

Senior Abbie Garchitorena couldn't immediately recall the last time the Glenbard West girls gymnastics team pulled out the title at Oswego's Panther Invitational.

Sophomore Mackenzie O'Keefe had an easier time with the last time she had won the all-around title at an invite.

"I'm still in shock. I've never won anything, all-around at least, or vault. I'm still shocked," O'Keefe said.

O'Keefe shared the joy of her titles in all-around and vault with the Hilltoppers as they captured the team title 141.65 to 141.225 over Geneva in the nine-team field.

While not performing at their best, the Hilltoppers won the invite for the second time in the past three years after taking second to DeKalb/Sycamore co-op in 2011 (144.575 to 142.05). DeKalb/Sycamore co-op was third this year with 140.05 points.

Besides her titles in all-around (36.775) and vault (9.425), O'Keefe was second on balance beam (9.225), fourth on uneven parallel bars (9.0) and fifth on floor exercise (9.125). Junior Maggie Phillips and freshman Amber Broucek added top-five finishes, and freshman Sarah DeStefano and Garchitorena added top-10 finishes.

The Hilltoppers now are on winter break until returning to action at the Naperville North Invitational at 1 p.m. Jan. 5.

"We tried our best and we were happy that we still got first," Garchitorena said. "We had a few mishaps on a few events, but we tried our best the

whole time, though, so we were just hoping for the best. At least we still did well.”

The Hilltoppers had their lowest score since their season opener on account of several falls and minor errors, especially on the uneven parallel bars, their final event.

“A win is a win and you can’t ever not like that, but we have certain expectations that we have of ourselves and a certain amount of gymnastics ability that comes with being a Glenbard West gymnast and just being Glenbard West,” Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes said.

“That (performance) was just not up to expectations. We don’t make excuses. We just need to be better. That’s all it comes down to.”

O’Keefe is a perfect example. She scored higher than she did all of last season even with falls during her beam and uneven bars routines. Now a 37-plus all-rounder, O’Keefe pulled the title over St. Edward senior Abby Madden (36.425), who fell once off beam.

“I think this is my worst one (for all-around this season),” O’Keefe said. “We had a little trouble on bars, but otherwise I think we did pretty good all around. We just had a little off day. I was really proud of us.”

O’Keefe’s victory on vault over Madden (9.375) also was sweet. O’Keefe landed her landed both of her pike Yurchenko vaults even after hurting her toe during warmups on beam.

“I was really nervous going into vault, because I thought it would hurt to run, but I zoned it out,” O’Keefe said. “On my first one, I stumbled backwards so I was really motivated to do my second one. When I did, I was

happy. I usually take a bunch of steps (landing) and I only took one.”

Garchitorenna was ninth in all-around (34.725) with Broucek 11th (34.625) and DeStefano 16th (33.525).

Even with a fall just before her beam dismount, O’Keefe was second to Stevenson sophomore Alyssa Weisberg (9.4) after strong routines by Broucek (9.1), which tied for fourth, and DeStefano (9.0) for eighth.

On uneven bars, Phillips (9.025) and O’Keefe (9.0) were third and fourth despite falls or touches on their dismounts to DeKalb/Sycamore senior Anita Bell (9.4) and Madden (9.05).

Despite their errors, the Hilltoppers still had the invite’s top team scores on beam (36.05), 1.75 higher than any other team, and uneven bars (35.00). Their 36.10 vault was .325 behind Geneva’s team-best 36.425.

“We had a good enough meet, especially coming off the break and Christmas. But on bars we just didn’t get the job done,” Fuentes said.

“It’s just small errors. Two falls on beam. The score doesn’t indicate it because we still scored well. On floor, we only had one fall but little misses, lots of out of bounds, which is still a tenth or two for taking a step and actually being out of bounds, that’s a .3 or .4 deduction so those add up quickly. Vault actually was the best that we’ve done this year. All of the vaults were basically on their feet so that was good to see.”

Garchitorenna enjoyed her best performance on floor (8.75), where she finished 11th. She also was 12th on beam (8.725), 16th on vault (8.8), 18th on uneven bars (8.45).

“I was really happy with floor. I liked my floor, one of my best floor routines I thought that I did,” Garchitorea said.

Broucek also was 11th on vault (8.975) and tied for 12th on uneven bars (8.525), DeStefano tied for 14th on vault (8.9) and was 19th on floor (8.425) and freshman Mia Connolly was 23rd on floor (8.2).

Senior Rachel Gathoff made her second straight varsity appearance, competing on vault (8.2) as well as beam (6.7) for the first time on varsity.

“I never expected it coming in freshman year that I would be on varsity senior year. It’s a really cool experience,” Gathoff said. “They’re good teammates. It’s a lot more intense, but it’s still fun.”

Gathoff began as an all-rounder on the JV II level as a freshman before being promoted to JV I. Because of an ankle injury, she began focusing on vault and beam last season.

“I was thinking that I would just be on JV I this year again, but I guess Carlos wanted me to come up and vault for him so I had to go along with it,” Gathoff said.

At Naperville North, the Hilltoppers will enter with the top season-high score (144.80), but four other teams in the 12-team field also have broken the 140 barrier – Prospect (142.125), Palatine (141.95), Barrington (141.75) and Hinsdale Central (141.575). At Oswego, Geneva became the 16th team this season to surpass 140.

Like Oswego, Naperville North’s invite uses the average score of two judges

per event, which obviously requires more time. With more teams, the Naperville North Invite traditionally has been one of the longest around.

It makes for a good test for the postseason, staying warmed up and maintaining focus. At Oswego, the Hilltoppers were always the final team to compete in the only three-team rotation after Wheaton Warrenville co-op and Stevenson.

“I think a big thing (for our team) is learning how to come to an invite, do the warmup, have a long wait and then go back and compete, how to keep your energy levels up, how to focus, how to be able to hit a routine after sitting for so long,” Fuentes said. “(In January) we really focus on that and see how we can replicate that in practice, perhaps by warming up events, going away from them and then coming back.”