

In August, Hannah Kapelinski briefly considered not returning for her senior year of girls gymnastics for Hinsdale Central.

Then she thought about her teammates, including senior Annie Zircher. They began gymnastics together when they were 4 in a tots program at Premier Gymnastics Academy.

"I was like, 'Do I really want to do this?' Is it worth the time commitment? I can have a job that I can make money for (college)," Kapelinski said.

"I'm like, 'I'm so close to all of these girls. I've known them so well.' When I look back at high school, I remember gymnastics season being one of my favorite things. Sure, it's a time commitment, but it's a good one."

Kapelinski, Zircher, Erin Morgan and Jenna Bomba were honored on the Red Devils' Senior Night Thursday, Jan. 17 before their home dual meet with Glenbard West. The Hilltoppers won 142.40 to 138.05.

All three varsity seniors contributed while Bomba competed for the junior varsity II team. The varsity the JV I teams will compete together one more time concurrently at the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet at 11 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 26, at Glenbard West.

"I absolutely love my friends on the team, and I just think it's a cool sport. It's something to do, and it also looks good for college (applications)," Zircher said. "I've been doing (gymnastics) since I was like 4 years old so it's kind of a really long time. I don't want to quit just quite. I want to keep going."

Morgan won all-around (36.25) and floor (9.45), tied for second on vault with junior Cayley Brenk (9.3) and was fourth on the uneven parallel bars (8.85) and fifth on balance beam (8.65).

Brenk and junior Emma Christoph tied for third on beam (8.7). Brenk also was fourth in all-around (35.30) and fifth on uneven bars (8.8). Christoph tied for fourth on floor (8.8) and tied for fifth on vault (9.1).

The Silver dual, usually on Wednesday, was moved back a day to accommodate final semester exams, which ended that morning.

"I know the girls' heads were exploding from exams and all of that kind of stuff, but I think overall the meet was really good, except for beam. We had lots of falls," Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said.

Morgan is the last of three Hinsdale Central all-state gymnasts from her family, following sister Colleen and brother Dan. Morgan reinjured her ankle in the dual and only competed on the uneven bars at the York Invitational Saturday, Jan. 19. Morgan's 9.3 earned second to Glenbard West sophomore Mackenzie O'Keefe (9.45).

At the invite, Hinsdale Central (135.575 points) finished fourth of 11 teams behind Glenbard West (144.075), Lake Park (137.775) and York (137.125). How much Morgan will compete at the Silver Meet remains to be seen.

Kapelinski felt the pain of taking some time off from the sport this summer. She had an internship with her uncle's web and graphic design company in a field she hopes to pursue and she had to travel to Minneapolis.

"I worked out because I have a Lifetime membership, but at the same time, it's not gymnastics," Kapelinski said. "I went back to the gym and I was so sore. It's not the same."

Hinsdale Central sophomore Maddie Sesemann said the team will not be the same next season after the seniors graduate.

"I think the seniors have a big impact, just with the attitude from some

of them,” Sesemann said. “I’ve gotten to know Hannah and Annie really well, and the same with Erin. I’m going to miss them but I know they kind of helped us when we became seniors what to do, what not to do and how to do stuff.”

The seniors had to assume leadership roles quickly. Morgan has been a varsity gymnast from the start, arriving the season after Colleen graduated. Kapelinski and Zircher worked their way up through the JV and joined the varsity last season, when the team had no seniors on varsity and just one in the entire program.

They’ve been a big reason why the Red Devils already have broken the 140-point barrier, a goal they barely missed in 2012.

“They all work hard. They’re a good group,” Estoque said. “Erin is steady as always. Annie and Hannah have really stepped it up this year. I was worried (their scores) might not count, but every meet they’ve counted and they’re really 8.5 gymnasts.

“They are good leaders. They step up. They kind of show others what to do. I’m really seeing Hannah come out, and Annie, a little bit more as a leader (this season).”

Kapelinski and Zircher usually compete multiple events, and Zircher occasionally has worked all-around.

At the York Invite, Kapelinski competed as an all-arounder for the first time by adding floor in place of Morgan, scoring a 32.375. Kapelinski tied for 18th on vault (8.7).

“I really haven’t competed floor since freshman year,” Kapelinski said. “Of course, I didn’t score as high as (Morgan, scoring 7.675), but I took one for the team and I stuck my routine.”

“I’m big on varsity that you work all-around (in practice),” Estoque

said. "You may not compete all-around but you work it because you never know. We've seen over the years that it does make a difference."

At the York Invite, Brenk and Christoph continued their success at vault. On vault, Brenk tied for seventh (9.225) and Christoph was 10th (9.075). Brenk also tied for seventh on uneven bars (8.9) en route to 10th in all-around (34.30).

Christoph was a team-best 13th on floor (8.625) with Brenk tying for 16th (8.475) and Sesemann 21st (8.275). Zircher was a team-best 15th on beam (8.3) with Christoph 18th (8.1). Freshman Elle Bergevin tied for 19th on uneven bars (8.3), and Zircher tied for 20th on vault (8.6).

Sesemann also competed as an all-arounder for the first time in a month (32.275). She's recently been competing solely on uneven bars and floor.

"I like doing all-around. It was more tiring, because I kind of got used to one or two events (at meets), but I liked it a lot," Sesemann said. "It made me feel like I was a big part of the team and I helped out."

Sesemann has shown her determination this season in coming back from surgery on both hips April 19 (right side) and June 7 for torn labrums. She returned to gymnastics training in late July.

Sesemann doctor believes that she actually suffered the injuries when she was 8 or 9 and had just withstood the consequences, visiting doctors and undergoing physical therapy treatments through the years. Sesemann got to the core of the problem after the pain became too much for her to bear.

"I finally went to the doctor where for me, it just hurt in class. Normally at practice it hurt kind of, but that was OK. But (not) every day," Sesemann said. "My right side was worse and it still bugs me,

but you've got to push through."

The overall Silver title is a 50-50 combination of dual meet and Silver Meet standings. Hinsdale Central finished in fourth place in varsity duals at 2-3, losing to Lyons Township, Glenbard West and York and beating Oak Park-River Forest and Downers Grove North.

The varsity seniors should have two more home meets, first as the host school for regionals at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 31. The Red Devils should advance to the Hinsdale Central Sectional, where they are the No. 2 seed to Lyons Township.

"It's kind of bittersweet because we've known each other for so long," Kapelinski said. "I guess I'm closer to them because we're going through the same stuff with college. It's nice to talk to other people than my usual group of friends. We're very similar in a lot of ways, especially because of gymnastics."