

Senior Erin Morgan nearly didn't come out for the Hinsdale Central girls gymnastics team as a freshman.

"I was going through a stage (in club) where I was very afraid of backwards skills and it made me stressed out," Morgan said. "I had a lot of thoughts about (quitting), but I always found myself going back to it."

Morgan stuck with the sport, became a four-year varsity gymnast for the Red Devils and the seventh individual all-stater in program history.

Morgan completed her gymnastics career with her fourth trip to the state meet Friday, Feb. 15 at Palatine High School as an individual state qualifier in all-around and all four events.

Morgan tied for 21st in all-around (36.05) and did not advance to the event finals the following night as she had in 2012 by being among the top 10 performers for state qualifiers in the preliminaries.

Morgan came closest on floor exercise, her final event, where she was 13th (9.325), just .05 from the finals cut. Morgan also tied for 20th on vault (9.45), tied for 28th on beam (8.4) and was 29th on the uneven parallel bars (8.925).

Junior Cayley Brenk, making her third state trip, tied for 27th on vault (9.325).

"It definitely wasn't my best meet of the season. But everything was pretty solid for me," Morgan said.

"I was hoping I could make (finals) on floor exercise or vault, but I knew I had a better chance on floor so it kind of gave me an advantage (performing

later) over the first people who went. I was definitely hoping to have a good routine to end my state meet. I was hoping, I was confident I would do well. It was a solid routine for me.”

Morgan has been a model of consistency especially the past two seasons where she emerged as a team leader after helping the Red Devils qualify for state as a team her freshman and sophomore seasons. Even this season, she continued competing -- and had some of her best performances -- despite suffering an ankle injury during winter break and aggravating it a week before the West Suburban Conference Silver Division Meet.

“She’s had four years (for us) and she’s worked hard all of those four years. She’s done a wonderful job,” Hinsdale Central coach Kim Estoque said. “She’s done very well. I’m very proud of her. She really did hit all four routines. She just had little, tiny mistakes.”

In her final home meet at the Hinsdale Central Sectional Feb. 6, Morgan was outstanding with a 37.625 all-around total just shy of her 37.70 all-time best that included first place on beam (9.425) and a share of first on vault (season-high 9.725), her final event that night.

At state, Morgan and Brenk were part of the first rotation on vault. Morgan then competed on uneven bars, beam and floor. As the 11th of competitors on floor, including team and all-around competitors, Morgan probably was affected by having her practice time limited the past few weeks trying to protect her ankle.

“I stumbled a little bit on my last pass, which is probably why I didn’t make finals,” Morgan said. “I just wore myself down through the routine, and I didn’t have enough energy on my last pass.”

Last year, Morgan reached the beam finals last year and earned a top-five all-state medal by taking fourth (9.475) after her 9.275 in preliminaries was the ninth-highest qualifying score. However, Morgan also has said that beam has been the event that has given her the most trouble since her ankle injury.

“I didn’t fall (off beam), but I had a couple of bobbles here and there. Beam was where I kind of lost control a little bit,” Morgan said.

It was a somewhat bittersweet case of déjà vu. Morgan’s older sister, Colleen, had been an all-state second on the uneven bars also as a junior at the 2008 state meet. As a senior, Colleen fell on her dismount at sectionals and didn’t qualify for state on the event.

“It was a fun experience making finals and making that as a junior was fun because I didn’t even expect it. It was cool,” Erin Morgan said. “It just kind of goes to show you that you’re not really given anything in gymnastics. You have to work towards it.”

Morgan did just that to continue and prosper as a gymnast. With the help of Premier Gymnastics coach Ben Hardy as a club gymnast during her middle-school days, Morgan learned to compensate for her fear of backwards skills by becoming the best gymnast she could be at skills with which she felt comfortable.

The only backwards skill she performed regularly for the Red Devils this season was her standing back flip on beam.

“I kind of worked around it (at Premier). I started doing more forward skills, incorporating those into my routines and it worked for me,” Morgan said. “I did most skills that most gymnasts didn’t do and it gave me an advantage.”

Now gymnastics is about moving forward for Morgan and her family. She is the last of three outstanding gymnasts in her family who all earned all-state honors with the Red Devils. Her oldest sibling Dan, a 2006 graduate, was a two-time all-stater on pommel horse for the boys team.

Like her siblings, Erin plans to attend the University of Illinois, where she will enter the office of business and major in accounting.

“It’s a little sad, but I think everyone’s able to move on to bigger and better things,” Erin said. “Even though it wasn’t my best meet, it was a fun meet to end of because it’s such a fun experience to be there. All of the state meets are memorable, especially the ones with the team. It was definitely fun to compete (there) one last time. I was very worried during the middle of the season, but I got over it.”

Brenk already is excited for next season. After a season of re-learning to land her pike Yurchenko, Brenk landed both of her attempts at state, the first time she did that all season.

“I was really proud because it was my second highest score this season,” Brenk said. “Even though it’s sometimes nice to (compete at the) end because the scores tend to be higher, it didn’t really matter what score I got. It just mattered to me how well I did the vault.”

With vault her last chance at sectionals to reach state, Brenk landed her first attempt for a season-high 9.5 that beat the 9.475 at-large state cut.

What are her goals for 2014? For vault, all of the nine gymnasts who competed in the event finals performed at least one layout Yurchenko.

“It makes me want to get a layout because I see all of these girls who do them so well and I just want to be like them, too,” Brenk said. “I felt the same thing as I felt at sectionals. I have to do this because it’s my thing. I feel like it was a great end to the season.”