

Palatine senior Abby Alden spent her younger years as a gymnast working at the state meet, even carrying the Palatine High School team sign for the Parade of Competitors a couple of times.

“I would march in with everyone,” Alden said. “I remember thinking, ‘I want to be competing at state,’ when I was little, and now I am.”

Alden secured a second straight trip to the state meet Monday by finishing fourth on balance beam at the Fremd Sectional with a 9.375. Top-five sectional finishers automatically qualify for the state meet.

The Pirates, the Palatine Regional champions, finished fifth (139.475). Alden still is hopeful she will be accompanied by sophomore Claudia Przystal when the at-large individual berths are determined after the final sectional Thursday at Stevenson.

The 12 highest remaining scores in all-around and each event that weren't top-five sectional finishers also advance.

“So I don't feel alone, I really hope Claudia makes it,” Alden said. “It feels awesome making it to state, just doing that so I have one more meet senior year.”

Palatine finished the season on a high note, just shy of its 139.475 winning regional total. The Pirates scored a season-high 143.075 at the Mid-Suburban League Meet and won regionals by edging Barrington by .05.

The Pirates got the most out of their lineup. Alden and Przystal competed at all-arounders at sectionals with senior Megan Hedstrom and sophomores Andrea Ori and Morgan Anderson on three events, senior Nicole Kuksuk on

two and sophomore Cindy Feliciano on uneven bars.

“The younger kids stepped up,” Palatine coach Terry Theobald said. “That’s all we’re trying to do, get a couple of kids through (to state). We’re just trying to make them safe. A 139, there’s nothing wrong with that (for us). We just don’t have the depth.”

Kuksuk, a three-time state qualifier and strong all-arounder, was injured even before the start of the season with an elbow injury – and later suffered a shoulder injury. She was limited to beam and floor for the postseason.

“She’s a little miracle baby,” Theobald said. “She dislocated two body parts. She’s really lucky she did two events.”

Alden should have a busier state meet. In her first appearance last year, she only qualified on beam and tied for 13th (9.125), just .075 from a spot in the finals for those among the top 10 preliminary scores.

This time, she should also advance as an all-arounder. She was sixth (36.675) Monday and has the highest at-large score with two sectionals remaining. In 2012, her 36.35 at sectionals just missed the 36.575 at-large cut.

“It would be just 10 times better to make it for all-around (as well),” Alden said.

Alden also is tied for fifth at-large on uneven bars (9.1). On beam, Przystal (9.025) is tied for third, and Kuksuk (8.9) still has an outside chance in ninth place ahead of three 8.85s. Last year’s at-large state cut for beam was 9.125.

“Hopefully it won’t be (my last meet),” said Przystal, who set the tone early for a strong beam routine with a precise flip-flop, flip-flop flight series. “I felt

relieved that I stuck (beam). I felt more on the beam and not wobbly, more confident.”

Alden continued the 36-plus all-around efforts that she’s produced all season. As the Pirates’ final competitor on beam, her 9.375 was only .125 shy of her season high and puts her on the Palatine all-time record board.

Alden also tied for 12th on uneven bars and 16th on vault (9.3). Alden was just .225 from her season high on vault, although the at-large state cut already is at 9.4.

“She’s been consistent all season so that’s what makes the difference for her. She did the whole season like that,” Theobald said.

Beam helped the Pirates win regionals. After starting on uneven bars Monday, the Pirates posted the third-highest team score on beam (35.45).

“It was a little nervewracking, kind of the pressure knowing I can make it, but I just have to hit,” Alden said. “But after the routine, it just felt amazing to be done. I was like, “(A 9.375). Oh, we’re good now.’ ”

“It was really awesome, especially to see her place on beam,” Kuksuk said. “I know we’ve all been working so hard at practice lately. We practice on Sunday. We’ve been coming in a lot. It was good to see that. I think Claudia’s close for making it at-large so I hope they both do well.”

Kuksuk also has proven to be among the state’s top consistent beam performers, winning regionals with a 9.45. Although she stayed on beam Monday, several wobbles and not holding a skill long enough contributed to a lower score than usual.

“It was just nerves I think. I was pretty nervous and it got to me. It usually does,” Kuksuk said. “I don’t usually do well under pressure.”

That pressure was heightened by being limited to two events for which to qualify. Kuksuk was an individual qualifier on floor, but her injuries have limited the difficulty of her tumbling passes.

“(I thought), ‘I’ve got to do well on beam so I can go to state,’ ” Kuksuk said.

Kuksuk has been among the Pirates’ best. After being a state qualifier on floor as a freshman and the team’s lone state representative, she had an incredible 37.40 sectional in 2011 that got her to state in all-around, vault, beam and floor. Last year, she qualified on floor and vault.

One more meet would be a wonderful reward.

“It’s going to be my last time doing gymnastics. Fifteen years are ending,” Kuksuk said. “Even though maybe I’m not going to state, I know that I still did well with my injuries taken into consideration. It is what it is. I can’t change it.”