

Junior Maddie Sesemann and her Hinsdale Central girls gymnastics teammates already had a long wait to return to competition after winter break.

Then came the Red Devils' usual wait during the Naperville North Invitational Saturday, Jan. 11.

Once again this year, the Red Devils were the last team in the 12-team field to compete on balance beam.

"I think it was kind of hard because we had to wait such a long period of time," Sesemann said. "There was a little (practice) beam behind the bleachers so a bunch of us were going behind there and pictured doing a good beam routine."

As it turned out, Sesemann was picture perfect. The final performer on the event, she scored a career-best 8.675 for ninth place and the Red Devils' highest individual place on any event.

Hinsdale Central finished 11th with 125.85 points. The beam routine helped Sesemann finish with a season-high 32.70 all-around total for 20th place.

"It was one of my most solid (beam routines). I didn't wobble or fall so I'm happy about that," Sesemann said. "I thought it was a pretty good meet (for me), other than bars."

Sophomores Lindsey Riker (30.775) and Jamie Sherlock (30.70) and senior Alex Yager (30.55) also competed as all-arounders, and sophomore Elle Bergevin competed on everything but floor exercise. With the junior varsity also in action Saturday at the Lake Park Invitational, the Red Devils went with just four performers on floor.

The Red Devils showed some rust after winter break and competing for the first time since Dec. 21. Their first meet after winter break Wednesday, Jan. 8, at home against Oak Park-River Forest was pushed back to Wednesday, Jan. 29. Both schools had no school or gymnastics

practice -- the previous two days because of dangerous sub-zero temperatures.

Their 31.15 team score on uneven parallel bars just missed their season high. They also counted two falls on beam and floor exercise, their first event.

"It was an OK meet (overall)," Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said. "That was a really nice beam routine for Maddie. It was her best one all year."

Riker was out of town most of winter break, Bergevin became stranded because of canceled airplane flights nationally. Bergevin returned Tuesday, Jan. 7, after she was supposed to originally get back Jan. 2.

Sesemann was among the Red Devils who remained at home the entire break and attended all practices. Besides beating her previous season bests of 8.15 on beam (Dec. 21) and 32.575 in all-around (Dec. 14), she had a team-high 8.425 on floor to tie for 23rd.

"I think it really helped (me)," Sesemann said. "Mostly (I trained) all events, working on cleaning stuff up and making it better. I was supposed to add a tumbling pass on floor, but I didn't do that. Hopefully next meet (Thursday, Jan. 16, at Lyons Township) I'll do that."

On uneven bars, Bergevin tied for 17th (8.2) in just her third meet back, Yager (7.825) also had a season high and Sherlock's 7.725 just missed her season best. The Red Devils' had the ninth highest team score on the event.

Sherlock stayed home during break and felt she was able to improve her consistency and routine details. On floor, she was among the first victims at the invite whose accompanying music could only be sporadically heard over the sound system, if it returned at all. Sherlock fell during her final pass.

Sherlock came back to finish 25th on vault with a team-best 8.6 and

complete both of her giant swings on uneven bars for only the second time in a meet.

"(I learned) just stick through and really focus on your next event and know you can do it, just keep going," Sherlock said.

"I didn't do well on floor, but vault kind of lifted my spirits a little because that's one of my best scores and a different trick (quarter full). It's really, really nice (making my giants). It was the best feeling. It was awesome. While I was up there, I was fighting so hard to go over."

The Red Devils' next big test will be scholastic. During many of Saturday's long gaps between events, most of them were in the bleachers studying for this week's final semester exams Tuesday, Jan. 14, through Thursday. Because of the two missed days of school, review sessions were condensed or bypassed.

"Everybody was doing homework between events," Sesemann said. "It's hard to think just about gymnastics because you have so many other things on your mind."

-- by Bill Stone