

Shepard sophomore Reilly Longawa's second high school gymnastics season may have once again ended at regionals, but not before she showed how far she's progressed.

Longawa had a nice list of personal triumphs during the Wheaton Warrenville South Regional Tuesday, Feb. 3, climaxed by completing consecutive back walkovers on balance beam, her final event.

"I'm so happy about that, but then I fell on that stupid half turn," Longawa said. "That's like my most solid skill and then I dropped my hip. I'm just like, 'Oh well.' "

Longawa did not advance to the Glenbard North Sectional Tuesday, Feb. 10, but she hopes to be there for junior teammate Skylor Hilger, a 2014 floor exercise state finalist who advanced to sectionals in all-around and all four events.

Longawa was 12th in the all-around (27.475). She was 19th on beam (6.675) and floor (7.275), 20th on uneven bars (5.925) and 23rd on vault (7.6).

"Better than I thought (I would do)," said a happy Longawa said afterwards. "I hit my floor routine (and I'm happy) because it's new. I just got it. It was my second time competing it and then I hit my series on beam.

"On vault, I threw the new vault, the half full, and I was really happy about that because I did get all the way around."

At regionals in 2014, Longawa scored 28.725 in all-around, but regional scoring arguably was tighter this year. Longawa also had her training affected by obligations with the school's marching band and show choir.

Coach Erica Wolf also is encouraged by Longawa's added skills. Wolf also coaches Wolf during the club season at Action Gymnastics, where she is co-owner with Jody Raymond.

"Reilly worked on her presentation on floor and her series on beam. She connected her pike jump so she's really happy about that. It was kind of fluky that she fell on her full turn," Wolf said.

“She’s done a lot better (this season). She upgraded her vault, her bars. And vault and beam she really upgraded so that was good. I do like her new floor routine. It’s a lot sharper. She presents it well.”

Longawa only competed once previously this season at the Lincoln-Way Invitational Jan. 10, and that was without Hilger. Longawa had a 28.05 all-around total and season-high scores on vault (8.1) and beam (6.9).

Besides having Hilger with her Tuesday, Longawa found comfort in two other individual competitors at the regional, Oak Forest freshmen Grace Stahnke and Abigail Bertucci.

“I liked it today. I felt more confident coming in and there were two other individuals (there) I’ve known since I was like 6 (from club meets),” Longawa said. “It was nice not just knowing Skylor and Erica but other girls, too.”

Longawa also received a lift from former Hinsdale South girls gymnastics head coach Jarrod Amolsch. He volunteered to be a spotter for Longawa and Hilger because Raymond was busy with Hinsdale South’s team, which was competing that night at the Lincoln-Way East Regional. Wolf and Raymond are assistant coaches for Hinsdale South.

“(Amolsch) cheered us on a lot and made us more confident,” Longawa said. “His daughter goes to our Action gym so he’s sometimes there at practice and he watches and critiques us sometimes.”

At regionals, all gymnasts compete first on vault and uneven bars before moving to floor and beam. Longawa had a difficult start on uneven bars because she had a rough warmup and her grip came loose during the actual routine.

“I face planted in warmups on my flyaway (dismount) so I just wanted to hit, and then my grip came off in my routine,” Longawa said. “I did my flyaway without my grip. I went up, I cleaned up my kip and I didn’t face plant.”

Nothing could have been harder than the 2014 regional. Longawa missed several key practices and nearly did not compete following the death of her grandmother. A couple of canceled practices just before Tuesday because of the snow storm did

not faze Longawa.

“That was nice not having anything family related going on into regionals. This year, I just focused on regionals and I was able to go to practice and it was nice,” Longawa said.

Longawa now is preparing for another club season in the Excel Platinum level, in which she qualified for state last year.

Her offseason training has been affected first by her other school activities. She recently has been practicing with the show choir until about 5 p.m. and then heading to practice at Action, which is based out of Hinsdale South in Darien.

“In the beginning of the season, I was in marching band and we competed every weekend,” Longawa said. “It’s just a lot of running around to get everything right. I wasn’t ready to compete (earlier), but next year I’ll probably do the Hornet Invite (the day before Thanksgiving).”

-- by Bill Stone