

Senior Alex Yager and her Hinsdale Central girls gymnastics teammates should have been at least mentally exhausted for their meet at defending state champion Thursday, Jan. 16.

That morning, they had just completed their third and last day of final semester exams.

"I had my two hardest finals this morning (Advanced Placement environmental science and AP microeconomics)," Yager said. "I had to wake up early, but I rested up, ate food and came to the meet."

Instead, Yager and the Red Devils made the grade in a big way. They achieved one of their season goals by breaking 130 points despite losing to the Lions 149.20 to 130.65 in La Grange.

Hinsdale Central previously hadn't scored higher than 127.075 Dec. 11 but came through with season-high event scores on floor exercise (33.10), balance beam (31.90) and the uneven parallel bars (31.85).

"I guess it's just easier (to compete) when we're too tired to think about anything after finals," Yager joked.

"It's good because I know starting out as a team that was one of our first goals we wanted to hit so we finally got there. Now we can do better from there, knowing we already can get a 130. I think we knew we had the potential before but now that we finally actually reached the goal, it motivates us to even push ourselves further."

Yager, junior Maddie Sesemann and sophomores Elle Bergevin, Lindsey Riker, Jamie Sherlock, who comprised the Red Devils' lineup, combined for 10 career-high or season-high scores in all-around or on events.

Sesemann (33.50) and Yager (32.20) had career-high all-around totals, and Riker (32.40) and Sherlock (31.20) also competed all four events. Bergevin competed on everything but floor exercise.

With the same lineup in its first meet back from winter break Jan. 11, Hinsdale Central scored 125.85 at the Naperville North Invitational.

**"I wasn't real happy with Saturday's meet, but this one I'm very happy with. I thought we had a lot of clean things, clean routines," Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said.**

**"(We went) 5 for 5 on beam so that was exciting. It was a pretty good meet for them all over. (Assistant coach Mark Wanner and I) said they were brain dead from exams so it was kind of funny. (They performed) more by memory of what they needed to do."**

**Despite the Red Devils' success, LT took first through fifth place on all four events with three all-arounders and five specialists. The Lions, who scored a school-record 152.10 Dec. 11, will play host to the Red Devils at the LT Regional Friday, Jan. 31.**

**Sesemann, whose previous season high was 32.70 Dec. 19, finally topped her all-time best 32.80 from freshman year, even though she had no season-high scores.**

**"I'm pretty proud of that," Sesemann said. "Most meets I have one really good event, but this meet, even though they weren't my career highs, they were good scores across the board so I was really happy about that."**

**Sesemann had team-high scores on floor (8.45) and beam (8.35). Bergevin had a season-best 8.3 to lead the lineup on uneven bars, and Yager had a team-best 8.6 on vault. LT, which scored a school-record 152.10 Dec. 11, took the top five places on all four events.**

**"Coach Wanner kind of joked around how all of our brains are dead so that's why we're doing really well. We're not overthinking everything," Sesemann said.**

**Mentally, finals week may have played a role in the Red Devils' success by creating a climate of urgency and focus in the gym.**

**"With finals and shortened practices, everyone was like, 'We need to get in the gym, do what we want, to be able to go home to study,' " Sesemann said. "In that mindset, everyone did what they needed to do the first time really, really**

good. I think it actually helped because a routine here (at a meet), you only get one try and everyone did routines on the first try there (at practice). In a way, it kind of helped us prepare more for the meet.”

The Red Devils boosted the previous best score on floor by one full point. Sesemann was followed by Riker (8.4), Sherlock (8.3) and Yager (7.9). Those three scores set or tied season bests.

On beam, the Red Devils improved .925 from their 30.975 Dec. 21. Riker followed Sesemann with a season-high 8.3, followed by Yager (7.65), Bergevin (7.6) and Sherlock (season-high 7.55).

On uneven bars, Bergevin was followed closely by Sesemann (8.2), Yager (season-high 8.05) and Riker (7.3) as the Red Devils topped their previous team season best by .30.

Bergevin, working her way back into the lineup since returning to competition Dec. 18, also had a season-high 8.2 on vault. Yager posted a season high on uneven bars for the second meet in a row.

“I added a new pass on my floor, which really helped (my all-around score), and on bars I did better than I normally do,” Yager said.

Before the meet, LT honored its eight seniors as well as those for Hinsdale Central. Yager is the lone senior in this year’s varsity lineup for the Red Devils, who will have their home Senior Night Wednesday, Jan. 22, against York.

“I was thinking about it, of course, when they were doing all of the stuff like, ‘Whoa. That went so fast. I can’t believe I’m already a senior,’ ” Yager said. “I’ve been doing this for four whole years already and after this I’m not going to be doing gymnastics again so it’s kind of sad but then I was like, ‘Well, I’m here now doing gymnastics.’ I know it’s going to be over soon so I’m just kind of trying to do all of new stuff that I can before I’m done.”

Yager already has risen to the occasion in her first full season with the varsity. More important, she feels as though she did well on her final exams.

Like the gymnastics postseason, final exams come down to one performance with so much at stake. Yager's last two exams were roughly 90 minutes each with only a 15-minute break in between.

"Eventually, all of the words kind of blur together and you're reading the same question like five times," Yager said. "It's really frustrating because you work so hard for the grade you want all quarter and then all another quarter and then it's like, 'Yeah, this final's going to make or break your grade.'"

-- by Bill Stone