

Gymnasts not too young to shine

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
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Freshman talent blends with veteran leadership as Grafton/Cedarburg team vaults way to 5th place at state

A remarkable season came to a rewarding close for the Grafton/Cedarburg gymnastics team at the WIAA Division 1 state meet last Saturday in Wisconsin Rapids.

It had been 13 years since the co-op squad qualified for state competition and longer than that since it cracked the top five at the meet.



Check both off the list.

Grafton/Cedarburg placed fifth out of 10 teams with 140.7 points, its second-highest total of the season, and did so with three freshmen.

“This is a huge accomplishment for our team, and it shows a very promising future for the gymnasts,” Grafton/Cedarburg coach Ali Pfeiffer said.

“The girls had an amazing meet, and everyone on the team reached some of their season-high scores.”

Freshman Maddie Gleed scored 9.083 on the balance beam, her season high.

The team leader in the vault was freshman Sami Koppa with a 9.267 mark.

Senior Cathy Brunette was a steadying influence on her younger teammates in their first state meet.

“Cathy did an incredible job of making her team feel comfortable and relaxed,” Pfeiffer said.

Brunette didn’t do so bad performing, either. She scored 9.0 on the vault, a season-high 9.067 on floor exercise, 8.535 on the balance beam and 8.533 on the uneven bars.

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“She had one of her best meets of the year and was extremely proud of herself and her teammates,” Pfeiffer said.

Collectively, Grafton/Cedarburg finished with 35.284 points on the balance beam, 35.55 on floor exercise, 35.75 on vault and 34.116 on uneven bars.

Franklin/Muskego /Oak Creek/Whitnall won the Division 1 team title with 150.516 points.

Burlington/Badger/Catholic Central/Wilmot was second with 148.001 points, and Homestead (141.3) and Arrowhead (141.135) rounded out the top four.

In Division 1 individual competition Friday, Grafton/Cedarburg got solid performances from Koppa, junior Catie Ball and freshman Sophie Zang.

Koppa tied for 10th in the vault (9.267) and was 14th in uneven bars (8.667) and 23rd in all-around (34.334).

“I was extremely proud of Sami for qualifying as a freshman, and she did an amazing job in her first year,” Pfeiffer said.

Ball was 12th in the uneven bars (8.717), and Zang tied for 17th in the vault (9.1).

“Both girls did an amazing job, and I was extremely proud of them,” Pfeiffer said.

With four of its top five gymnasts expected to return next season, Grafton/Cedarburg should be strong again, Pfeiffer noted.

“As a coach, I can honestly say that this is one of the most enjoyable and remarkable seasons that I have had,” she said.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed working with every one of these girls, and there is such a promising future in store.”

O'Donnell shines for Pirates

Port Washington's lone state qualifier was freshman Danielle O'Donnell, who turned in her team's best individual performance since 2000.

O'Donnell placed 22nd in the all-around (31.851) with event scores that included 7.967 in the uneven bars (13th place), 8.467 in vault (19th), 8.117 in floor exercise and 7.3 in balance beam.

Her all-around state finish was the highest for a Port gymnast since 2000, when Lauren Henkle took 12th.

“It was a very good day for Dani,” Port coach K.C. Didier said.

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“No performance was her best of the season, but in a meet where freshmen and first-timers are notorious for meltdowns, it was a consistent day she can be proud of. She was so poised. It seemed to be just another meet to her.”

O'Donnell's vault score was her second-best of the season, and her floor and bars routines were her third-bests.

“Although Dani's performance was one of the best by any Port gymnast in the past decade, her next challenge will be making it back to state,” Didier said.

“Of the 25 total qualifying spots available from our sectional, only two were filled by seniors this year. Dani took three spots, 50% more than those taken by all the seniors.

“Another four were taken by juniors and 19 went to freshmen or sophomores.”

Image Information: SENIOR CATHY BRUNETTE helped lead a young Grafton/Cedarburg gymnastics team to fifth place at the Division 1 state meet. Photo by Sam Arendt