes said. "I'm being really overly cautious. With any of them, we want to keep them healthy as much as possible for the postseason. We want to get back to the sectional (as a team)."

Even in a limited capacity, Broucek made her presence known.

On uneven bars, DeStefano (9.075) and Broucek (8.95) had the second and third highest individual scores behind Naperville North senior Michaela Robert (9.45). Rosch tied for eighth (8.675), followed by Lach (8.1) and Connolly (7.95). The Hilltoppers outscored second-place Lincoln-Way co-op by .725 on the event.

Oakes shared the third highest beam score (8.85), just .125 from the top score by Waubonsie Valley/Metea Valley co-op's Morgan Powell (8.975). Broucek was ninth (8.575), Rewerts tied for 13th (8.45) and Cranny was 20th (8.3).

"It just feels so weird doing lowered-down skills a little bit," Broucek said. "It doesn't feel right, but I still do good enough."

On floor, Oakes was fourth (9.2), .375 behind the first-place Robert, and DeStefano tied for sixth (9.025). Rosch was 11th (8.85) and Connolly 25th (8.225).

Landing her tuck Tsukahara vault, DeStefano tied for ninth with a season-high 8.875, and Cranny tied for 21st (8.6). The Hilltoppers, who competed first on vault, were sixth (34.525), just .3 from third.

DeStefano is becoming a consistent 9.0 scorer on floor and uneven bars after working hard to perfect that routine. Saturday's beam score (8.05) suffered at least the standard .5 deduction for a fall on a cartwheel.

"I think bars went really well mostly, with the two judges, and I think my floor has been getting a lot better. I'm getting more comfortable," DeStefano said.

Against Downers North, DeStefano won all-around, beam (9.3) and uneven bars (9.2) and was second on floor (9.05) and tied for second vault (8.3) with Oakes, who won floor (9.3).

DeStefano's beam and floor scores were season highs, and her uneven bars scored tied her season high from Jan. 16. Her only higher all-around total was 35.80 at a dual as a freshman.

"Undoubtedly, it's probably the best I've ever seen Sarah (perform) in her three years of high school. It was her best competition she'd ever had," Fuentes said.

"Her vault score was low, but she stuck a Tsuk. The score didn't come out as what it was, but it was a great vault, probably one of the best ones she's ever done. Then she went 9 on bars, 9 on beam, 9 on floor. She looked fantastic."

On Saturday, Oakes enjoyed one of her best meets for both beam and floor, two events where she is consistently placing high at invites. Her season bests are 9.4 (floor) and 9.2 (beam) from higher-scored meets back on Dec. 10 and Nov. 25, respectively.

"It just kind of clicked (for both Saturday). There's really no explanation. I didn't do anything different," Oakes said. "I wouldn't say it was my best (on beam), but I was a stick so that was good. And my floor routine, that was one of my best. I love getting a 9."

Oakes not only has been gaining consistency as a first-year high-school gymnast. She also has been relatively healthy even with the heavy schedule of meets.

"I feel like this is the most meets I've ever had in one season," Oakes said. "In club, it's intense, but it's like five, six, seven (overall). It gets crazy, but everyone helps each other not to burn out at the end. We get stronger."

Cranny and Lach certainly have become stronger and more polished gymnasts since receiving extensive varsity experience as freshmen.

On Saturday, Cranny set the tone for the beam squad with a personal-best 8.3 as the first competitor, .05 shy of her lifetime-best score from last season.

"It was definitely (among my best). I got probably all of my connections," Cranny said.

"I thought it was good. I was scared, but I like pressure. I like (going first) because then it's over and all of the pressure is taken away. I just like getting it over and I like pressure so it's good."

Cranny, who also worked floor earlier in the season, already has scored higher on floor (8.4) and vault (8.85) than all of freshman year. The true contributions of Cranny and Lach have been in their impressive performance consistency, especially as only sophomores.

"Last year I was a lot more nervous because it was my first year. It's kind of scary and now this year it's still scary because I still get nervous but it's not like last year when I didn't know what was happening. This year I know what's going on," Cranny said.

"Overall (Lach and I) got a lot stronger because we did a lot of strength (conditioning) so that just makes every event better. It's a lot different because we all, I guess, want it more maybe and we all are working even harder than last year."

Rewerts got her first taste of varsity action Saturday. Besides making her varsity debut, this was only Rewerts' second meet since a couple of early-season meets more than a month ago.

"It felt a little more important because it was the first time in a long time doing (gymnastics), let alone competing and I was doing varsity instead of JV," Rewerts said. "I don't really think it was that much more nervewracking. It was a little because it seemed a lot bigger than the JV meet, but it was similar."

Rewerts contributed a solid, stuck beam routine in which she saved her dismount like a veteran. On floor, Rewerts is on the verge of adding a full twist to her first tumbling pass.

"It was both a little disappointing and I was proud that I still did it was my (beam) dismount," Rewerts said. "My foot started to slip and I caught on with my other foot and still went through and I still made the dismount. And I did my switch side (leap) a lot bigger than I did two nights ago. Still, I had a huge bobble afterwards and it wasn't a full split, but it was pretty good."

Daflucas scored an 8.4 for her half-on, half-off vault. Last season, she also often contributed occasionally for the varsity primarily on vault but also on beam and floor.

"It's always really fun (competing varsity). I enjoy it a lot. I love being part of the team," Daflucas said. "My legs came apart a little on the way up, but I think I did pretty good. I've been working on fulls (half-on, full-off), but they haven't been consistent enough."

Senior Grace Fraser from the JV I also has contributed occasionally for the varsity on uneven bars. On Thursday, Daflucas and Fraser were recognized on Senior Night along with Mariah Dietz and Mirian Loarca from the JV I squad.

Daflucas and Fraser have been four-year gymnasts. Dietz and Loarca joined as sophomores.

Daflucas also played softball as a freshman. Gymnastics has remained her one constant activity throughout high school.

"They make it really fun. My freshman and sophomore year I didn't really know a lot of skills but I learned really fast and I had an awesome coach (Jamie Plumb)," Daflucas said.

"You just get to learn a lot. You get to hang out with awesome people all day. It

keeps you busy, if you're bored."

The Hilltoppers enter the Silver Meet in second place after dual competition with a 4-1 record. They can earn a share of their first overall Silver title since 2012 if they can defeat two-time defending state and Silver champion Lyons Township Saturday. LT won their dual 144.85 to 139.25 Jan. 12 in La Grange.

Broucek, DeStefano, Connolly, Rosch and Cranny return from last year's varsity Silver lineup. Lach was kept on the JV I level and captured the all-around title.

"I'm nervous, yeah, but I mean it's just like any other meet," Oakes said of her first Silver Meet. "I get nervous for any other meet so I don't think it'll be any different. It'll just be more official."

--by Bill Stone