

One of Hinsdale Central senior Hannah Kapelinski's gymnastics wishes is coming true.

"This is the first season I've been so consistent for senior year. I couldn't really be happier," Kapelinski said. "I've always had the same basic routines. Now that I'm getting higher scores and I see them going up and up and really just staying where I want them to be, it's a good feeling because all of that work since whenever I started is finally paying off for my last year."

Kapelinski and the Red Devils are trying to be even more consistent as a team for the remainder of the season. They've already achieved a pre-season goal of breaking 140 points, and now they want to stay there.

Training without competition during two weeks of winter break should certainly help. In their final meet before break, the Red Devils scored 138.75 to finish fourth of eight teams at New Trier's Holiday Invitational in Northfield. The Red Devils only were beaten by three teams that were among the eight qualifiers for last year's state meet – Fremd (145.025), New Trier (144.825) and Stevenson (139.475).

Senior Erin Morgan once again had a great performance at the invite. She was second in all-around (37.15) to New Trier senior Kerry Scafidi (38.10) and was second on floor (9.475) to Scafidi (9.5), who had the meet's final performance at the meet. Morgan also was fifth on balance beam (9.1), sixth on the uneven parallel bars (9.225) and ninth on vault (9.35).

Juniors Cayley Brenk, the Red Devils' other all-arounder (12th, 34.575) and Emma Christoph had top-15 finishes, and senior Annie Zircher had two top-20 finishes. In all, the Red Devils used a season-high 10 gymnasts at the invite with regulars Kapelinski, sophomore Maddie Sesemann and freshman

Elle Bergevin also seeing action and junior Alex Yager and freshmen Linsley Riker and Jamie Sherlock making their varsity debuts.

The Red Devils scored a season-high 141.575 Dec. 8 to win their invitational and 136.05 and 139.20 in two duals prior to New Trier. The invite used the average score of two judges per event, many of them state-level judges.

“We did OK, not anything spectacular, but OK,” Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said. “I think (we’ll use winter break) just to get a few more things. Hopefully, we can be 140 and above every meet, instead of a 139. A 139 is still good, but we want to be over 140.”

The invite once again brought the best out of Morgan. She showed herself among the state’s elite after scoring a career-high 37.70 for second place in all-around there in 2011, a total she equaled Dec. 8.

“It was good to know that against these teams that we usually don’t compete with I can still do pretty well,” Morgan said.

“I think it’s because we know we’re not going to win because there’s so many good teams here. I know it’s bad to say, but we know it’s true. It just lets us compete kind of for ourselves and what we want to get. It kind of gives us more motivation because we don’t really have the pressure on ourselves. It’s kind of like a win-win situation, but it gets us more confident for the rest of the season.”

Last year, Morgan finished second to Carmel senior Lauren Feely (38.375), the two-time defending state beam champion who was out of town for this invite to visit family in England. Feely won last year’s invite titles on vault, beam and floor.

This time, Carmel senior and defending state vault champion Sarah Cohen-Smith won that event (9.825), Scafidi also won uneven bars (career-high 9.7) and Stevenson sophomore Alyssa Weisberg captured beam (9.45). Minus Feely, the three-time defending invite champion Corsairs finished fifth (138.15).

Morgan and Scafidi were the only gymnasts to finish among the top six on all four events.

“I was a little wobbly on beam. I did very well on bars. I was proud of my bars and floor was really good,” Morgan said.

The Red Devils return their entire lineup from last season, when they never scored higher than 139.95. They’re doing better so far this season because of more experience, consistency and depth.

A healthier Brenk also has helped. She was 14th on vault (9.225), 16th on beam (8.25), tied for 16th on floor (8.7) and 18th on uneven bars (8.4).

Christoph tied for 13th on floor (8.75) and was 18th on vault (8.975), Zircher was 17th on beam (8.175) and 18th on floor (8.65) and Bergevin tied for 21st on uneven bars (8.075).

With the combined scores from Morgan, Brenk, Christoph and Kapelinski, the Red Devils posted a season-high 36.175 on vault to share the invite’s third-highest team score on the event. Morgan and Brenk posted season-high scores. Hinsdale Central also was third on floor with a 35.575.

“(Vault) should be our strongest event, but for some reason (it’s not). It’s

getting there,” Estoque said.

Kapelinski has been an unsung hero, usually contributing counting team scores in the 8s on her three events – vault, uneven bars and beam. At New Trier, she contributed an 8.625 vault, 8.05 on uneven bars and 7.725 on beam with a fall.

“She’s been so consistent,” Estoque said. “She and Annie have really improved, just in being that really consistent 8.5ish (score). Hopefully we can get 8.7s by the end.”

Kapelinski has scored as high as 8.9 on vault and 8.5 on uneven bars and beam. Zircher, who has competed as an all-rounder, has season highs of an 8.9 vault, 8.85 on beam, 8.75 on floor and 7.85 on uneven bars.

“Hard work and confidence (are helping me), just knowing that I’ve done this before,” Kapelinski said. “It’s just the same old routines. I can do it. And we have a solid team that I know that I’m actually contributing to and it’s a good feeling.”

Although their scores did not count toward the team total, Sherlock (8.5 on vault), Riker (8.125 on floor) and Yager (7.6 bars) contributed solid performances. Estoque thought that their regularly working out with the varsity might have made their debuts easier.

“They all three hit (their routines). I didn’t know if they’d be real nervous or not, but they looked good,” Estoque said.

The Red Devils emerge from winter break with another big invite at Naperville North at 1 p.m. Jan. 5. The 12-team field includes West Suburban

Conference Silver Division rival Glenbard West (season-high 144.80) and three other teams that have broken 140 – Prospect (142.125), Palatine (141.95) and Barrington (141.75).

“I think as a team we’re trying to add in more skills (over break) so we can raise our score, get to our goal score,” Kapelinski said. “Personally, I know I want to upgrade all of my skills just a bump higher so I can get even higher scores than I am right now.”