

Lyons Township junior Jackie Fuller is receiving an early holiday present for her injured ankle.

After the Lions earned a 148.20 to 132.70 victory at York Monday, Dec. 16, they are not competing again for more than two weeks, until Jan. 8 at Glenbard West.

"(My ankle is) definitely getting better. I'm hoping to get back fully healed over break and just be back. I'm just looking forward to competing everything again," Fuller said.

"I'm really excited (for winter break). There's always room to improve and now we have a lot of time to do that."

Junior Kelsy Kurfirst won all-around (38.30), vault (9.8), floor exercise (9.75) and uneven parallel bars (9.4), and senior Katie Carling won balance beam (9.55).

After taking final exams beginning Wednesday, Dec. 18, the Lions are on winter break from school as students from Dec. 23 until resuming Jan. 6. As gymnasts, they'll continue to practice and, hopefully, become even stronger.

"We love this point of the season because we actually kind of turn more into athletes than gymnasts. We really work on our fitness and we really work on getting really strong and ready for the pounding of the state series," LT coach Kari Karubas said.

"I hate to say it, but we have a lot of fun. Practices are really just all about the reasons we became gymnasts in the first place. They work hard, but we really kind of have some good memories and good laughs, and it's all for the right reasons. The next couple of weeks are just all about gymnastics rather than all about competition."

While the sectional seeds are determined Jan. 15, the Lions own the state's highest sectional seed score through Jan. 4 (148.1833) and the single-highest meet score – an unofficial school-record 152.10 Dec. 11.

Even after the meet, Karubas and several Lions cited things they could have done better in their routines.

Kurfirst, the defending state champion on floor and 2012 co-state champion on uneven bars, is just about as excited as everyone to improve and perfect over break.

"I'm hoping to upgrade on a couple of events and also perfect my other skills that I've been competing and hopefully be more consistent," Kurfirst said.

"It's nice because we all kind of know what we need to do and how we need to get to the point where we want to be at after break. We've had a lot going on in the past few weeks with school and we've had a lot of meets so honestly (the York meet) was a good way to end the part before break."

During winter break last season, Carling was working to become an all-arounder. She accomplished the feat until she had to give up uneven bars for the postseason with a broken bone in her hand.

This time, a healthier Carling is looking to build upon what she already has.

"I think I'm going to try and add a few things on floor, maybe bars (over break). I'll keep working on them and see," Carling said.

At York, the Lions used three all-arounders – Kurfirst, Carling (37.60) and senior Michelle Cozza (37.10). Senior Mackenzie Stotz and junior Kelly Ryser competed on two events, and Fuller, junior Olivia McGann and sophomore Cat Mossing competed on one event.

The Lions swept first through fifth on uneven bars with Kurfirst, Cozza and McGann (9.25) and Carling and Fuller (9.15).

On beam, LT had the top four scores with Carling, Kurfirst (9.35), Cozza (8.75) and Mossing (8.5). The Lions took first through third on vault with

Kurfirst, Cozza (9.6) and Carling (9.45) and floor with Kurfirst, Cozza (9.5) and Carling (9.45).

On beam, the Lions' final event, Carling had one of the meet highlights with a solid routine, just .05 shy of her season-best 9.6.

"I've been working on it a lot. It felt nice to hit," Carling said. "I think (this meet) gives us a lot of motivation going into break. We still know we have so much to work on and so much potential to add to our routines. It all just gives us motivation to step it up even more."

Carling said her beam routine was solid enough that she could connect a flip flop to her aerial walkover.

"Wasn't it gorgeous? She really looked strong and confident up there," Karubas said. "We've been working on having what we see in the gym reflect in competition because she looks amazing in the gym. She can throw routine after routine."

Ryser and Stotz also made strides in the victory as they contribute more to the lineup.

Ryser made her season debut on beam Dec. 11. She competed on that event again and added floor for the first time, scoring a sixth-place 8.95.

"I'm happy that I'm in the lineup again," Ryser said. "I kind of messed up my dance a little bit (on floor), but it did feel more natural competing again because I like to bring energy out on the floor and it's a lot of fun."

Stotz competed on vault and floor for the second meet in a row. She had a season-high 8.5 on vault to tie for sixth and was seventh on floor with an 8.85.

"I switched up my passes a little bit on floor but (only) a handspring on vault, hopefully I'll change that soon," Stotz said.

The winter break should be among the most productive for Stotz. She is

competing in high-school gymnastics for the first time and is in the sport competitively for the first time since she was a freshman.

"I've been off for a while. It's an overwhelming experience coming back after three years and now I'm hoping to bring my stuff back and just little by little," Stotz said.

"(High school gymnastics) is different. I'm a little rusty, we'll say that, but I'm making my way back up because practices are so fun. We'll come back (from break) stronger than ever, definitely. I know we can do it."

-- by Bill Stone