

Hinsdale Central junior Cayley Brenk has been making a comeback since the start of the gymnastics season.

On her first event in the annual Red and White intersquad exhibition meet Nov. 16, she struck her head against the vaulting table and sat out the rest of the competition.

“I think I know what I did wrong. I just didn’t get my arms back to the table fast enough,” Brenk said. “That kind of scared me a little bit, but I’ve been working on it.”

On Monday, Brenk took a big step by not falling. She landed a tuck Tsukahara vault for the first time this season in her opening event of the Red Devils’ home dual meet with Lyons Township.

Although the Red Devils lost 144.25 to 139.20 in the West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual, there was plenty to celebrate.

Senior Erin Morgan (36.85) was second in all-around to LT sophomore standout Kelsy Kurfirst (37.55) and on three events in scoring four 9s.

For Brenk, it was her best meet so far. Her fourth-place 35.30 all-around was a season best. Vault turned out to be her highest score with a fourth-place, season-best 9.2.

“(Vault) started off on the right foot so that helped,” Brenk said. “I’ve been falling on them, but I’m just concentrating on not hurting myself right now. But they’re getting better.”

Brenk had two other season-high scores to finish third on balance beam

(9.15) without a fall and sixth on floor exercise (8.8). On the uneven parallel bars (8.15), she was pleased that she didn't drag her feet on the mat coming out of her bail on the lower bar.

"That was the first time I landed a beam routine this season, too. It was still pretty wobbly, but I just landed it so I was happy," Brenk said. "I try to have a good mindset and focus on each event at a time. After I landed that (vault), I guess I had a lot more confidence than I normally do. I don't really let other events bother me usually, but I guess it helped subconsciously."

LT, which had its third meet in six days before beginning final exams Wednesday, owns the highest score in the state so far, a 149.00 Dec. 6 in a home dual victory over York.

Meanwhile, the Hinsdale Central junior varsity I and JV II teams moved to 3-0 in Silver duals by beating LT. Sophomore and JV II gymnast Carly Gallo celebrated her birthday complete with cupcakes made by the mother of senior Hannah Kapelinski.

"I was impressed with our JV II and I levels both winning against LT," Morgan said. "For varsity, it was just knowing that we didn't really let them get too far ahead of us. They were only up by five points and we were expecting it to be a lot worse so we were happy with our score."

Morgan scored 9.35 on floor and 9.2 on the uneven bars and beam. She also had a 9.1 vault as she continues to perfect her handspring front flip.

"On beam, I was a little wobbly, and on vault I still haven't gotten that consistency factor in yet, but it's still good knowing that I can get decent scores not having the best meet I've had," Morgan said.

“I’d say floor probably was best tonight (for me). Bars was good, but I feel like I could have improved my routine a little bit better. I was a little bit loose and sloppy.”

It’s been a crazy week for Morgan. She was surprised to just find out that she was Hinsdale Central’s nominee for the Meatheads Athlete of the Meet with voting conducted on the Athletics2000 website.

On Friday, she found out that she had been accepted to attend the University of Illinois.

“It came out at like 4 o’clock, but I didn’t want to check until I was done with my practice. I came home and checked on the computer,” Morgan said.

The Red Devils tied their season-high team vault score of 35.85 with Brenk, Morgan, Kapelinski (8.8) and junior Emma Christoph (8.75). Other 8s came from freshman Elle Bergevin (8.1) and Kapelinski (8.05) on uneven bars, Kapelinski to start the set on beam (8.2), and senior Annie Zircher (season-high 8.75) and Christoph (8.7) on floor.

Perhaps the biggest highlight is that the illness that has struck the team appears to be subsiding. Brenk missed the Red Devils’ previous meet Dec. 13 because of sickness.

“I’m still recovering a little bit,” Morgan said. “Last week, I’m pretty sure every girl on the team didn’t feel good at some point. It’s better now than in January where it counts (for the postseason) so I’m glad that we’re getting it out of the way right now.”

Hinsdale Central begins its winter break competing at the New Trier

Invitational at noon Saturday and ends it with the Naperville North
Invitational at 1 p.m. Jan. 5.

Brenk is hopeful that she can attempt and land a higher-value pike Tsuk
vault as early as Saturday.

“I’ve watched videos of my vaults every day so I kind of know what I’m doing
wrong. I learn from the bad ones,” Brenk said.