

Shepard freshman Skylor Hilger is competing by herself as a high school gymnast, but during her season debut at the Lyons Township Invitational Dec. 14, she felt far from alone.

“All of the LT girls made me feel very comfortable so I was happy with that,” Hilger said. “On vaulting, everyone in the stands and from other teams is cheering for me, and it just makes me feel really good. As soon as I’m running down the runway, I’m like, ‘Whoa, people care.’ I’m able to get a burst of energy from that.”

After leaving club gymnastics three years ago, Hilger competed once before the high school season began with Action Gymnastics.

Her high school start was a busy one. After the LT Invite, she competed the following afternoon at the Homewood-Flossmoor Invitational. Despite battling a sore ankle at H-F, she had three top-10 finishes after four top-10 finishes at LT with three of those in the top five.

She has until the Oswego Invitational at noon Dec. 28 to get healthy and increase the difficulty in her routines.

“(Competing) was a good feeling. It was great. It was so much excitement,” Hilger said. “High school is a whole different vibe than club. Club is more pressure, but high school is more calm and happy and fun.

“Overall, it wasn’t bad, but I know I can do better personally. I was really upset about my ankle because I really wish I was OK and able to do the best I could but hopefully (at Oswego) I can come out and do a lot better.”

Hilger more than held her own against some of the state’s top high-school

gymnasts.

At LT, Hilger was fourth in all-around (36.60) behind LT sophomore Kelsy Kurfirst (37.90), the defending state uneven parallel bars champion, LT junior Michelle Cozza (37.75), a first-year high-school gymnast and Level 10 club gymnast, and Glenbard West sophomore Mackenzie O'Keefe (career-high 37.65), a 2012 state qualifier in all-around, uneven bars and balance beam.

Hilger was sixth in all-around at H-F (35.625). The top two finishers were Prairie Ridge co-op sophomore Riley Mahoney (37.725), sixth in all-around at the 2012 state meet, and Andrew senior Jamie Valla (37.55), a two-time state qualifier who was injured for last year's sectionals.

"I'm proud of (Hilger). It's hard to compete two days in a row," coach Erica Wolf said. "She said she was really sore from (the LT Invite) because you put in that all-out effort and you're body is a little tired. But she was looking forward to competing (at H-F) so it kind of motivated her to compete again."

Hilger opened on floor at the LT Invite and shined with a 9.3 that tied for fourth. She also was fourth on uneven bars (9.1), tied for sixth on vault (9.4) and tied for 12th on beam (8.8).

Because of her ankle injury, Hilger was somewhat fortunate that that floor was her final event at H-F. She was fourth on vault (9.45), tied for sixth on uneven bars (9.15) and was 11th on beam (8.4) before she battled through floor with an 8.625 for 16th.

"I've always had weak ankles. I could barely do floor because it started popping and hurting really bad," Hilger said.

“(Going back-to-back meets) was more challenging than I thought it would be. It was a little sore from (the LT Invite), which I didn’t think it would be, but it was. I was a little tired, but I tried my best to come out here. I’m OK with the results, I guess.”

Hilger consistently landed her pike Yurchenko vault at both invites. At H-F, she took out of double twisting full on floor that she landed at LT to protect her injury. Hilger said she was disappointed on uneven bars that she dragged her feet on the mat coming out of her bail and that she fell on her beam flight series.

Hilger competed against many familiar faces from Action. Many LT gymnasts, such as Kurfirst, are teammates of Hilger. Hinsdale South was among the 11 full teams at H-F, and the Hornets’ varsity lineup is comprised of Action gymnasts. Freshman Maddie Nowak was fourth in all-around (36.05).

What was surprising was the amount of friendly faces that Hilger didn’t know. Wolf said Hilger received several offers from coaches to participate in their upcoming dual meets. Hilger, entered only in five regular-season invites, said she is considering accepting some of the offers. Wolf will leave the decisions up to her.

“A lot of schools have been really nice and supportive of her so far. She’s gotten a lot of support from teams and coaches that she doesn’t even know and has never met so that’s really reassuring for her,” Wolf said.

“She did a great job. She’s a lot more confident (after these meets). I think she knows a little bit more of what to expect from high school gymnastics and I think she’s had a lot of fun competing with her teammates and friends

from club. Difficulty-wise, I know she plans on adding a lot more on every event.”

Hilger also should feel more comfortable at the Oswego Invite with the time schedule. During her days as a club gymnast, Hilger was used to competing on events right after a touch warmup with the apparatus. At almost all high school meets, gymnasts can only warm up all four events prior to competition.

“You warm up on your first event and have a whole about two hours and then you compete on that event,” Hilger said. “It’s almost like a cold routine. It’s hard to get used to, but hopefully I get used to it fast because I need to.”