

Hinsdale Central freshman gymnast Lily Jones may not be back to 100 percent physically, but her determination hasn't waned.

Jones has been recovering from an injured left ankle, but she still competed as an all-arounder at the York Invitational Saturday, Jan. 27.

Instead of possibly being conservative for floor exercise, the Red Devils' first event, she came out aggressive.

"I actually added a harder skill for my last pass," Jones said. "I was doing it in practice so it was kind of like normal."

When Jones and the Red Devils return to York for the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet at 11 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, they should be in a much better position for success.

At the invite, the Red Devils still were fifth of 11 teams with 132.45 points. They competed with four all-arounders and two specialists but were without their top gymnast, senior Brigid Cultra, who was attending a wedding.

The Red Devils' four all-arounders – Jones, freshmen Amanda Leon and Jenny Sims and senior Maddie Sesemann – had top-15 individual finishes.

The team had the fourth highest event scores for floor (33.65) and uneven parallel bars (32.975). Individual medals only were awarded for all-around Saturday.

"Not bad overall, an OK meet," Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said.

Jones was hopeful to return to practicing full out Monday before the Red Devils compete at Oak Park-River Forest Tuesday, Jan. 27, in a rescheduled meet from Jan. 7.

With conference and the postseason approaching, Estoque said the team may water down routines as a whole Tuesday, just to play it safe.

"I think I'm going to be 100 percent (for conference) because I'm going to start flipping my vaults in practice," Jones said. "I haven't really been vaulting as much. I'm going to start vaulting a lot more on Monday and hopefully have my (Tsukahara) tuck back."

One thing is for sure. Jones and the Red Devils will know the layout at the Silver Meet. With their dual meet also at York Wednesday, Jan. 21, the Silver Meet will mark the team's third time competing at York in 10 days.

That should be an advantage, especially considering that Sesemann is the only varsity gymnast with previous high-school competition experience prior to this season. The Red Devils won the dual meet at York 134.65 to 120.50.

"(The Silver Meet) is our third time here within a week and a half so the girls should be used to the equipment, which is nice," Estoque said.

Jones suffered a mild ankle sprain during warmups for the Lyons Township home dual Jan. 19. She was switched to competing exhibition for vault with a much easier one that she repeated Saturday.

"I haven't really been vaulting as much. I'm going to start vaulting a lot more on Monday and hopefully have my (Tsukahara) tuck back," Jones said.

On the other events, Jones remains among the Red Devils' best. She had the team's highest finish on any event Saturday with a seventh-place, season-high 8.75 on uneven bars.

She also tied for 14th on floor (8.5) and had a team-high 8.15 on beam to tie for 22nd. Even with a 7.975 vault, she placed 10th in all-around (33.375).

"Today went pretty well. Bars (was the highlight) because I've been struggling kind of in practice. I hit my routine so I felt like it was better," Jones said.

Leon was a team-high 12th on floor (8.6) and Sims was a team-best 14th on vault (8.7).

Leon (33.00) and Sims (32.825) were 14th and 15th in all-around and Sesemann

(31.625) 18th. Sesemann tied for 15th on vault (8.675), Sims was 20th on uneven bars (8.275) and Leon scored 8.05 on beam.

"This was one of my OK meets. I think I did good. I was hoping to do better on beam (7.7 without a fall)," Sims said. "I've been having trouble connecting my skills on beam so I think that affected my score a lot. I've been doing better staying on, but I need to work on connecting my skills."

Although unsuccessful, Leon attempted her tuck Yurchenko vault in a meet for the first time.

Sims had been working tuck Tsuks last club season but she's been losing confidence in landing them and needed to switch vaults.

The half on-full off vault is completely new to Sims this season. Saturday's score was .05 shy of her season best from Dec. 10.

"I did a lot better on vault than I have before and I've been getting a lot better on that vault," Sims said. "When I first started learning it, it was kind of hard at first but I've been getting better at it. Hopefully I'm going to try and work those (tuck Tsuks) and get it for next season."

The Red Devils previously competed without Cultra Dec. 4 as she recovered from mononucleosis. On Saturday, freshman Jessica Elliott competed three events and freshman Jessica Sprong competed on uneven bars.

Even though she fell landing both tuck Tsuks, Elliott's 8.65 vault counted toward the team total as did Sprong's 7.85 on uneven bars.

On Wednesday, Elliott landed that vault for the first time in competition on her first of two attempts for a season-high 8.9 that took first place.

"It didn't go as well as I planned it (Saturday). I wish I would have landed it again," Elliott said. "(On Wednesday) I just got to the back of the board and the back of the (vaulting) table and pulled and I landed it. It felt really good."

Elliott has competed varsity, sometimes exhibition, and for the junior varsity I

team. She missed the team's last two meets prior to winter break recovering from an ankle injury.

Around the gym, she is known as Cubbie, a nickname given to her as a little girl by her father. It's used to help differentiate her from Sprong because they have the same first name.

"I feel like it's gone pretty good. It's a lot different than club. They score a lot differently," Elliott said. "I just like all of the new friends that I've made. I knew Lily and Jenny from club (Balance Institute of Gymnastics) and I met Amanda, Brigid and Maddie. We're all really close now."

The Red Devils will enter the Silver Meet in third place behind two-time defending state champion and Silver champion Lyons Township and Glenbard West.

They will finish the season with two home meets – the Hinsdale Central Regional at 6 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 5, and the Hinsdale Central Sectional at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 11. The sectional will be held in the main gym instead of the fieldhouse.

"We're all just trying to do our best (for conference)," Jones said. "Brigid's going to be there so I feel like we're all just going to try our hardest and whatever happens, happens."

In the dual victory over York, Leon won all-around (34.05) and beam (8.5) and Jones won floor (8.85) and uneven bars (8.6) by .05 over Cultra and Leon, respectively.

--by Bill Stone