

With chronic back pain and a stress fracture in her foot, Maggie Phillips had every reason not to return to the Glenbard West girls gymnastics team even prior to her senior year.

"It's come across a lot, and my friends kept me going, and my teammates," Phillips said. "I knew I had to stay for my team, and I wanted to stay for my team. I wanted to stay for (Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes) because I knew he would need some help this year because we have such a young team. I knew I needed to be a leader so I stepped up."

On Monday, Jan. 13, Phillips, Cara Passi and Sarah Ross were recognized on Senior Night and the Hilltoppers posted another season high in losing to defending state champion Lyons Township 149.30 to 134.30 in West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual action in Glen Ellyn. Shepard freshman Reilly Longawa also competed as an individual and had a 28.00 all-around total.

The Hilltoppers posted a season-high score for the second time in three days, exceeding their 133.50 from the Naperville North Invitational Jan. 11.

"We did really well. We just came in positive and we knew things that we could fix from Saturday and we really tried to improve on that," Phillips said.

Phillips is a team captain and the lone senior in the varsity lineup. Sophomores Amber Broucek and Mia Connolly and freshman Cailey Cranny competed as all-arounders Monday. Sophomore Amanda Rosch and Phillips worked three events each and freshman Kylie Lach two.

The Hilltoppers had season-high event scores on vault (34.75) and balance beam (34.25). Seven individual scores in all-around or the four events meet or beat season-high scores.

"The girls are right on track. Here at West we always talk about at the start of the new year you want to make sure you're pushing in the right direction, really cleaning up your routine and showing consistency,"

Fuentes said.

"Again, we hardly counted any misses in the meet. We look clean. We look consistent. We're proud of the routines that we're showing the judges. I'm really happy with the progress that they're making. We really put in our time on balance beam at the beginning of the year and all of our practices. I can't tell you the last time we had to count more than one fall."

Phillips and Passi have been part of the program all four years, while Ross joined this year for the first time. Passi competed Monday on the JV I level and Ross for the JV II team.

Phillips already has had quite a ride, competing at the state meet her first three years, twice with the Hilltoppers in team competition (2013 and 2011). She has been an individual state qualifier on the uneven bars the past two seasons.

"It's really great because I know we can keep the legacy going of West being a really good gymnastics school. I'm just really glad that I can help get that tradition," Phillips said.

The Hilltoppers were seventh at state last season. Also part of that state lineup were Broucek, Connolly and sophomore Sarah DeStefano, who has been out of the lineup since early December.

Last season, Phillips usually competed only on uneven bars, and she began this season only on that event to assist her back injury. Starting with the Oswego Invite Dec. 28, Phillips has been the Hilltoppers' first competitor on beam and also has joined the vault lineup.

"(Phillips) helps us a lot. This year she's doing beam and vault so that also contributes, too, to our team," Broucek said. "I'm proud of her. She's a good leader. She's a good captain. She's really supportive and just tries to motivate us to keep on going. She's positive."

Broucek was a 2013 state finalist on beam and finished 10th. In her

second meet back in the lineup Monday, Broucek was second on beam (9.5) to LT senior Michelle Cozza (9.6) after scoring 8.825 at Naperville North.

"(Beam went) really good. Plus, it gives me more confidence because it's at home, too. I feel better on our equipment, I guess, because I'm used to it," Broucek said.

"I was so scared that on that one turn, I almost fell off. I was like, 'What?' Just one turn. The simplest skill you can fall off of."

Phillips started the strong beam team with a season-high 8.65 for fifth place, followed by Connolly (8.2) and Lach (7.9).

"I'm working on getting it a lot more solid and I guess that showed today. I'm really happy with my beam, and the same with vault," Phillips said.

The Hilltoppers counted just one fall for the event to surpass their previous event season-high of 33.20 at home Dec. 2.

"Mia continues to impress on beam and that's really passing along to Cailey and Kylie, who have actually become really solid beam workers (as freshmen)," Fuentes said.

"We're not killing you with difficulty but with the execution, they're scoring well because of that. As a coach, you're proud to see that because those are the things you work on and want to see move from practice to competition and that's what is happening, especially with so many young kids."

Broucek was fourth in all-around (36.20), a season-high by .1 from Dec. 4, followed by Connolly (32.75) and Cranny (30.70).

Broucek also was fifth on vault (season-high 9.1) by landing her tuck Tsukahara and fifth on floor (8.9) and sixth on uneven bars (8.7) with team-high scores.

**"It feels really good, sticking all four. I'm so proud of (our team). We've been working really hard just to get 134, 133, 135-ish," Broucek said.**

**"I love (the tuck Tsuks). I feel like I never stopped doing them from last year. I'm still kind of getting into the groove of things, but I feel like I want to add new things already. I'm always wanting to add new things."**

**Still, Broucek quickly is making progress. Monday's beam competition, with Glenbard West going first, included three other of the 10 finalists at state last year.**

**Cozza tied for sixth at state and LT senior Katie Carling and junior Kelsy Kurfirst were all-state by tying for third. Carling and Kurfirst both had 9.3s Monday without falls.**

**"Any time you're in this company and your score holds up, you're really one of the great beam workers in the state," Fuentes said. "I've had a lot of really strong beam kids over the years and (Broucek is) definitely one of the best. She just has a great feel for the team. She just looks natural up there. That's the part that I can't teach. That's just something that she has in her."**

**On vault, the Hilltoppers' 34.75 beat their 34.275 from Saturday with four season highs -- Broucek, Phillips (8.6), Connolly (8.55) and Lach (8.5). Besides Broucek, Connolly and Rosch (8.45) had season highs and Lach tied her season high from Saturday.**

**Other top scores came from Connolly (8.4) and Rosch (season-high 8.3) on floor and Phillips (8.5) and Connolly (7.6) on uneven bars.**

**Phillips plans to attend the University of Arizona. The Senior Night introductions cited her greatest individual highlight as winning uneven bars at last season's Glenbard West Sectional with a career-best 9.6.**

**With a more conservative uneven bars routine so far this season, Phillips' highest score has been 8.9 Dec. 11, but she certainly might add skills for the postseason. The uneven bars score required at sectionals to qualify**

for last year's state meet was 9.1.

"I think it's going well. It's really weird not doing the skills that I used to and I kind of think about that sometimes, but I'm glad with the routine that I have now and I know that it's a solid routine and that I can hit it a lot," Phillips said.

-- by Bill Stone