

Sophomore Lauren Haney and her Hinsdale South girls gymnastics teammates only had a feeling that their dual meet against Willowbrook Jan. 9 would turn out special.

“We don’t really calculate our scores after every event,” Haney said. “We never really keep track. We just have a surprise at the end.”

The Hornets received quite a surprise. They not only posted a season-high score but a significant one with a 135.55 to easily defeat the Warriors’ 123.85 and remain undefeated in West Suburban Conference Gold Division dual action.

Hinsdale South easily topped its previous best of 133.75 from Dec. 8.

“It was really exciting because we’ve never got that high or came close to that (135.55 before),” Haney said.

Freshman Maddie Nowak led the way with a first-place, season-high 37.70 all-around total that included first place on all four events. She had season-high scores on balance beam (9.45) and floor exercise (9.45), tied her then season-best on vault (9.35) and added a 9.45 on the uneven parallel bars.

With Nowak, Haney and juniors Jessica Hawken and Taylor Daley, the Hornets swept the top four spots on floor and were among the top three places on vault.

“On every event, we had more hits than usual, less falls, so it was our most successful meet of the year,” Nowak said. “I think that we kind of took a step back at the Lincoln-Way Invite (Jan. 5) and kind of took two steps forward. That’s kind of how it works out sometimes. I’m glad we came

together in that meet.”

With their lineup once again intact, the Hornets competed with Nowak, Haney, Hawken and Daley as all-arounders and junior Shur Batmunkh as a specialist on beam. With the same lineup Saturday, the Hornets finished fourth at the Neuqua Valley Invite with 132.775 points.

Against Willowbrook, Haney (33.10) and Hawken (32.65) were third and fourth in all-around, and Daley (32.10) tied for fifth. Haney and Daley both had season-high totals.

At Lincoln-Way, where Haney did not compete, the Hornets’ score dropped to 130.65, their second-lowest score of nine meets this season. The team also struggled emotionally as the meet progressed.

“(Willowbrook) was our best meet performance-wise, too, and we still counted some falls,” Hinsdale South coach Jennifer Fichter said. “We should be going 136, 137 every time. We just haven’t put it together yet. We’re going to, though.”

Nowak’s 37.70 in the dual easily beat her previous best of 36.65 in all-around Dec. 8. Her 9.45s on floor and beam beat respective previous season bests of 9.4 (Dec. 18) and 9.05 (Dec. 15 and Nov. 21).

“I think definitely beam (was the highlight). That was my best performance of the year,” Nowak said. “That was my best meet of the season. I came close to putting everything together, which I believe I did that meet. I was really glad to just help out my team. I think I let them down a little bit (at Lincoln-Way) with my attitude so I just tried to come in with a positive attitude and it really helped me out.”

Hawken (9.1), Haney (8.6) and Daley (8.4) were second through fourth on floor and Hawken was second on vault (9.05) and Haney tied for third (8.8). Haney was third on uneven bars (7.7), Haney and Daley tied for third on beam (8.0), Daley was fifth on vault (8.7) and Hawken was fifth on uneven bars (7.05).

Hawken's 9s on floor and vault were season bests. Haney and Daley had season highs on vault, and Haney had a season high on floor.

"This was Maddie's best meet. She hit every event," Fichter said. "She works so hard. She's just one of those girls that comes in every single day and she just busts her butt. She just really, really works hard, and she's working hard to motivate the rest of the team. She really, truly believes in this team. I hear it in her voice when she just tries to pump them up, and she's just a little freshman."

Fichter said she plans to stick with the lineup of four all-arounders and Batmunkh on beam until the postseason. Most of last season, the Hornets competed with just four all-arounders per event, including Hawken, Haney and Daley, yet ended up winning their first overall Gold title since 2007.

"We have to make it work. We only had four last year," Haney said. "(Against Willowbrook) it was a better atmosphere, too. (At Lincoln-Way) we were all in a really bad mood. We were just really positive."

With the same lineup at Neuqua, the Hornets had many highlights in only finishing behind Prairie Ridge co-op (145.775), Lake Park (136.70) and Lincoln-Way co-op (134.60) in the eight-team field. Prairie Ridge took third in state last year.

Nowak was second in all-around (36.425) to Prairie Ridge's Jada Berkland (36.85). Haney (14th, 32.65), Hawken (17th, 32.10) and Daley (20th, 31.30) also finished among the top 20 in all-around.

Nowak nearly won floor, taking a close second (9.0) to Neuqua's Sara Cushing (9.05).

"Half a tenth I lost by so that was a little disappointing, but if anything it just motivates me," Nowak said.

Like most invites this season, the Hornets began on beam. While they actually did fairly well at Lincoln-Way, the Hornets started off rough but then progressed.

Nowak took a hard fall off beam but that was her only one. She went on to take eighth (8.55) and then fourth on vault (season-high 9.5) and third on uneven bars (9.375).

"I just lost my footing (on beam) and knew because I was in a meet that I had to go for it no matter what so I went for it anyway," Nowak said. "I was facing sideways and I couldn't save it. It's all a blur right now. What was going through my mind was I just need to get back up there and hit the rest (of the routine)."

On vault, Nowak landed her pike Yurchenko to finally surpass her previous best of 9.35, for which she been scored four times.

"That (9.35) was the pattern the whole year," Nowak said. "It lets me know that I'm ready to move on to a layout so hopefully I'll be adding that soon."

Hawken scored another 9 on vault (9.0) to tie for ninth, and Daley improved her season high by .05 with an 8.75 to tie for 16th. On beam, Haney actually had one of her best performances, staying on for a 10th-place 8.45 to tie her season best at Lincoln-Way.

“I stuck my routine and I was really glad,” Haney said. “My dismount was kind of off, but I was fine because I stayed on. It’s good enough for me.”

Hawken also tied for 13th on floor (8.1) and was 25th on uneven bars (7.5). Haney was 18th on vault (8.7), tied for 19th on floor (7.8) and tied for 22nd on uneven bars (7.7), and Daley tied for 19th on beam (7.9) and was 22nd on floor (7.7). Batmunkh was 23rd on beam (7.8), only .05 from her season best.

The Hornets’ next meet is a huge one – a home Senior Night meet at 6 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 17, against rival Downers Grove South with first place in the Gold on the line.

The Mustangs, second to the Hornets in the Gold last year, scored a season-high 133.40 at the Lincoln-Way Invite followed by a 133.225 at the Fremd Invite Saturday.

Hinsdale South pulled out last year’s dual, also at home and on Senior Night, 129.50 to 129.20.

“It’s nervewracking and exciting at the same time. I know last year was a really fun meet because the energy was just really high, but it’s also a little bit scary,” Haney said.

“The energy is a lot higher, I feel, when we have the complete team with the JV I, JV II and varsity,” Nowak said. “Having a positive attitude only helps us more so I feel that we can pull out another 135 or even higher at that meet.”