

Hinsdale South freshman Maddie Nowak handled the pressure extremely well during the Hinsdale Central Sectional to qualify for her first girls gymnastics state meet.

During Friday's state preliminaries at Palatine High School, Nowak approached the meet still with some nerves but also with aggressiveness and mostly enjoyment.

"It's a great experience. At one point of the meet, I was like, 'Just have fun with it,' " Nowak said. "Besides the performance and everything, it's about the experience, too."

Nowak should have multiple chances to perform even better at state in years to come, but she got off a decent start as a state qualifier in all-around and three events.

Nowak tied for 14th on vault (9.5), just .05 shy of her season best, was 24th on floor exercise (9.1) and tied for 36th on uneven bars (8.575) en route to tying for 26th in all-around (35.825) with another freshman, St. Charles co-op's Rachel Dugan.

Only four freshmen qualified for state in all-around and only two reached the event finals Saturday for individual state qualifiers among the top 10 scores in Friday's preliminaries. Neither freshman earned all-state honors, although Barrington's Abby Hasanov, a finalist for vault and uneven bars, scratched because of illness she fought through Friday to finish seventh in all-around (37.575).

"I'm really motivated for next year. I know that personally I'll get better, but I know everyone else will, too," Nowak said. "It's that competition aspect of

it so I'm going to continue to work hard. I'll come out with a lot of new skills. I know that."

Nowak unveiled some of her newest skills at state. On vault, after she landed her normal pike Yurchenko for her first vault, she attempted a higher-valued layout Yurchenko for her second.

The layout didn't completely work out, yet Nowak's score only missed reaching the event finals by .1. Of the nine finalists who competed on vault Saturday, all of them threw at least one layout Yurchenko.

"It wasn't quite fully laid out. (But) I was happy with the score," Nowak said.

On uneven bars, Nowak added a blind change, reverse giant swing to her routine. However, she had problems as she tried to cast over into a pirouette and had to get off the apparatus and restart, an automatic .5 deduction.

"I think I just second-guessed myself on the pirouette," Nowak said. "I'm glad I went for it and I tried it and hit it both times in warmups so it's kind of disappointing that I missed it in the meet, but it's OK. I've only been working on it consistently at the end of the season."

At sectionals, Nowak had to compete first on beam, recently her toughest event. Although she did not qualify on the event, her 8.8 set the tone for a great 37.225 all-around performance.

At state, Nowak suffered a fall but scored an 8.65.

"I wasn't too upset because I knew I would be advancing anyways," Nowak

said. "I was able to brush that off and try to focus on the other events."

Nowak had season-high totals in all-around (37.70) and beam (9.45) Jan. 9, uneven bars (9.55) Dec. 8 and vault (9.55) and floor (9.45) Jan. 26, when she helped the Hornets win the West Suburban Conference Gold Division Meet and secure another outright overall conference title.

She was the Hornets' first state qualifier since 2010 and their first state qualifier in all-around since 2007.

"I had some highs and a lot of lows, but I'm just going to remember the high points to the season. That's what I'm going to build off for next year," Nowak said. "I was very pleased with my performance at sectionals, going 4 for 4 (in hit routines). Those were my best routines, I think, all season."