

The Hinsdale South girls gymnastics team had looked at the Knights Invitational at Lincoln-Way East Saturday, Jan. 5 as a chance to make a breakthrough.

The Hornets ended up having to try their best to avoid a breakdown.

Although it was disappointing to finish with 130.65 points in eighth place, the Hornets were not at full strength and may have gained some insight and motivation that should help them for the important meets to come.

“As a whole, we weren’t our best that day,” freshman Maddie Nowak said. “We were missing one girl (Taylor Daley). I feel like we had a negative attitude to start the meet, and that wasn’t good. I think we all learned something from that meet that we all have to be more positive in general and move on from each event.”

The invite was the last chance for the Hornets to improve their sectional seed score before it was submitted to the IHSA Wednesday, Jan. 9. When Hinsdale South coach Jennifer Fichter found out the night before Daley wasn’t competing, that hope pretty much subsided.

“We usually all practice together. It was kind of a shock that (Daley) wasn’t there,” sophomore Lauren Haney said. “It didn’t really affect us that much. (But) we all just got really down on ourselves.”

“I think we learned that we just need to go with what we have and to move on, do our best no matter what we get thrown into,” junior Jessica Hawken said.

While Fremd (146.425), Geneva (141.35) and Glenbard North (139.95)

dominated the top three spots as expected, the next four teams all finished at least three points ahead of the Hornets after they had beaten them at invites earlier in the season.

“It’s just hard. It’s disappointing,” Fichter said. “It was hard because we’ve beat Oswego (136.95), Lincoln-Way (135.25), Neuqua Valley (134.05) and Downers South (133.40). There’s no reason why we should be regressing at this point of the season. That’s what is so frustrating.”

Nowak was fourth on vault (9.35), sixth on floor exercise (9.1) and took 10th in all-around (34.55) despite counting four falls.

Hawken had a season-high all-around total (33.95, 14th place), and Haney (32.20, 21st) missed her season best by just .05. Freshman Erica Meyer, originally scheduled to compete only on uneven bars, added vault and floor. Junior Jorie Smith competed on vault and floor, and junior Shur Batmunkh competed on beam.

Despite their first event being beam, the Hornets had a decent set with a 32.45 that’s only .7 from their season high. They later scored 34.90 on vault, a season best by .15 that was the fourth-highest team score on the event.

On beam, Hawken was 19th (8.6) and Haney tied for 22nd (8.45), both with season highs.

“Lauren and Jessica stuck beam. That was the highlight of the day,” Fichter said.

Hawken had her best beam score since the season-opening Hornet Invitational. This was Haney’s first 8 on beam all season.

“I stuck my flight series (flip flop, flip flop), which usually doesn’t happen, so I was really glad about that,” Haney said. “And then the rest of it was really sloppy because I was just doing anything to stay on. It wasn’t the best routine altogether. At least I stayed on, though.”

Haney and Hawken both agreed having beam early in the meet was a good thing. The Hornets also competed first on beam at their previous invite, Hinsdale Central’s Red Devil Invite Dec. 8.

“I really like starting on beam because then it’s the two hardest events out of the way (beam and floor) and then it’s just kind of like a downhill coast,” Hawken said. “I had a few bad things that I did, but for the most part I pretty much hit my routines (at the invite).”

The season-high vault total came from Nowak, Hawken (8.85, 14th), Smith (season-high 8.4) and Haney (8.3). Hawken also tied for 25th on floor (8.4) and tied for 29th on uneven bars (team-high 8.1).

The Hornets had just four performers on beam and uneven bars, meaning every score counted toward the team total. Meyer’s 7.2 on uneven bars equaled her season high, and her scores on vault (7.55) and floor (7.05), while not counting toward the team total, also were varsity bests.

“(Meyer) stepped up for the team, which was good,” Fichter said.

As it turned out, even at full strength the Hornets wouldn’t have been able to improve their 132.3833 sectional seed average from their three highest scores (133.75, 132.00 and 131.40) enough at the invite for a top-four seed and the priority to be a host school for regionals. The Hornets needed a

141.40 to reach the 135.7167 seed score of No. 4-seed Oswego co-op.

Hinsdale South ended up as the No. 7 seed in the Hinsdale Central Sectional and will compete at the Hinsdale Central Regional at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 31. The sectional is at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 6.

Another huge goal appears to be more challenging to attain. Downers South's season high at Lincoln-Way by 2.95 points, and comparable to Hinsdale South's season best, confirmed that the Hornets are going to have to work hard to defend their West Suburban Conference Gold Division title.

The teams' dual meet is Jan. 17 at Hinsdale South. The Gold Meet also is at Hinsdale South at 5 p.m. Jan. 26.

"We didn't expect that (133.40). We knew they had gotten some pretty good girls this year, but we didn't expect it to be much different from last year," Hawken said.

"I thought it would be pretty easy (to win the Gold) since we got it last year and we've got Maddie this year, too, but now I'm just like, 'OK. We'll have to work a little harder,' but obviously we can do it, though," Haney said.