

Glenbard West freshman Cailey Cranny has realized something only three weeks into her first high-school gymnastics season.

The Hilltoppers have a lot of meets. And that's the way she likes it.

"I like to compete," Cranny said. "It's really tiring, but it's really fun."

Cranny was among the Hilltoppers who had many highlights at the Conant Invitational Saturday, Dec. 14, in Hoffman Estates.

Glenbard West (96.45 points) was eighth in the 10-team format in which teams are allowed just four competitors per event with the top three scores going toward the team total. Most meets allow five competitors with the top four scores used for the team total.

Sophomore Mia Connolly and freshman Kylie Lach also competed as all-arounders. Senior Maggie Phillips competed on uneven parallel bars and junior Catherine Daflucas competed on the other three events.

This was the Hilltoppers' first varsity invite of the season.

"I thought it was a really good start for all of the freshmen to compete in an invitational," Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes said. "That's the first time they've seen so many teams. I thought they controlled their nerves real well. I thought they competed well.

"Mia, Kylie and Cailey just had hits on every single routine, not a single miss from the three all-arounders. That's a really nice thing for them. Your job (as a coach) is to get them to hit and that's what they did today."

Usual sophomore all-arounders Amber Broucek and Sarah DeStefano and sophomore Amanda Rosch did not compete. DeStefano also missed the Hilltoppers' last meet Wednesday, Dec. 11 against Hinsdale Central while Broucek competed on uneven bars and floor exercise. Rosch competed on everything but uneven bars against Hinsdale Central but sat out Saturday to rest a strained hip flexor.

Cranny and Connolly had season-high all-around scores and season-high event scores on three and two events, respectively, most achieved in the previous meet. This was Lach's debut as a varsity all-arounder.

"I thought I did really well and the team did really good, too. I was a little nervous, but overall it was really fun," Cranny said. "I thought I did pretty well on floor. I thought everybody did really well on floor. I think I scored higher on almost everything."

This was already the fifth meet for the freshmen beginning with the Nov. 26 season opener. That included the Hinsdale Central Freshman Invitational Nov. 30, where Cranny tied for fifth (7.7) and Lach tied for seventh (7.6) on beam.

"I like beam a lot. It's just kind of fun," Cranny said.

"She's like, 'The more meets the better. Bring them on. She loves being out here and competing,'" Fuentes said of Cranny.

"She trains hard with a positive attitude every single day. I see no differences from her training to her competition. The routine that she throws and she does, the same kind of energy she brings, it's really virtually the same between practice and competition, which is what you want to see."

It's a lot more competition than Cranny was accustomed to during the past four to five years competing in club for GymNasti in Carol Stream at the GJO level.

"It's really fun (in high school). It's just kind of fun," Cranny said. "My team is really nice and they're really fun to be with and I think I'm getting a lot better and I think everyone's getting a lot better. I just want to keep getting better every single meet."

Connolly stepped up with a 4-for-4 meet. After a solid 32.80 in all-around three days earlier, she scored a 33.20 for 11th place. Connolly tied for 13th on beam (career-high 8.5), tied for 15th on floor (8.4) and tied for 17th on uneven bars (8.1).

"I feel like it was one of my best meets. I improved a little bit on each event so

that was good," Connolly said. "After Wednesday, I knew what I had to improve so I worked on it through Thursday and Friday and then it just showed up at the meet here."

Cranny (31.50) and Lach (30.80) were 18th and 19th in all-around.

Daflucas had a team-high 8.25 vault, which tied for 24th, and Connolly was 28th (8.2).

Phillips was 22nd on uneven bars (7.85). Lach, who competed as a varsity all-arounder for the first time, tied for 22nd on beam (season-high 7.85).

Cranny had a season-high all-around total by .6. Cranny was 24th on beam (7.8) and tied for 25th on uneven bars (7.6) with season-high scores and had a season-high 8.0 on floor, which tied for 27th.

"I think maybe it was a little bit of being naïve and not knowing what's going on (for the freshmen), but I try to always make it as low pressure as possible, regardless of the level of the team," Fuentes said.

"Our job is just to come here and hit the same routines that we do every day in practice. We're not changing anything. We're not adding anything new. If you look at it that way, it tends to calm the nerves. We usually have pretty stable, level-headed kids compete for us at West and we just want to continue that."

Connolly is part of the proof that the approach works. While a solid competitor as a freshman who usually performed first on events for the team, she never scored higher than 8.25 on beam.

Connolly already surpassed that mark Saturday after an 8.2 Wednesday.

"I've been sticking all of my routines at practice, too, in preparation for the meet so I think that's been really helping," Connolly said. "My beam confidence is definitely a lot more improved that last year."

-- by Bill Stone