

Hinsdale Central junior Maddie Sesemann had a little extra motivation to land her tuck Tsukahara vault Saturday, Dec. 14.

This not only was the team's first event at the Red Devil Invitational, its annual nine-team invite. Sesemann's older brother, John, was home from college and came to watch from the outset.

"He's one of my really, really best friends. I was like, 'I really want to do this for me, but I need to do this. I need to show my brother,'" Sesemann said. "I was kind of going into it like, 'I have to prove to him I can do this.' It kind of helped me go for it, I guess."

Sesemann landed her second attempt cleanly without a spotter and scored a season-high 8.6 that helped the Red Devils post a season-high 127.00 points to place fourth. Geneva (141.925 points), fifth at state last year, won in its first invite appearance, followed by Downers Grove South (131.475) and Lake Park (129.45).

Sesemann took fifth in all-around with a season-high 32.575, and senior Alex Yager (31.90, 10th) and sophomore Jamie Sherlock (30.925, tied for 13th) also had season-high all-around totals.

Sesemann, who tied for 12th on vault, improved her season high on vault by .7. Her team high scores earned fourth on the uneven parallel bars by tying her career high of 8.45 and tied for sixth on floor exercise (8.4).

"That was a really great experience, just making (that vault). It kind of made a boost for the rest of the meet, like 'I did one thing (well). I can kind of keep the momentum going,'" Sesemann said.

"It was great to have a season high (as a team). I know we're definitely shooting for a 130 this year so we're so close. That meet really showed us what we really just need to improve on beam but other than that, the rest of the scores were some of the best we've ever had."

The Red Devils easily passed their previous best score of 126.05 from Wednesday, Dec. 11, at Glenbard West behind season-high team scores on vault

(34.825) and uneven bars (31.55). Only Geneva scored higher on vault (36.625).

Yager, Sherlock and sophomore Lindsey Riker also had top-10 event finishes, and freshman Mia Randell made her varsity debut and competed in all-around (28.125, 22nd). Usual freshman all-arounder Margot Tye was diagnosed with a stress fracture in her lower leg after Wednesday's meet, and sophomore Elle Bergevin has not received medical clearance to begin competing this season.

"We keep going up (with our score) so that's good," Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said. "Overall, they're getting cleaner and stuff so now it's just a matter of keeping it clean and then adding new skills, which we'll do over (winter) break to increase our difficulty to make sure we have all of the requirements."

Randell was added to the varsity lineup that morning after previously competing for the junior varsity I team, which had its Red Devil Invite simultaneously and won with 121.325 points. With Riker not competing on floor, the Red Devils had just four competitors on the event.

"We went into the meet kind of knowing (Tye was out) but we didn't know if we were going to be able to have a fifth person compete with us," Sesemann said. "It was kind of nice having Mia compete with us during the meet and for her to help us and help our scores. I think it's a great perspective for her to figure out the differences of varsity versus JV."

Sesemann landed her tuck Tsuk in the Nov. 26 season opener, but it was voided because she was touched by assistant coach Mark Wanner's spotting. Her success Saturday was just part of a solid team effort on the event.

Yager (8.8), Sherlock (8.725) and Riker (8.7) swept seventh through ninth place by beating their respective previous season highs of 8.6, 8.5 and 8.4, respectively. Randell also was 18th with a personal best 8.525.

Yager has been throwing a handspring full and a half vault, which has a 9.6 start value.

"That last half of a twist has been a little bit of a struggle, but I hit it all the way

around," Yager said.

"It's always nice to start off with something positive like that. It helps your mindset especially when it's really early in the morning (10 a.m. start). It's just nice to be on our own equipment and everything and we don't have to sit on a cold bus. It's hard when you have to go stretch and everything's cold."

The Red Devils kept things going on uneven bars. They had their two top-five finishes with Sesemann and Riker, who had a season-high 8.4 to tie for fifth. Sherlock tied for 19th with a season-high 7.4 and Yager added a 7.3.

Yager then was 12th on beam by tying her season high of 7.9. Riker was 17th (7.5). On floor, Sherlock (8.1, 13th) and Yager (7.9, 20th) both had season highs.

"Actually, one of the coaches (assistant Myles Laffey) gave me some really good advice for my front pass (on floor). I changed my technique a little bit and it really helped my form out a lot," Yager said.

"(And beam) was good. I think there were some things I could have definitely cleaned up. I know I'm going to add another jump in my routine to get another series and hopefully will up that score, too."

What's even more exciting is the Red Devils know there is plenty of room for improvement. Sesemann has even more motivation knowing that she is closing on her career-high all-around total of 32.70 from freshman year.

There also will be more than two weeks of uninterrupted practice during winter break after the Red Devils compete at the New Trier Holiday Invitational Saturday, Dec. 21.

"Winter break is a time where, without school, it's less stress. I have time to make sure to focus on certain things and spend that extra time," Sesemann said.

"Floor and beam I know I can definitely improve. It's a great (all-around) score, but I know little nit-pick things that I can improve on to hopefully get my score up higher and higher so that's my goal."