

Hinsdale South junior Maddie Nowak waited longer than expected to hear her all-around score during the awards for the Homewood-Flossmoor Invitational Saturday, Dec. 20.

"They started off in the 33s and I was like, 'I don't think I got a 33, maybe 35 of 36,' " Nowak said. "Then second place was like 36 and I was like, 'All right, it's me.' And then it wasn't."

Nowak was surprised but she had just won the all-around title with a 36.05. The Hornets were fourth in the nine-team field with 129.60 points.

Nowak won all-around without winning an individual event and in the presence of state team title favorite Prairie Ridge co-op, which easily won with 148.00 points.

As it turned out, none of Prairie Ridge's gymnasts competed as all-arounders. Nowak pulled out the all-around title by .30 over Glenbard North senior Katie Murphy (36.05), a first-year high school gymnast.

"I was able to slide in there," Nowak said. "(Winning all-around) was exciting, something I didn't expect just because I saw the Prairie Ridge girls really solid in a bunch of events."

For the second straight meet, Hinsdale South coach Mia Tritch thought her team was in a meet with tight judging. While there may have been some fatigue from competing just two days earlier in their 130.15 to 127.80 dual victory at Addison Trail, Tritch felt the Hornets performed better in some areas.

"Actually, it was maybe our best floor that they've done, but you wouldn't know by the scores. Vault was actually really good, too. They were just super tight on scores," Tritch said.

"They definitely were tired (from Thursday). Their warmups were a little shaky, but they competed great. It was a good meet for us. We were actually pretty happy, but all of the judging was very, very tight."

Nowak was coming off winning the all-around title at Hinsdale Central's Red Devil Invite with a 36.85 Dec. 13. Even with the tight scoring Saturday, Nowak took

second on two events with season highs. Nowak opened with a 9.4 on floor exercise to finish second to Murphy (9.65).

"I was really happy about floor. I thought my landings were the cleanest they've ever been," Nowak said.

Nowak then finished on a strong note with a 9.5 on uneven parallel bars to Prairie Ridge senior Rachael Underwood (9.75), last year's state champion on vault. The long wait before the final rotation put Nowak in a mood to be more aggressive than usual.

"I just told (assistant coach Jody Raymond), seeing all of the Prairie Ridge girls, I was like, 'I'm just going to go all out for my last event,' try to hit all of the handstands, where sometimes I'm a little conservative just so I hit for my team," Nowak said. "I did and it was a good score. I don't think it was my best, but it was a good score."

Nowak also tied for seventh on balance beam (8.8) and tied for 12<sup>th</sup> on vault (8.65). She fell on her layout, step out combination on beam and did two tuck Yurchenko vaults rather than attempt the higher-value layout Yurchenko on her second vault.

Freshman Kaitlin Hall (31.35), junior Erica Meyer (31.20) and senior Lauren Haney (30.70) were 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> in all-around.

"I can't worry about scores, honestly, especially in a meet where as a team it's not essential for us to place. It's not like a conference meet," Nowak said. "As (Raymond) pointed out, it was almost flip flopped. What we did well on at Addison Trail was not as well as the invite. What we didn't do well on, we did well at the invite."

That especially held true on floor, where two of the Hornets' four all-arounders suffered falls at Addison Trail and had one pass go out of bounds.

Besides Nowak, Hall tied for 14<sup>th</sup> (8.3) Saturday and Meyer (8.0) was 19<sup>th</sup>.

"Floor was great. Maddie's routine was absolutely amazing. Lauren's was great

and Kaitlin's. Floor was so much better than Thursday," Tritch said.

Hall also tied for 13th on beam (8.2), just .2 shy of her season high, to bounce back impressively from a 7.1 at Addison Trail. Haney tied for 14th on uneven bars (7.85), and Meyer had the team's second-highest vault score (8.15, 21st).

Even with three falls on beam, the Hornets did place ahead of Sandburg/Stagg co-op (5th, 127.15), which won Hinsdale Central's Red Devil Invite Dec. 13. They now don't compete again until Jan. 8 at Leyden.

-- by Bill Stone