

Even with all that senior Michelle Cozza and her Lyons Township girls gymnastics teammates accomplished last season en route to the program's first state championship, there were a few remaining items on the to-do list.

In their first dual and home meet this season Wednesday, Dec. 11, the Lions sensed quickly they were about to achieve one of them.

"Our goal has always been to go over 150 (points) or hit 150," Cozza said. "I think last year we had a 149 (149.775) so it was kind of the same feeling we had, just being consistent, and it's fun when you're consistent."

The Lions hit 19 of 20 routines and were justly rewarded with a 152.10 – believed to be the highest score in program history – to top Downers Grove North's 129.40 in the West Suburban Conference Silver Division dual in La Grange.

Junior Kelsy Kurfirst broke her school-record all-around total with a 38.90 and won three events, including a career-high 9.8 on balance beam to tie that school record. Kurfirst also won floor exercise (9.75) and the uneven parallel bars (9.6).

Cozza won vault by tying her career high of 9.8. Cozza (38.50) and senior Katie Carling (38.15) also had career-high all-around totals in their second seasons with the program.

The Lions had season high scores on all four events. Beam somewhat surprisingly led the way with a 38.40 behind five hit sets and four career-high scores, followed by floor (38.15), uneven bars (37.80) and vault (37.75).

"We kind of knew in the back of our minds (during the meet) that a 150 was possible," Cozza said. "I think it kind of helped us carry through each event. After beam, we're like, 'OK, we've got floor. Let's keep it up.'"

"I actually had a lot of adrenaline going. I kind of jumped out of bounds on my double pike, but it was good, though. I had a lot of power going into it."

The Lions are one of the stronger floor teams in the state and Kurfirst in the defending individual state champion. Thanks to such a strong showing on beam,

the Lions only needed a 36.30 event score on floor (9.075 average) to reach 150.00 and 36.45 (9.1125 average) to beat the previous documented school-record score of 150.125 when the Lions won the 2000 LT Regional en route to taking third at state.

"It was really exciting. (The 152.10) definitely gave us some confidence and it felt good because we all hit our routines," Kurfirst said.

"For us, we don't usually judge how well we do based on what score we get. Sometimes it is a good reflection. Sometimes it's not. The thing that we focus on is did we hit our routines? Did we do what we needed to do? That's the important thing and I think we did that for sure."

The Lions swept the top five spots on three events. On beam, Kurfirst was followed by Cozza (career-high 9.7), Carling (9.6), junior Kelly Ryser (career-high 9.3) and sophomore Cat Mossing (career-high 8.8).

Cozza and Carling shared second on floor (9.6), followed by senior Mackenzie Stotz (career-high 9.2) and Mossing (8.9). Carling (career-high 9.45), Cozza (9.4) and juniors Jackie Fuller (9.35) and Olivia McGann (9.25) were second through fifth on uneven bars. On vault, Kurfirst (9.75) and Carling (9.5) were second and third and Fuller (career-high 8.7) tied for fourth. Mossing, Stotz and Fuller are first-year team members.

"We can't really look at the scores. Even when it goes in our favor, we don't really look at the score," LT coach Kari Karubas said.

"We are proud of the 152. Who wouldn't be? How realistic was it? It was a good night on a couple of levels because we're really talking about the mindsets that each girl needs when approach an apparatus. We handled one event all last week (in practice) on the mindset and we saw those things happen in competition, although at a perfect place, a home meet."

The Lions made significant strides in just their third meet of the season after two invite victories. They scored 144.25 in the Nov. 27 season opener at Hinsdale South's Hornet Invitational followed by a 111.30 at Downers North's Big Purple Invite Dec. 7. The Big Purple Invite uses just four entries per event

with the top three scores going toward the team total. Had all four scores counted, LT would have scored 145.875.

"(These scores) might have been high but I think we performed so much better than the last two meets. We were just more comfortable competing at this dual and I think it showed in the scores," Cozza said.

The Lions scored in the 149s six times last season with three of those coming in the quaint home gym. Their season high 149.775 came in winning the LT Regional title at home.

LT won the state title with a 149.625, improving upon its 149.05 after the preliminaries in the state event finals. The Lions edged Prairie Ridge co-op (149.30) after suffering their only loss to the Wolves at the Lake Forest Invite (150.00 to 149.675).

"Competing at home is always a blast because you have so much adrenaline, everybody's cheering you on," Kurfirst said.

"I remember last year at our first dual meet we got a pretty high score (149.00 Dec. 6 at home), higher than we expected, and that gave us a lot of confidence. I was hoping we would do the same thing this year and we did, and we even improved from last year so I think we're on the right track."

Kurfirst broke her all-around school record of 38.65 from another home dual Dec. 12, 2012. After never scoring higher than 9.65 on beam, her 9.8 tied school-record score set by Andrea Skala in 2008.

"I haven't really thought about (my all-around score). I just focus on what I have to get done and the routines that I have to hit," Kurfirst said. "I think my beam score (was the highlight). I got a 9.8 so that was pretty exciting. It gave me some more confidence on beam definitely."

"I know she was complacent with her performance. It's kind of funny because she goes 38.90 and it's like, 'I did OK,' " Karubas said.

Cozza now owns the third highest LT individual all-around best, just shy of Skala's 38.525 from 2007. Cozza's 9.8 layout Yurchenko vault tied her best from last season and shares second in the all-time records with several Lions, including older sister Carolyn, behind Erin Murphy's 9.9 record from 2002.

"(My vault) feels very consistent so I'm happy with it," Cozza said. "I think beam was my highlight. Just making my beam routine is what I've been trying to do the last two meets so finally hitting it was definitely a highlight for me. I had a little wobble, but I'm just glad I made it."

Mossing also excelled on beam under difficult circumstances. She planned to only compete on floor but was pressed into service when Fuller injured her ankle landing her vault.

"Physically we are banged up. Mentally, we are getting there so I just see some mental toughness and I love that," Karubas said.

"We stayed on (beam) and Cat impressed me so very much. She's very much a mental gymnast and aware of her technique and she loves to compete so I was very confident of the decision to put her in. I had no reason to doubt that it wouldn't be a safe decision, safety-wise."

Mossing previously competed on beam at the Hornet Invite, scoring a fifth-place 8.5. This time she said found out about the additional routine while the junior varsity I team was competing on the event.

"I did get to go to the dance (practice) gym and warm up and just get mentally ready," Mossing said. "I knew I could do it. I was ready for it. It felt so good. I was so happy and then I brought that to floor and just carried it all through, and I feel like we all carried it with us."

The team score was just part of the excitement for Mossing. This was her first time competing at home for the Lions after previously being among the spectators as a young gymnast for Flying High.

"I've wanted to be on the LT team for so long, since I knew there was an LT gymnastics team when I was younger, so to be on varsity was really good for

me," Mossing said.

"I definitely need to improve some things and start getting more bonus and all of that, but I think I'm doing pretty well. I love it, though, because I've never really been on a team so this is really good and fun to just all work together and to get a great big score like we did."

-- by Bill Stone