

In her first gymnastics regional last season, Hinsdale Central senior Hannah Kapelinski struggled.

At the Hinsdale Central Regional Jan. 31, Kapelinski fought, especially to stay on balance beam.

The payoff was her first individual sectional berth as she placed fifth on beam with a season-high 8.55, which also helped the Red Devils win with 138.65 points to automatically advance as a team to the Hinsdale Central Sectional at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 6.

“Last year, I had just an awful regional. I did terrible for myself because I let the pressure get to me,” Kapelinski said. “This year, being senior year, I really wanted to qualify because it was my last chance. I’m happy I did it finally.”

The Red Devils, the No. 2 seed in the sectional, won their fifth straight regional title comfortably over No. 7 Hinsdale South (132.35), followed by No. 10 Waubonsie Valley/Metea Valley co-op (128.70) and No. 15 Riverside-Brookfield (117.325).

Senior Erin Morgan, who won floor exercise (9.5), Kapelinski, senior Annie Zircher and juniors Cayley Brenk and Emma Christoph advanced to sectionals individually either automatically with a top-five regional finish or at-large by being among the 12 remaining highest scores from the four feed-in regionals. Sophomore Maddie Sesemann and freshmen Elle Bergevin and Lindsey Riker also were part of the regional lineup.

“It was pretty good. A couple of misses, but that’s OK. We’re used to that,” Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said. “We really want a 140 (at

sectionals). I think it's the score right now. We got that (season-high 141.575 Dec. 8) for that one meet. If we could get a 140 at sectionals, we'd be very happy, no matter what place we take."

Besides winning floor, Morgan was a close second in all-around (36.125) to Shepard freshman Skylor Hilger (36.15), who competed as an individual entry. Morgan was third on vault (9.225) and fourth on the uneven parallel bars (8.775) and beam (8.6), where she each fell once.

Brenk was fourth in all-around (35.25) behind taking third on vault (9.225) and fourth on uneven bars (8.775) and beam (8.6). She also advanced to sectionals at-large with her 8.65 on floor.

Christoph advanced at-large on all of her events – vault (9.0), floor (8.65) and beam (8.475).

Zircher advanced on vault with an 8.825. On uneven bars, Bergevin (7.875), Riker (7.875) and Sesemann (7.85) just missed the 7.975 at-large. Riker was promoted from the Red Devils' Silver championship junior varsity I team after winning conference titles in all-around and uneven bars on that level.

At sectionals, the Red Devils will compete against No. 1 and state-title contender Lyons Township, which had the state's highest regional score (149.775), No. 4 Oswego co-op (139.925), No. 6 Lincoln-Way co-op (139.175), No. 3 Naperville North (137.925) and No. 5 Neququa Valley (135.20).

Had the Red Devils not won the regional, they would have advanced by scoring at least a 135.20, a total they've exceeded ever since the season opener. Although the Red Devils have passed 140 just once, they also

reached 139 two other times, including a third-place 139.00 in their previous outing at the West Suburban Conference Silver Meet Jan. 26.

After vault and uneven bars Thursday, the Red Devils only led Hinsdale South by .9 (69.275 to 68.375) but they pulled away with another strong team set on beam (34.55) and concluded with a 34.825 on floor.

"Hinsdale South stepped up their game this year so we actually had competition," Kapelinski said. "We were all kind of nervous in the beginning of the meet, but we all just did our part and contributed all that we could."

That especially held true on beam. The Red Devils couldn't replicate their season-best 5-for-5 performance at the Silver Meet (34.825), but they came pretty close, counting just two falls.

"It's especially nice on beam that Hannah Kapelinski stuck her routine," Morgan said. "Just seeing her face kind of filled with joy kind of made me happy because she was so proud of herself there. It was nice seeing that in some people today."

Kapelinski's ultimate beam routine would have been to connect her front walkovers. When she felt herself wobble after the first one, she opted to take a couple of seconds to regroup before proceeding.

"I knew I was just enough off balance where if I went for it right away, then I'd fall. I figured a lost connection is better than (possibly counting) a fall," Kapelinski said. "I didn't really have any major wobbles, anything. I'm really genuinely happy with it. I'm not regretting anything."

All of the Red Devils had highlights on various events. Despite falls on uneven bars and beam, Morgan continues to excel while recuperating from

her ankle injury, and surprisingly on floor and vault.

"I just kind of forget about my ankle as much as I can, especially for floor and vault," Morgan said. "I was going in positive with my floor routine because I know that's my best event. (The ankle) doesn't really bother me too much on floor. It's just on beam where it's the worst.

"I've definitely had better nights, with two falls. I still did well overall and I hope to do better at sectionals. At conference (my ankle) was bothering me much more than it is now. I'm going to just keep taking it easy for as much as I can, but still try to get routines done in practice."

Brenk finished just .5 shy of her 35.30 season high in all-around. After hitting her head on the vaulting table early in the season, Brenk continues to gain confidence.

Brenk again just missed her season-high vault score of 9.3 with her tuck Tsukahara. She still is trying to land a pike Tsuk, the vault that got her to state last year as an individual.

On beam, Brenk suffered a fall on her flip-flop layout flight series, but she still qualified on the event after missing sectionals last year. Last year, Brenk didn't even have a flight series in her routine.

Uneven bars still was the biggest highlight.

"I kept my feet up off the ground on my bail, which I hardly ever do, so that was nice. My coach was so happy," Brenk said.

"Cayley hit bars. That was great. That's the best one we've seen her do all

year," Estoque said.

On vault, Zircher got the team set going well, just missing her season high of 8.9. Christoph had one of her best overall meets of the season. She earned a coveted 9.0 with her tuck Tsuk vault and continued the momentum on floor and beam.

"I love seeing 9s on floor, vault. It's not a rare occurrence, but it's definitely what I work for," Christoph said. "When you see it and it catches you by surprise or you just look down there all of a sudden and there's a 9, it's really, really exciting just to see that."

After coming so close to 9s in the same way the Red Devils have chased 140, Christoph has reached that barrier a few times this season on vault (9.1 season high) and floor (9.05). Last year, she qualified for sectionals on floor, scoring an 8.675 there as well as regionals.

"I love competing floor. That's definitely my favorite, but I think (qualifying for) vault is really satisfying because I'm starting to get the vault down," Christoph said. "Last year I started doing the tuck Tsuk and I've slowly gotten it. Half of the time I would land it. Half the time, I would just fall straight on my face. It's getting a lot easier to do and lot more solid."

Morgan is hoping to return to state for the fourth time after last year's trip was climaxed by an all-state fourth on beam (9.45). Brenk qualified for state last year in all-around and vault after also being part of the Red Devils' fifth-place state lineup in 2011.

"(State is) always in the back of my mind. I try not to think ahead too much I'd say," Morgan said. "I'm just going to worry about sectionals and not even

think about state. I'm just going to worry about what I'm doing, what skill I'm doing."

"Since I've been through the (state) experience already, I really want to go again," Brenk said. "It's not the end of the world if I don't."