

Hinsdale South freshman Maddie Nowak was having the kind of gymnastics meet she wanted Dec. 18 at Riverside-Brookfield until she arrived at her final event, the balance beam.

“Obviously, I’m a little disappointed with the fall, but I think I maintained,” Nowak said. “I started off really strong on the first three events, but then I got to team. I was solid throughout the first three at least.”

Nowak’s feelings summarized the meet for the Hornets. They have several strong performances but not enough to have the kind of performance they had hoped for despite a comfortable 130.95 to 110.40 nonconference victory.

The Hornets went into the meet hoping to not only surpass their season-high score of 133.75 points from Dec. 8 but also break the 134 barrier at least.

They went into the meet stressing perfect landings, fighting for every tenth possible, but they gave many away on beam. They counted a combined five falls on beam, each an automatic .5 deduction.

“We were trying for our best score today. And then we just crumbled,” Hinsdale South coach Jennifer Fichter said. “We were on for the first three events, I’ll take it, and then we got to beam. We work beam really hard in the gym, and I don’t know (what happened). There’s no excuse for that.”

There still were many highlights. Nowak won all-around (36.50), floor exercise (season-high 9.4), vault (9.3) and uneven parallel bars (9.3) and tied for first on beam (8.5) despite her fall with R-B senior and first-year high-school gymnast Becca Smith.

Juniors Jessica Hawken and Taylor Daley and sophomore Lauren Haney also competed as all-arounders. Juniors Shur Batmunkh (beam) and Jorie Smith (vault, floor) and freshman Erica Meyer (uneven bars) were promoted from the junior varsity I lineup to help bolster the score.

Hawken (31.70) and Daley (31.20) were third and fourth to Smith (33.20) with Haney (29.70) fifth.

On floor, Hawken earned her second career nine on floor in as many meets (9.0) to tie for second and junior Daley had a season-high 8.5 for fourth.

Batmunkh was second on beam with a career-high 7.85 as the Hornets' only entry to not fall. Hawken (8.4) was second on vault, and Daley and Haney (8.1) shared third. Hawken also was a solid second on uneven bars (8.3) with Haney fourth (7.3).

There were some factors working against the Hornets. This was their third meet over six days on top of the impending stress of the final week of school heading into winter break.

"I didn't feel like we had as much team spirit tonight. We're all tired from school and what not and beak coming up," Nowak said. "I think we could do much better and I look forward to the meets after, once we have a break."

Fichter said some of the Hornets didn't feel comfortable with the competition beam even during warmups.

"I always tell them there's nothing you can do. It is what it is," Fichter said. "The beam might be shaky, but that's the beam we're competing on. If you don't like a piece of equipment, you just have to keep it to yourself."

The beam didn't affect Batmunkh. She had her best routine ever. She landed both of her roundoffs well, and she continued to take advantage of her core strength with some unique moves.

"I'm very satisfied. It's super exciting (for me)," Batmunkh said. "I stuck (before), but this was very clean for me. I love doing really cool tricks that no one else really does. I like to stack those in my routines."

"She's the rock star as far as I'm concerned right now," Fichter said. "If we didn't have Shur competing beam, we would be counting another 6.0 (score) and we would have scored a 128, 129."

Nowak came extremely close to landing her beam routine as well, falling on a flip flop back tuck. Fichter, who stands at the end of the beam to watch her athletes' execution, said Nowak was 'straight as an arrow.' "

"She was straight, dead on. She even got off and said, 'I had that,' " Fichter said. "She just lost her confidence for a second and then she got up and finished nicely."

Hawken continued her momentum on floor from three days earlier at the Homewood-Flossmoor Invitational. Hawken scored a career-high 9.05 there and performed perhaps even better at R-B.

"Jessica hit floor. It was beautiful," Fichter said. "It was her best routine. She did even better than she did (at H-F) as far as I'm concerned."

One key for Hawken has been upgrading her first tumbling pass to a front handspring, full twist. Hawken said she just learned the pass Dec. 9 and

nearly debuted it Dec. 13 at Leyden, but when she struggled in warmups, she opted to wait.

“In warmups (at H-F), I made it to my feet so we decided it was good enough to put in,” Hawken said. “I ended up sticking it perfectly. It really bumped up my score a lot.”