

The fight with cupcake frosting in the face between Glenbard West sophomores Amber Broucek and Sarah DeStefano Wednesday, Dec. 4 apparently was a draw.

"She always gets me," said Broucek as she still cleared frosting from her eyelashes. "(I got her, but) she usually gets me first, though."

As far as the gymnastics meet that evening, Broucek once again was a clear winner.

Broucek took first in all-around (36.10), balance beam (9.55) and floor exercise (9.1) and had season-high scores on all four events in helping the Hilltoppers score 129.70 points in their home meet against DeKalb/Sycamore co-op (131.35).

The cupcakes were part of the celebration for DeStefano's 16th birthday. DeStefano did not compete, however, because of pain from a shoulder injury.

Broucek couldn't remember the last time they didn't compete in the same meet going back to their days as club gymnasts in grade school.

"It's been a long time. We've grown up together," Broucek said.

"It's difficult, but since she's in pain, I don't want her to hurt herself even more. I want her to stay safe. Even without her, we still tried just as hard as we would without her."

Sophomores Mia Connolly (32.00) and Amanda Rosch (30.70) and freshman Cailey Cranny (29.15) also worked as all-arounders. Senior Maggie Phillips competed on the uneven parallel bars and freshman Kylie Lach competed on the other three events.

The Hilltoppers just missed their season-best 129.75 at Oak Park-River Forest Dec. 2 despite the absence of DeStefano, usually the team's second highest scoring all-arounder next to Broucek. Glenbard West scored 129.30 in its season-opening home quad Nov. 26.

"(DeStefano) said she warmed up on all four events and she said it wasn't feeling good enough to go so she just doesn't go," Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes said. "It's Dec. 4. There's no reason to go and get someone hurt doing something that's just unnecessary.

"Every day in practice, someone can go down, can be sick, can be injured and you have to have your routines so you can go out there and compete. You have to be prepared for anything and they really did that. I think they seamlessly just stepped right in."

Besides her first places, Broucek was second on uneven parallel bars (9.0) to DeKalb/Sycamore senior Meredith Whisenhunt (9.1) and shared a team-high 8.45 on vault with Connolly to tie for fourth.

Phillips (8.35 on uneven bars) and Connolly (7.9 on beam) each finished third and Rosch was fifth on floor (8.05), all with season-high scores. Connolly's fifth-place all-around total also was a season best.

Whisenhunt also won vault (9.45) and was second in all-around (35.65), followed by teammates Alison Morreale (33.70) and Katelyn Nelson (33.05).

Teams were allowed five competitors per event. Fuentes often also uses the exhibition spot, a sixth entry whose score cannot count toward the team total. When DeStefano was scratched, the exhibition performers were promoted to the regular lineup.

"That was an easy (lineup) fix for us," Fuentes said. "We didn't have to scramble. We already had somebody ready."

Broucek felt more ready for Wednesday than at OPRF. After the season opener, Broucek went out of town for Thanksgiving break the next day and never had a practice prior to the OPRF dual.

Fuentes was conservative that night with Broucek, limiting her to three events minus vault, and watering down some skills. Broucek still won

floor (8.8) and finished second on beam (8.9) and uneven bars (7.8), two events that DeStefano won (9.0 and 8.05, respectively).

"(Broucek) put in the hours in the offseason, in the spring, in the summer, in the fall (training)," Fuentes said. "Sure, you would like those days consecutively right before the meet and that's what we want it to be and that's generally how you do it, but she's put in the hours (overall)."

A state finalist on beam as a freshman, Broucek had a season-high score on the event Wednesday.

"It was good. The score shocked me. I was like, 'Whoa,' " Broucek said. "Beam's beam. I don't really get nervous on it anymore. When I'm up there, I just do what I do.

"I felt like in that routine (at OPRF), my gym-acro was more connected than this meet, but every judge is different."

Collectively, the Hilltoppers again had a strong beam meet, scoring 32.35 and counting just one fall on Rosch's dismount. Rosch and Cranny each scored 7.45.

"Our beam's starting to look good. We're not throwing the biggest difficulty yet, but we're staying on," Fuentes said. "Consistency wise, we're definitely getting there. Different people have different philosophies. Some people add all of the difficulty in first and try to get the consistency from there. I usually go the other way around, do consistency first and then add difficulty as we build confidence."

Broucek took 10th at state last year on beam (8.85) at Palatine High School after qualifying for the finals with a 9.425 in prelims.

Still, she said competing on beam at Glenbard West certainly helps.

"Sometimes you psych yourself out at other meets for beam because the beam's different, but I love doing beam here at home," Broucek said. "It just makes me feel more comfortable because you're more used to the

equipment, but it doesn't really bother me much at other meets. As long as my team's with me anywhere, it's cozy."

- By Bill Stone