

Senior Brenna Budaitis is contributing full-time on varsity for the Hinsdale South girls gymnastics team after occasional opportunities as a freshman and sophomore.

What's making the experience even better is she's sharing it with four other seniors and longtime friends Shur Batmunkh, McKinsey Hultmark, Melanie Lofgren and Jorie Smith.

"We've all known each other since like forever," Budaitis said. "I've known Jorie and Melanie since kindergarten-ish and then Shur moved here in fifth grade. I've known McKinsey since like third grade. We were at (Mark DeLay School) but my sister was friends with (Hultmark's) sister. We combined at (Eisenhower) junior high."

Budaitis and the Hornets continued their progress at the Hinsdale Central's Red Devil Invitational Saturday, Dec. 14, and at home against Addison Trail Thursday, Dec. 19.

The Hornets had a season-high total despite losing to Addison Trail 121.55 to 103.60. They were eighth at the Red Devil Invite with 98.40 points.

"We did all right," Budaitis said. "It was decent (for me). It was pretty good."

Hinsdale South easily outdistanced its previous season-high score of 100.65 from Dec. 7 and 10. Budaitis had three season-high scores and Smith, Batmunkh, Hultmark and sophomore Eva Bucke also had at least one.

Budaitis also beat or equaled her previous season highs at the Red Devil Invite. In that meet, she felt the highlight was uneven parallel bars, where she equaled her then season high of 4.4.

"Eva (Bucke) and I got a new dismount (flyaway). We tried that for the first time and we got it," Budaitis said. "And then we all made our long hangovers, which was rare, so it was nice."

Budaitis and the Hornets continued the momentum Thursday.

Budaitis (27.65) and Smith (25.75) each had season-high totals for fourth and fifth in all-around with Budaitis achieving the highest all-around total by any Hinsdale South gymnast this season. The Hornets had season-high event totals on uneven bars (20.10), an improvement by 3.0 points, and balance beam (25.55).

Smith was second on vault (8.0) and fifth on floor with a team-best 7.55. Budaitis improved her uneven bars score to 5.8 for fourth and Smith (5.1) and Bucke (5.0) also had season-high totals.

On beam, Batmunkh had a season-high 7.8 to tie for third and Budaitis added a 7.75, a season-high by one point. Bucke (7.0) and Hultmark (6.4) had season-high scores on floor.

Budaitis passed the 27.00 all-around mark after a then season-best 26.85 at the Red Devil Invite. Smith (25.20) also had a season-best in all-around by .05. Smith tied for 19th on vault (8.5). Budaitis (8.4, tied for 23rd) and Hultmark (7.5) had season highs and Bucke (7.4) tied hers.

Other team-high scores came from Budaitis on floor (7.85, tied for 23rd and beam (6.3) and Bucke on uneven bars (4.5).

Budaitis and the Hornets soon will have an uninterrupted chance to improve skills and routines during winter break. After the Hornets compete at the Homewood-Flossmoor Invite Saturday, Dec. 21, their next meet isn't until Jan. 9 at home against Leyden.

"I'll just keep going, probably (try to add) something on beam," Budaitis said. "(My goal is) probably just improve on my bars. I'll probably work on my dismount more just so I'm more comfortable with it."

Camaraderie continues to be the biggest benefit of this season. As a junior, Budaitis was among the top competitors for the junior varsity I team, which along with the varsity won outright overall West Suburban Conference Gold Division titles.

**"It's different (this season), I guess, because last year on JV, we were so used to winning and this year we're used to losing," Budaitis said. "It's not bad, but just different."**

**-- by Bill Stone**