

Hinsdale Central sophomore Lindsey Riker is regaining her gymnastics groove at the perfect time of the season.

The Red Devils need her now more than ever.

For the second meet in a row, the Red Devils competed with the minimum lineup of four all-arounders at the York Invitational Saturday, Jan. 25.

Hinsdale Central took eighth with 127.55 points as every routine by Riker, senior Val Yager, junior Maddie Sesemann and sophomore Jamie Sherlock counted toward the team score.

"It's like practice. We all warm up and practice each event so it's kind of just like we're at Central," Riker said. "We've worked hard in practice, I think, this week more than we usually have."

Yager had the Red Devils' highest individual finish, taking seventh on vault by tying her season high of 8.8.

Sesemann (33.10) and Riker (32.425) were 18th and 20th in all-around, followed by Yager (31.475, 24th) and Sherlock (30.55, 26th).

Sesemann (8.25) and Riker (8.125) were 19th and 23rd on the uneven parallel bars. Riker was 20th on beam (8.275) and Sesemann tied for 24th (8.125). Sherlock tied for 23rd on vault (8.475), and Sesemann was 25th on floor (8.375).

"You've just got to keep in mind that every score counts so you can't mess up," Yager said. "That's what we do in practice so the pressure is the same as it's been."

Teams usually are allowed five entries per event with the top four scores going toward the team total. Most of the season, the Red Devils have been going with five or six on the varsity.

Freshman all-arounder Margot Tye, however, has been out since early

December with a stress fracture. Sophomore Elle Bergevin returned to the lineup from injury Dec. 18 and lately competed on everything but floor, but now she is done for the season.

Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque did not promote any junior varsity I gymnasts Saturday because they also had a meet and won the Lincoln-Way East Invitational. The varsity initially competed with four all-arounders Wednesday, Jan. 22, in their 133.50 to 125.10 dual loss at York while the JV I remained intact and won on its level.

"It was just go with what we've got and then keep (the JV I) together for conference so they can try to win something," Estoque said. "At regionals (Friday, Feb. 7 at Lyons Township), then we'll pull people up. I figured it's better to let them have some success on the JV.

"(Saturday) was an OK meet. When you have four kids up, four count and if one misses, it's trouble."

The Red Devils have been gaining that type of experience and tension lately in practice. They have been focusing on pressure sets, in which gymnasts perform routines in front of everyone else, similar to a meet with a captivated audience.

"We had everyone sit down and cheer for everyone and put kind of more pressure on everyone to do their routines well and it helped motivate everyone," Yager said.

Yager had the highlight of the meet Saturday with a top-10 finish on vault that was .25 from a top-five medal. In the dual at York, Yager inexplicably received a 7.9 for the same vault.

"Last meet, I did horrible on vault for some reason," Yager said. "I stuck my vault, I didn't take any steps out of it and I got like a 7.9 but today I got an 8.8 so I'm happy that I redeemed myself."

Riker has gained motivation from a steady improvement over the past few meets. She went through a rough stretch for the past month starting

with pulling through as an all-rounder despite battling illness Dec. 18.

Riker then was out of town most of winter break and practice time was further diminished when school was closed the first two days back from break because of dangerously cold temperatures. That meant just three days of practice before the Naperville North Invite Jan. 11.

"You could tell I was on vacation when I came back. That was rough," Riker said.

On Jan. 16 at Lyons Township, Riker posted a season-high 8.3 on beam and tied her season high of 8.4 on floor. Riker credited Yager with accelerating her resurgence.

"I was kind of done for a little bit but then Alex put me back on the right path. Then we just started practicing again and I got back into it and it's fine now," Riker said. "(As a team) we critique each other in warmups now and we're kind of just coming together more."

Saturday was another step forward despite two falls. On uneven bars, Riker just missed her season high of 8.4 despite counting a fall, an automatic .5 deduction.

"Bars would have been good except the bars were on the wrong setting so I did a toe catch and I landed on my stomach," Riker said. "I would have gotten an 8.6 (otherwise) so that would have been a good routine."

Riker's team-high beam score was just .025 shy of her season best at LT.

"Beam was fun today and I had a floor routine that was good," Riker said.

"That was a good connection from her back handspring to her jump (on beam)," Yager said.

Yager counted a fall off beam but it was on a walkover that she has just added to her routine. Sherlock opened the beam set by staying on for a 7.55 that tied her season high at LT.

In the dual at York, Sesemann won floor with a season-high 8.85 and was third on uneven bars with a season-high 8.5 that contributed to a season-high 32.15 event score along with Riker (8.3, 4th), Yager (7.85) and Sherlock (7.5).

Sesemann finished second in all-around (33.20) to York's Meghan Davidson (35.85). Sesemann and Sherlock also shared fourth on vault (8.3) and Sesemann tied for fourth on beam (7.55).

"Overall, the girls are doing pretty well. There's just not much (room for error), only having four kids," Estoque said.

The Red Devils conclude the regular season with a home dual meet against Oak Park-River Forest at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 29, followed by the Silver Meet at 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 1, at Hinsdale Central.

The dual with OPRF was rescheduled from Jan. 8 after both teams did not have school the previous two days. With frigid temperatures on the way again, the teams may face the same predicament this week.

"Unless there's no school (Wednesday), we're having that meet, even if we don't have school Monday and Tuesday," Estoque said.

-- by Bill Stone