

Even though her ankle still bothers her, Hinsdale Central senior Erin Morgan persevered through all four events at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet Saturday at Glenbard West, particularly balance beam.

"It hurts most on beam. I don't know why," Morgan said. "It hurts especially on my jump series and back tuck. After my routine, at that point, my ankle's throbbing, but I just had to push through it."

Morgan had more than enough inspiration to stay on the beam and perform well. It was her final conference meet, and the first four Red Devils had no falls, something that's never happened this season.

"Oh I knew," Morgan said with a big smile. "This is the first time we went 5 for 5 with no falls. I'm glad we got it here at conference so we can go into regionals and sectionals being pretty confident."

The finish on beam concluded a strong day for the Red Devils, who finished third with 139.00 points. State-title contender Lyons Township (148.25 points) and state-meet contender Glenbard West (145.40) took first and second while the Red Devils finished just ahead of fourth-place York (138.65) after barely losing their dual meet 138.50 to 138.25 Jan. 9 in Elmhurst. As a result, the Red Devils and Dukes tied for third in the final overall Silver standings.

Injured or not, Morgan remained among the best and most consistent gymnasts in one of the state's best gymnastics conferences. Morgan finished third in all-around (36.925) by tying for second on floor exercise (season-high 9.55), third on the uneven parallel bars (9.15), tying for third on vault (season-high 9.4) and taking 10th on beam (8.825).

Juniors Cayley Brenk and Emma Christoph also had top-10 finishes, and seniors Annie Zircher and Hannah Kapelinski placed among the top 15.

"Hopefully next week we'll be even better," Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said. "The kids had a few bobbles there, but hey, 5 for 5 (on beam)."

I'll always take 5 for 5. Beam hasn't been very good lately so going 5 for 5 was a great improvement and I think it really gave them a boost."

Morgan received a lift from her return to all-around heading into the postseason. The Red Devils should win the Hinsdale Central Regional at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 31, to automatically advance to the Hinsdale Central Sectional at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 6. The Red Devils are the No. 2 sectional seed behind LT.

Morgan first injured her ankle practicing beam during winter break. After pain intensified following her all-around performance on Senior Night Jan. 17, Morgan only competed on uneven bars at the York Invite Jan. 19, the Red Devils' final regular-season meet.

The performance is especially impressive considering that Morgan only performed one vault and floor routine during the past week because of the injury.

"It's hurting her but you wouldn't know it so much," Estoque said. "Beam is the hardest on her."

Brenk especially can feel Morgan's pain. Brenk joined Morgan at state as an individual qualifier in 2012 after Brenk overcame injuries to both ankles that resulted in her only competing on uneven bars at the Silver Meet.

"(Estoque) kind of made (that decision). I agreed with her, but she was the one who suggested it," Brenk said. "I'm glad I did that. I think (Morgan will) be fine, though. She's been taking care of herself pretty well."

One of Brenk's decisions turned out to be a good one. She requested to be the Red Devils' first performer on beam for the first time.

"I felt like that might help me not to watch all of my teammates go before, and it did, I guess," Brenk said.

Brenk ended up setting the tone for a great team effort that secured third place. Besides Brenk and Morgan, Christoph and Kapelinski tied for 14th (8.475) and Zircher was 16th (8.45).

The Red Devils' 34.825 team score was .85 shy of their season-high 35.65 Dec. 8 that helped them score a season-high 141.575 in winning the Red Devil Invitational. It was the third highest team event score behind LT and Glenbard West and .65 higher than York.

"It felt so good. We try to get five in a row and we actually did so we were so happy," Brenk said. "That would be great if we could do it again, especially with these meets coming up."

The Red Devils also had the third-best team scores on vault (35.50) and floor (34.80). They were fourth on uneven bars (33.875), where Morgan was followed by Brenk (8.575, tied for 12th), sophomore Maddie Sesemann (8.15, 17th) and freshman Elle Bergevin (8.0, 20th).

Morgan's less practiced events looked like business as usual. By tying her season best of 9.55 on floor from the Nov. 21 season opener, Morgan shared second on with LT's Katie Carling with Christoph 10th (8.95), Sesemann 17th (8.3) and Zircher tying for 20th (8.0).

Besides Morgan, all five Red Devils were among the top 15 on vault. Christoph tied for ninth (8.8), Zircher was 11th (8.7), Kapelinski was 14th (8.8) and Brenk tied for 15th (8.55).

Estoque said Morgan was determined to compete as an all-rounder, although Estoque wouldn't allow her to tumble or vault Friday.

"Erin really wanted to compete today," Estoque said. "I try to keep practice as low (key) as I could for her, even though she'd kind of get mad at me."

While Morgan has been training as conservatively as possible, the ankle

remains heavily taped but also somewhat of a mystery. The pain has been traveling up her ankle into her Achilles muscle.

Morgan says she plans to “take it easy” for regionals. After the way she performed Saturday, who knows what she still will accomplish.

”I’m not 100 percent. I’m thinking about regionals and sectionals so I knew this wasn’t the most important of all the meets. I just tried to do my best out there,” Morgan said.

”It’s definitely the most frustrating (injury I’ve had) because it’s at the end of the season. I want to be able to go five routines a day on each event so I can have that confidence. (It’s difficult) probably knowing I can’t do that this year, but I’ll just have to trust myself with my routines.”