

Hinsdale Central freshman Mia Randell received stunning news when she arrived at the Red Devil Invitational Dec. 14.

She was about to make her debut in the varsity lineup.

"I came in and set my bag down. (Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque) handed me the leotard and said, 'You're going to do varsity this meet,'" Randell said.

"I was like, 'Oh, wow.' I was super surprised and was like, 'Oh my gosh.' I didn't even know at all that I'd be doing (varsity) so it was really a surprise."

By the time she competed with the Red Devils at New Trier's Winter Holiday Invitational Saturday, Dec. 21, Randell was beginning to feel like a varsity veteran.

With as complete and healthy a lineup as possible, the Red Devils scored a season-high 127.075 points to finish an impressive fourth in the eight-team field behind Fremd (146.60), New Trier (141.35) and Carmel (139.75). Fremd and New Trier were third and fourth at state last year.

The Red Devils improved from their 125.15 Wednesday, Dec. 18 with the same lineup that also included senior Alex Yager, junior Maddie Sesemann and sophomores Elle Bergevin, Lindsey Riker and Jamie Sherlock.

This was already Randell's third varsity meet over eight days. The New Trier Invite was where three teammates made their varsity debuts last season – Yager, Riker and Sherlock.

"I didn't think I'd be good enough (for varsity) because the other girls are really, really good. It was kind of a shock to think, I'm doing it? Really, you picked me? It was just surprising," said Randell, previously part of the junior varsity I team.

"It's all kind of shifted a little bit, but competing JV, I'm doing the same routines as I am on varsity. The routines don't feel any different. It's just the atmosphere. (And) a better leotard."

While the Red Devils will continue practicing, they are on winter break from school until Jan. 6. Their next meet is Jan. 8 at home against Oak Park-River Forest.

"We've been talking about our goals for the break and trying to get what we want to improve on or little things that, 'If we can get this pretty easy, let's work on this,'" Estoque said.

"You can tell (Randell) has had a gymnastics background. She's doing well. She's got great dance and we just have to improve her skills. If we can get that going, she's going to be doing a good job."

The Red Devils did a good job collectively to edge their 127.00 from the Red Devil Invite.

Yager (31.55), Sesemann (30.925), Riker (30.925) and Sherlock (30.80) finished 18th through 21st in all-around. Randell (vault, floor) and Bergevin (uneven bars, beam) split the other two events.

Yager was 14th on vault (8.7), Bergevin was 15th on uneven bars (8.05), Riker was 17th on uneven bars (7.925), Sesemann was 18th on floor (8.425) and 19th on beam (8.15) and Sherlock tied for 18th on vault (8.55).

The Red Devils had season-high event scores on floor (32.10) and beam (30.975), their highest totals since the Nov. 27 season opener.

On beam, Sesemann had her first 8-plus score of the season, followed by Yager (7.7), Bergevin (season-high 7.675) and Sherlock (season-high 7.45). Sesemann also led the way on floor, followed by Riker (8.025), Sherlock (7.95) and Yager (7.7).

At the 2012 New Trier Invite, Riker (floor), Yager (uneven bars) and Sherlock (vault) competed on one event each in their varsity debuts. They were standouts for last year's JV I lineup who trained with the varsity.

"It's awesome because I can remember coming here last year," Sherlock said. "Just so much has changed as a team and just individually I feel so much

stronger.”

Randell has had a few advantages in her transition to varsity. She started the sport “late” around third grade, but she has consistently competed in club gymnastics, most recently for Balance Institute of Gymnastics (BIG) at Level 6-7.

Her older sister, Gina, is a senior on the JV II team. Mia not only attended meets last season but even worked at some of them, flashing scores and gathering judges’ sheets.

”I really got a feel for what high school gymnastics is actually like. It really helped me coming into it, kind of knowing how everything goes and how the meets work and how practices work,” Randell said.

”After seeing (Gina) do it, I knew I wanted to do high school instead of club. It just looked so much more fun I guess. It really helped me get the feel for how it actually goes by seeing her go through it.”

Randell joined the varsity after freshman all-rounder Margot Tye was sidelined by a stress fracture after the team’s dual at Glenbard West Dec. 11 and Bergevin didn’t join the lineup from her injury until Dec. 18.

With Bergevin back, Randell competed on three events Dec. 18 and did an exhibition routine on uneven bars. Randell also was going to perform exhibition on beam but was inserted when Sesemann could not compete because of illness.

At the Red Devil Invite, Randell was used as an all-rounder.

”I was like, ‘Wow. Whew, that’s a lot,’ ” Randell said. “I hit all of my routines so it went well. I did really, really well on vault (8.525) and only got .075 off (my start value) – my best vault score for high school so far. That was really exciting.”

From her season debut, Bergevin showed significant strides three days later.

”Elle looked like she was back to her normal self (on uneven bars). Really, for

the last meet, she had hardly done anything. And her beam was good," Estoque said.

Yager once again had a strong showing on her handspring full and a half vault, which has a 9.6 start value. Saturday's score was just .1 shy of her season high.

"(My vault is) improving a lot. I've been working on blocking off my shoulders better and twisting all the way around."

At last year's New Trier Invite, Yager had a non-counting 7.6 on uneven bars. She said she didn't remember being too nervous competing with the varsity for the first time.

"I'm pretty relaxed in general. It was really fun just to be able to participate in that," Yager said. "I think (this year's invite) was just more fun for me. I got better and I can do all of the events and be more a part of the team."

The Red Devils now are working on improvements all the way around over break.

Sherlock hopes to continue her improvement meet by meet, and her consistency. She was unable to make her two giant swings on uneven bars Saturday after achieving them for the first time in a meet Wednesday.

"I want to flip a Tsuk on vault and get a 9.0 and on floor I think I can get more skills and progressively get better and higher scores," Sherlock said.

Yager said she is satisfied with her vault but will try to add elements to her floor routine. Riker said she is seeking to add a back tuck on beam.

"(It's) kind of a big dream, but I want to get that. I can do it somewhat on a low beam (in practice), but I need mats," Riker said.

Sesemann has a long list of goals for break. She wants to add an aerial on beam. For floor, her strongest event, she hopes to add elements (front handspring, front layout and punch front) that she has never done in a routine.

She landed her tuck Tsukahara vault Dec. 14, but struggled with it Wednesday and didn't attempt it Saturday. She also wants that to change in 2014.

"There are a lot of things I want to add and I definitely want to get my Tsuk back," Sesemann said.

"I didn't do it in warmups. It's kind of like if you don't do it in warmups, you don't compete it, which makes sense to me. It's kind of on and off lately and I really want to get consistent with that because that's a high-scoring vault."

-- by Bill Stone