

Trying to qualify for her first sectional meet, Hinsdale Central senior gymnast Alex Yager was left with a choice.

Vault usually has been Yager's strongest event, but she struggled with the first and easier of her two attempts at the Lyons Township Regional Friday, Feb. 7.

Yager could try the same vault again or her higher-valued full and one-half turn, which has a start value of 9.6.

"I was freaking out. I was like, 'Oh my God. I just bombed that first vault,' "
" Yager said. "(Hinsdale Central assistant coach Mark Wanner) was like I should do that vault again because I know I'll hit that one but he was like, 'What do you feel comfortable with?'

"I was like, 'I don't know. It's my last meet. I'll just do the hard one.' "

Yager landed her full and one-half for a season-high 8.825. And it wasn't her last meet.

Yager is joining junior Maddie Sesemann and sophomore Lindsey Riker as individual qualifiers for the Hinsdale Central Sectional at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 12.

Yager advanced on vault – and even as an all-arounder (31.925) after never competing at regionals in her previous three seasons.

Sesemann and Riker have previously competed at sectionals. Sesemann advanced in all-around (33.475) and floor (career-high 9.025), Riker advanced on balance beam (8.2) and Riker (8.4) and Sesemann (8.125) both advanced on uneven parallel bars.

"Well, it feels really good (to qualify). I came in here thinking, 'Oh my gosh. It's the last time I'm ever going to do gymnastics ever again, but now it looks like it's not. I didn't expect it at all," Yager said.

Hinsdale Central did not advance as a team after finishing third (130.125

points) with its second highest score of the season behind defending state champion LT (school-record 152.10) and Downers Grove North (132.425).

Gymnasts also advance to regionals as individuals either automatically with a top-five regional finish or at-large by being among the 12 remaining highest scores for the four feed-in regionals.

Yager needed at least an 8.6 to advance at-large on vault. She had scored as high as 8.8 twice before this season, including the York Invite Jan. 25.

"I think that all she needed to do was stick that vault (to qualify)," Sesemann said. "Once she stuck it, she knew. She got the score. She knew."

Yager was the ninth of the 12 at-large qualifiers in all-around (31.60 cut). Her total received a boost from a season-high 7.925 on floor as part of the Red Devils' 33.55 season-high team event score.

"I think I've improved a lot so that's exciting (to advance in all-around)," Yager said.

Sesemann was the only ranked qualifier, by taking fifth in all-around and tying for fifth on floor. Yager tied for sixth on vault, .475 from fifth, and was seventh in all-around. Riker and Sesemann were seventh and eighth on uneven bars and Riker was eighth on beam.

"It makes me really excited because I've never competed all-around at sectionals freshman or sophomore year," Sesemann said.

"Even though we're not doing it for the team, in a way it seems like a bigger deal because what I do affects me directly. Just like Lindsay deserved to make it, I feel like I deserved to make it, too, for all of the work that I put in. And Alex, too. I'm so happy for her."

Sesemann's success was impressive, considering she hyperextended her knee while vaulting Jan. 29. Her floor score was a special reward.

"It was funny hearing everyone yell, but it's the highest score that I've ever gotten in gymnastics for high school," said Sesemann, whose season best had been 8.85 Jan. 22. "I was really, really happy. I thought I'd get a good score, but I didn't assume I was going to get a 9."

Last year, Riker competed for the team at sectionals on uneven bars and floor. This time, Riker beat the at-large sectional cuts of 7.95 on uneven bars by tying her season high from Dec. 14 and shared the last qualifying spot on beam, thanks to fighting to stay on after her 1 1/2 turn. On floor, Riker's other event, her 8.4 just missed the 8.425 cut.

"Bars is my favorite event," Riker said. "This time, it seems more real (to compete) because we had to work for it really hard in the gym and it's kind of a struggle to get to this."

Hinsdale Central passed 130 points for the second time this season, surpassed only by its team-high 130.65 Jan. 16.

Sophomore Jamie Sherlock also competed as an all-rounder (30.725). On vault, junior Melina Megaridis and sophomore Alexis Potocki (8.5s) and Sherlock (8.45) came close to the 8.6 sectional cut, and Sherlock scored 8.2 on floor.

The Red Devils had competed with just four all-rounders the previous four meets, including the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Feb. 1 so that the junior varsity I lineup could remain intact for its meet.

Megaridis, who also competed on uneven bars, Potocki and senior Haley Johnson, who competed on floor made their varsity debuts. Freshman Mia Randell also competed on beam after making three varsity appearances in December.

For Yager, sectionals not only is her chance to compete one last time but also to perform again at her main gym.

"My freshman year, I was on (junior varsity II)," Yager said. "Coming into this, it was always like Erin Usher and Erin Morgan, all of those girls were

amazing. I was like, 'I'll never be able to be where they are,' and it's kind of cool to be able to be like, 'Oh yeah, I get to compete at the same meet that these girls had.' "

-- by Bill Stone