

Glenbard West sophomore Mackenzie O'Keefe received a big payoff for hitting all four of her routines at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Saturday at Glenbard West.

O'Keefe not only was rewarded with a school-record 38.125 all-around total, she also won the uneven parallel bars (career-high 9.6), balance beam (9.55) and floor exercise (9.575) as the Hilltoppers finished second with an impressive 145.40 points.

The rewards didn't end there.

"I wanted to get a 38.00 so bad. My friend bet me if I got a 38.00, then I'd get Maroon 5 (concert) tickets, and my dad bet me if I got a 38.00, then he'd give me \$38," O'Keefe said.

"I'm so happy. I wasn't really that nervous today. I don't know why. I figured I'd have a good meet. I wasn't expecting this at all so I was just really calm and confident. I think that helped a lot."

The Hilltoppers had plenty of highlights as they posted their second-highest score of the season. Freshman Amber Broucek added two top-five finishes, tying for third on beam (9.475) and taking fifth in all-around (36.50) as the highest finishing freshman. Senior Abbie Garchitorena, freshman Sarah DeStefano and junior Maggie Phillips had top-10 finishes.

State-title contender Lyons Township (148.25 points) regained the outright title that Glenbard West captured for the first time in 2012. Hinsdale Central (139.00) edged York (138.65) for third place.

The Hilltoppers, who had one fall or significant mistake on each event,

scored a team-high 35.95 on uneven bars and were second to the Lions on beam (season-high 37.075), floor (36.275) and vault (36.10). Glenbard West scored 37.025 on beam in winning the York Invite Jan. 19.

“We had a miss everywhere, but it was a solid meet. A 145 and change, you can’t be upset about that,” Glenbard West coach Carlos Fuentes said.

“Sometimes it’s better to make little mistakes before the big meets so you focus a little more so you shore up your skills. We’re in good position to do well in the regional and the sectional.”

The Hilltoppers will be at home for the next two meets as they try to return to the eight-team state meet after just missing last season. Last year, they shared the ninth-highest sectional score (144.875), just .5 from the last at-large state berth.

They play host to regionals at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 29, followed by the Glenbard West Sectional at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 5.

The Silver Meet was held in Glenbard West’s main gym so it was an important trial run because that’s where sectionals also will be held.

Other than Garchitorea and Phillips, members of the 2011 Glenbard West sectional team, none of the Hilltoppers had competed before in the main gym. Regionals will be in the upstairs practice gym, where duals meets also are conducted.

“It’s such a big difference. I felt like we weren’t even at home, just the surrounding lights, all different,” Broucek said. “It didn’t bother me. It was just a little weird at first, just to know we had to do it down here. I liked having our own equipment.”

O'Keefe certainly handled the adjustment as well. She broke her previous record of 37.90 Jan. 12 at the District 87 Invite at Glenbard North, where the Hilltoppers won with a season-high 146.00. Saturday's scores also came from the average of two judges per event as opposed to one judge at District 87.

This was O'Keefe's fifth consecutive all-around title at an invite or major meet. Last year, her only Silver title was on beam (9.325) as she took third in all-around with a season-high 36.95.

"I was hoping to win beam or something. I just wanted to win one thing and to win four, it's super great," O'Keefe said. "It was nice actually (competing downstairs). I like it a lot better. It's a lot more spacious and it just felt better and calmer."

Fuentes believes it is the single-best performance by a Glenbard West gymnast at the Silver Meet since Maggie Duvall in the mid-2000s.

"It's a great title to add to your name, really looking at the competition for the day. In the end, it's about hitting four routines," Fuentes said.

"She's putting it all together right at the end of the year. She's peaking at the right time. That's all you want for your athletes," Fuentes said. "She's really doing all of the hard work and it's really starting to pay off, especially in a loaded field with (LT's Kelsy Kurfirst and Michelle Cozza and Hinsdale Central's Erin Morgan). We'll all talking state qualifiers."

Perhaps the sweetest victory came on uneven bars. She won by .2 over York senior and club gymnastics friend Alyna Gagliardi and she also finished

ahead of sophomore Kurfirst, the defending co-state champion who was fourth (9.1) with a fall on a new dismount she tried for the first time. Kurfirst, who also fell on her double back on floor, was second in all-around with a 37.525.

“I think it was the best bars I did in a long time,” O’Keefe said. “I was hoping to hit. I thought for sure, Kelsy or (junior Cozza) would win. I felt so bad that (Kurfirst) fell. She is such a great gymnast. To come out and beat her, it’s really exciting.”

On beam, O’Keefe edged Kurfirst (2nd, 9.525) and finished ahead of two 2012 state beam finalists, York junior Meghan Davidson (7th, 9.225) and senior Morgan (10th, 8.825), who stayed on despite her ankle injury.

Beam brought out the best in many Hilltoppers. Broucek had three 9s on the day but was most pleased about her 9.475 that shared third with Cozza.

“Beam, definitely beam (was my highlight). It was my high score today,” Broucek said. “I think we’re feeling pretty good (about the postseason). Each meet we have fewer falls so that’s pretty good, staying consistent.”

Garchitorena was excited about her sixth-place 9.25 climaxed by landing her back layout, step out, back tuck dismount. DeStefano was 11th (8.8).

“I’d say beam was my proudest event. I think I did well on that one the most,” Garchitorena said. “I was really happy with it. I’ve just been working really hard. I know my previous meets haven’t been as good. I tried my best to stay on.”

Another proud moment came during the awards for all-around. The

Hilltoppers took four of the top eight spots with O'Keefe, Broucek and Garchitorena (35.45) and DeStefano (35.075) in seventh and eighth.

"It was really nice. All of us have been working so hard during practices and just having all of us stand next to each other for that was really amazing to see," Garchitorena said.

On vault, O'Keefe tied for third (9.4) with Morgan behind Kurfirst (9.75) and Cozza (9.65). Broucek tied for sixth (9.1), Garchitorena was eighth (9.05) and freshman Mia Connolly and DeStefano shared 15th (8.55).

On uneven bars, Broucek was sixth (9.05), Phillips 10th (8.675), Garchitorena 11th (8.625) and DeStefano tied for 12th (8.575).

DeStefano came through with a 9.15 on floor to tie for seventh, followed by Broucek (8.875), Connolly (season-high 8.675) and Garchitorena (8.525) in 11th, 13th and 14th.

The honors didn't stop there. Based on voting by the Silver coaches, Fuentes was named the conference's varsity Coach of the Year, and Glenbard West junior varsity I coach Jamie Plumb was named Coach of the Year for that level. This is Plumb's first year with the JV I lineup after previously coaching the JV II squad.

"I am very proud of Jamie and her Coach of the Year win. It is always great to be honored by your fellow colleagues," Fuentes said. "She has worked very hard this year as a first-year JV I coach. She is eager to improve herself as a coach every day and her love for the sport and passion for coaching is evident every day."

The Hilltoppers are the No. 1 seed for their sectional, and the sectional

champion automatically qualifies for the state meet. While they should cruise to their sixth straight regional title and seventh overall Tuesday, the sectional field appears tough.

St. Charles co-op (147.45) and Geneva (145.65) put up impressive scores in separate meets Jan. 14, but they scored 144.775 and 141.50 Saturday in finishing 1-2 at the Upstate Eight Conference Meet. DeKalb/Sycamore co-op, which shared the ninth-best 2012 sectional score with Glenbard West, won the Independents Conference Meet Saturday with a season-high 143.975 points.

St. Charles competed without one of its top gymnasts, Cathryn Gotlund, recovering from having wisdom teeth removed. Geneva counted four falls off beam.

The Hilltoppers' streak of major meet victories may have ended at four Saturday, but having LT in attendance gave them a good test of the atmosphere they'll experience at the sectional.

"I thought our girls did a really nice job of standing up to the pressure, competing against Lyons Township," Fuentes said. "The last few meets, we've been the favorite coming in. To see how they competed against a quality team like LT, I was very pleased. You still want them to put on a good showing, still hit the routine and not be intimidated by the competition."