

Throughout the girls gymnastics season, Hinsdale South senior Maddie Nowak never was completely satisfied with her performances at major meets.

After she came away with her first sectional titles in all-around (37.65), vault (career-high 9.7) and the uneven parallel bars (9.475) at the Hinsdale Central Sectional Wednesday, Feb. 10, there were plenty of reasons to smile and even joke around a bit.

"I said, 'Who gets third at conference (in all-around), second at regionals and first in sectionals?' It's a good place to be," Nowak said.

"When you get to these big meets sometimes you want to hold back. Tonight I was just all about going all out and it paid off."

The state meet is Friday and Saturday, Feb. 19-20, at Palatine High School.

In 2015, Nowak rose to the occasion with the most successful state meet in program history – three top-five, all-state medals. She gained momentum and confidence to do that again by qualifying for state automatically in all five events with top-five sectional finishes.

Besides her sectional titles, Nowak was second on floor exercise (9.425) and third on balance beam (9.05).

"She did wonderful. She especially wanted to hit that beam routine, every event really, and she did. I think she was ecstatic about the meet," Hinsdale South coach Mia Tritch said.

"More than qualifying for state, she wanted to hit all of her events and be a sectional champion for the first time ever. Every single meet she has a goal and one of her goals probably would to be the sectional champion because she could."

The Hornets also completed a satisfying season as a team. They qualified for sectionals and finished fourth out of the six teams with 136.70 points. Their Sandburg Regional title Feb. 1 with a 138.425, just shy of their season-high 138.80 Jan. 27, marked only the second regional title in program history and first since 1989.

Senior Erica Meyer and sophomores Erin Haney, Kaitlin Hall and Kayla O'Donnell also were individual sectional qualifiers. Also competing for the team were sophomore Lizzie Lowery and freshman Patricia Iwaniec. Freshman Samantha Smith competed on floor at regionals but was injured for sectionals.

"The girls were incredibly happy, finishing fourth. That's definitely a great way to end the season," Tritch said. "The girls were so happy after regionals. I don't really think they thought they could be regional champs and then if I would have told the girls we're shooting for 138 at the beginning of the season, I don't think they honestly thought they would do that, considering we started at 129."

At state last year, Nowak tied for fourth on vault (9.7), was fifth on uneven bars (9.525) and tied for fifth in all-around (37.20).

Before then, no Hornet had ever earned more than two career all-state medals, much less in one meet. As a freshman, Nowak qualified for state in everything but beam with her highest finish a 14th-place tie on vault (9.5). She focused on club gymnastics as a sophomore and did not compete for the Hornets.

In the state meet format, the all-around is determined during Friday's event preliminaries. Qualifiers among the top 10 preliminary scores advance to the event finals. The events are held one at a time in the order of vault, uneven bars, beam and floor with only Saturday's

scores accounting for the final standings.

At state last year, Nowak finished behind four graduated seniors in all-around and three on uneven bars. Among all performances at this year's sectionals, Nowak ranked among the top six in all-around, vault and uneven bars and top eight on floor.

"Just going out like (sectionals), just hitting 4 for 4 (is my goal)," Nowak said. "At the end of the day, the scores don't matter to me. The medals don't matter to me. I just want to end with good routines that put a smile on my face and I'm happy with.

"Sometimes it feels like there's a little extra pressure on me (from 2015) but I know if I can just keep pushing myself to the limit in practice that it'll pay off the same way it did (at sectionals)."

The Hornets' first event at sectionals was vault. Nowak matched her career-best score for the first time since state with her layout Yurchenko, but she didn't find out until much later. She initially ignored her scores in an attempt to maintain focus.

"Everybody went, 'Oh my gosh, Maddie. Did you see your (9.7) score?' I was like, 'I didn't. I don't want to see it.' " Nowak said. "They're like, 'OK. It was actually a bad score, mediocre, just joking around."

She won vault by .225 over Downers Grove South junior Kayla Carlson (9.475), uneven bars by .05 over Downers South freshman Abby Carlson (9.425) and all-around by .825 over Sandburg/Stagg co-op sophomore and friend Maddy Roe (36.825).

Nowak often writes notes to herself and checks them during meets to help focus on her goals. This time, she wrote her notes on the white board in the Hornets' training gym and arrived empty handed.

"I didn't want to overthink it. I knew at this point of the season my body knows what to do," Nowak said. "For some reason, the days before a meet, I get really, really nervous, but then when the day comes, I'm more calm."

Among the Hornets' other individual sectional qualifiers, Haney was 13th on floor (8.95), 15th in all-around (34.225) and 18th on vault (9.0), Meyer tied for 14th on floor (8.925) and was 18th on beam (8.025), Haney and Meyer shared 22nd on uneven bars (8.25), Hall tied for 19th on beam (7.975) and was 31st in all-around (31.625) and O'Donnell was 30th on beam (7.275). Meyer also qualified in all-around but did not compete on beam with Lowery taking her place. In her final high school routine, Meyer climaxed with a career-high score on floor – a .225 improvement from her then career-high 8.7 for fifth at regionals.

"One of the best routines I've ever seen her perform," Tritch said. "To end her career with that routine was just wonderful."