

The vast improvement of junior Amanda Rosch and her Glenbard West girls gymnastics teammates resulted in a disappointing feeling at the Glenbard West Regional Monday, Feb. 2.

Although the Hilltoppers put themselves in position to achieve their ultimate goal of advancing to the Glenbard North Sectional as a team, they had to wait it out after being edged by rival Glenbard North 140.00 to 139.55 for the regional title.

"We've definitely been working so hard. I'm proud of everyone," Rosch said. "It's obviously a bummer that (we didn't win). We've just got to bring our A game to sectionals."

The Hilltoppers officially earned that chance Thursday night after the last of the four feed-in regionals at York. While the four regionals champions automatically advance, the next two highest scoring teams also qualify, and the Hilltoppers did so with the second best at-large total.

Junior Amber Broucek returned to the lineup as an all-arounder and won with a 36.025 as well as vault (9.175) and balance beam (9.025). She also was second on floor exercise (9.025).

Junior Sarah DeStefano, Rosch and sophomore Alison Oakes also earned top-five regional medals and advanced to sectionals individually. Junior Mia Connolly, sophomore Cailey Cranny and Kylie Lach and freshman Kendall Rewerts also competed and contributed at least one counting score toward the team total.

The Glenbard North Sectional is at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 10. Besides the Hilltoppers and Panthers, the field includes Geneva (146.425 regional score), DeKalb/Sycamore co-op (145.175), St. Charles co-op (141.825) and Wheaton Warrenville co-op (140.00).

Last year, the Hilltoppers scored 137.30 at regionals and it was the third best at-large score, missing out of advancing by just .225 behind U-46 co-op. It was the first time the Hilltoppers did not advance to sectionals as a team since 2002.

"(Qualifying for sectionals) was our goal from day one – the day after we did not

qualify last year," Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes said. "Winning a regional would have been a bonus. We would love to, but it's hard to win a regional, especially against a team that is so completely talented like Glenbard North. A 139 is never a score to be ashamed of. We hit 18 out of 20 routines."

Monday's result was Glenbard West's second-highest score of the season and seventh straight meet above 138. This time, the closest team to the Hilltoppers was Batavia's 134.025.

"We (were) just really hoping to advance on because that's what we've been working for all season," Broucek said. "We've been working our butts off. We just went out there and did what we usually do. Apparently it wasn't enough (to win), but we still worked super hard and did our best."

Broucek and DeStefano are the only Hilltoppers with previous sectional experience as individual qualifiers last year and with the 2013 state team. They advanced to sectionals in all-around and all four events Monday automatically with top-five regional finishes or at-large.

Rosch moved up from the junior varsity I lineup to also be a part of last year's regional lineup on three events. She earned her first regional medal Monday by taking fifth on uneven bars (8.975) and advanced on floor with a seventh-place 8.6.

"I'm not going to lie. It's always in the back of everyone's mind (to get a medal) just because it's such a cool thing to say I placed at regionals. It's just an honor," Rosch said. "Thinking back, freshman year I would get like 5s, 6s. I'd be happy if I got a 6 and now I'm mad if I get below a 9. It's just weird."

Broucek has qualified for state individually both previous years and was an individual state finalist on beam as a freshman, finishing 10th. But she hadn't competed in all-around since helping the Hilltoppers to a season-high 142.10 Jan. 16. That night, the Hilltoppers won the District 87 title by .7 over Glenbard North (141.70).

On Monday, however, the Panthers were back at full strength with sophomore Erin Bregman, who won uneven bars (9.425) and was fifth on beam (8.45).

Glenbard North led at the halfway point even though the Hilltoppers had a near-perfect first half with team scores on vault (35.30) and uneven bars (35.20) that both were within .5 of their season bests.

"Here's the difference, Erin Bregman. They didn't have her the last time," said Fuentes, pointing to the results. "They have club accolades up and down the lineup that we don't have, and that's OK because we love our team and how scrappy they are and how much they've worked to get as good as they are. They had their obvious misses on beam and even still were .2 ahead of us (after three rotations). It speaks to the talent that they have. Our motto has always been just being consistent and hitting routines."

Broucek did just that and, to her surprise, pulled out the all-around over Glenbard North senior Katie Murphy (35.45) with DeStefano a close third (35.425). Glenbard North junior Allison Wahrman (35.325) and sophomore Leah Roman (34.15) were fourth and fifth.

"I wasn't expecting that (title). I don't know. I was just like, 'What?' " Broucek said. "I forced myself to stay on beam and on bars I had a little instant. I kind of hit my feet (coming under on the mat) but I still kept going.

"It felt kind of weird because I hadn't done all-around in a while. It was kind of nice, too, but painful at the same time. I'll get through it."

Another surprise was vault. Her pike Tsukahara vault won by .125 over Murphy and Glenbard East sophomore Veronika Srey (9.05).

"It was the first time I've vaulted in a while," Broucek said. "I stuck it so yeah (I was happy). It started off (the meet) well."

Broucek earned the only 9 on beam, winning by .05 over Roman (8.975). Broucek was .025 behind Murphy (9.05) on floor and was sixth on uneven bars (8.8).

The past three meets, Broucek only has been competing on uneven bars and beam. Broucek probably could have perhaps competed all-around sooner but Fuentes opted to play it safe for the postseason.

"Carlos saved me for this meet," Broucek said with a laugh. "(Watching) the meets felt 10 times longer. Let's just say that. And I ate more food because I literally just sat there and did nothing."

DeStefano continued her streak for season highs with her tuck Tsuk vault, scoring a fourth-place 9.025, and followed with a season-high 9.275 for third on uneven bars. She also was fourth on beam (8.7) and 10th on floor (8.425) but edged the 8.4 at-large cut to advance on that event as well.

"(My events) felt really good, especially vault," DeStefano said. "Pretty much every meet I hit three out of the four events. I've finally got to put it together, but it was nice starting on vault because I feel my vault is like a chance. You stick it or you don't so after vault, we go to bars and I love doing bars."

DeStefano especially was glad about Broucek's return to all-around. Her absence had moved DeStefano to last in the vault lineup.

"It's so nice having (Broucek) back. It felt so weird without (her)," DeStefano said. "We're always next to each other in the lineup usually. Mostly (it helped) on vault because that (event) makes me nervous."

Oakes had a bittersweet first regional. Usually the team's top scorer on floor, she suffered a fall trying to complete her back-to-back layouts and her 12th-place 8.125 did not advance to sectionals.

On beam, the team's final event, Oakes delivered an 8.85 for third place. She also advanced at-large on vault with a seventh-place 8.6.

"I didn't think (beam) was difficult because I remember at the beginning of the season, I messed up on floor and then came back on beam. You just kind of have to move on," Oakes said.

"I feel like we all just kept moving on, even with mistakes, so I feel like that was good. We worked so hard and we got that 19 out of 20 (hits) so we were going for the 20 out of 20, but we'll get it one day."

That day could be sectionals. The Hilltoppers probably will not advance to state as a team because only the four sectional champions and four highest scoring teams among the other 20 qualify.

Many personal – and team – goals still remain. Individual sectional qualifiers advance to state either automatically with top-five finishes or by being among the 12 best remaining scores among the four sectionals.

“Because we beat (Glenbard North) at District 87, I feel it would be a lot better just to beat them one more time,” Oakes said. “We’re going to try and do that (at sectionals) so we’ll see.”

-- by Bill Stone