

Junior Kelsy Kurfirst concluded the greatest state meet in Lyons Township girls gymnastics history in February with an electrifying routine on floor exercise, earning the individual state title to put an exclamation point on the program's first team state championship.

Kurfirst and the Lions opened this season competing on floor at Hinsdale South's Hornet Invitational Nov. 27.

Kurfirst, LT's last competitor, concluded her first tumbling pass by landing one of her biggest tricks, a double back flip.

"It was definitely (a relief). I could breath a little bit," Kurfirst said.

While it may be a whole new season for Kurfirst and the Lions, they experienced many of the same old feelings of success at the eight-team meet. Kurfirst won the all-around and all four events and the Lions won for the second year in a row with 144.25 points.

Kurfirst swept vault (9.65), uneven parallel bars (9.55), balance beam (9.4) and floor (9.1) en route to a 37.70 all-around total.

Seniors Katie Carling and Michelle Cozza, juniors Jackie Fuller and Olivia McGann and sophomore Cat Mossing also had top-five finishers, and senior Mackenzie Stotz added a top-10 finish on vault, her one event.

"It's always a nice meet to get the jitters out," Kurfirst said. "It's definitely a good place to start the season. Obviously we know what we have to work on. It's wasn't perfect, but I think it was definitely a good start to the season."

The invite traditionally has been a strong starting point for Kurfirst. Over her first three appearances, she has a combined 11 first places in all-around or on events. That includes titles every year in all-around and uneven bars, the event on which she won state as a freshman in 2012.

This was the highest all-around total among the three invite titles, topping her 37.60 in 2012. Although Kurfirst won state on floor last year with a 9.725, her floor victory may have been her most satisfying for this invite.

"It was a little nervewracking trying to figure out my routine because that was the first time I've competed it, but I think it went OK," Kurfirst said. "I'm pretty happy with how my routines went, but as we've said, there's still stuff to improve on."

Kurfirst, Carling, Cozza and McGann return from last year's state lineup, but Fuller, Mossing and Stotz are newcomers to high-school gymnastics.

Junior Kelly Ryser, LT's other state returnee, did not compete after joining the team late following another state berth in diving.

"It was really nice to see what kind of competitors (the newcomers) are because I've only seen them in practice. I was really impressed with Cat and Jackie," LT coach Kari Karubas said. "It was also nice to see the returnees have some legacy and mannerisms of comfort and leadership, although there are some things we need to work on.

"There's a lot going on other than tonight's four events so I'm excited. I'm really motivated to get back in the gym (to practice). It was as good place to start. None of us are satisfied, though."

The Lions had problems on floor with falls and mistakes, combined with some inconsistent scoring as the season gets under way, for a 33.40 team total.

Kurfirst's floor routine help to set the tone for much better things on the other three events.

"I'm very proud of her. The minute she landed her (double back), I said, 'Good start to a good season,' " Karubas said.

LT dominated vault (37.50), uneven bars (37.60) and beam (35.75), where they counted just one fall.

”(Floor) didn’t go as well as we hoped, but we used it as motivation for the next events,” Kurfirst said. “It was great how we were able to just pick it up and move forward.”

The Lions took at least the top two spots in all-around and all four events and the top three spots on three events. Kurfirst and Carling (36.40) were first and second in all-around and Cozza (34.725) and Fuller (34.60) were fourth and fifth behind Glenbard East freshman Veronika Srey (35.00).

Fuller was making her high-school debut after coming off a Level 9 club gymnastics season with Flying High.

”I was really nervous, yeah,” Fuller said. “It’s a lot different (than club gymnastics), but I like it a lot. It’s kind of fun just to get to see how the team competes together. I think it went pretty well.”

The Lions were most impressive on uneven bars by sweeping first through fifth place with Kurfirst, Carling (9.5), Cozza (9.3), McGann (9.25) and Fuller (9.2).

On beam, Kurfirst, Fuller (8.95) and Carling (8.9) took the top three spots, Mossing (8.5) was fifth and Cozza (8.175) was ninth.

Kurfirst captured her first vault title as part of another 1-2-3 LT finish with Cozza (9.5) and Carling (9.45). Fuller (8.9) was fifth and Stotz (8.3) tied for 10th.

Kurfirst and Carling (8.55) were first and second on floor.

At last year’s Hornet Invite, Carling only competed on beam and floor since she was coming off labrum surgery in the offseason and was ninth on both events. It was the high-school gymnastics debut

for both her and Cozza, who also previously were club gymnasts for Flying High.

"I like doing all-around. In general, I think the highlight is we're able to finally see how we're able to compete together and we learned a lot about each other," Carling said.

"Bars went well. I'm pretty proud of that because I've been working on that with my shoulder and hand issues. Also I just know there's a ton to work on still so I'm keeping that in mind."

On the Lions' final event, beam, Fuller set the tone for a strong team showing by turning in a solid routine as the Lions' first competitor. Fuller also competed first for LT on floor and second on uneven bars and vault behind Carling, Cozza and Kurfirst.

Fuller may prove to be one of the big surprises of this season.

"I had no idea she was going to be such an amazing competitor," Karubas said.

"When I have a new girl, I don't want injuries. There are things I just don't know about them. I walked on eggshells with her. Based on practices, I was still kind of nervous. She just smiled and said OK and then she saluted (the judge) and just proved me wrong. What a good lesson for me."

-- by Bill Stone