

By Randy Whalen

Although it fell short of the goal to advance to state, it was a great season for the Lockport Township competitive dance team.

The Porters participated in five invites this season. They were second twice and won the final two of them, which included their own invite. That was held on Saturday, January 6 before a nice-sized crowd in the gym at Lockport East.

There, Lockport finished first in the Large School Division with a season-high score of 87.17.

Afterward, Gina Miranda, who has been a dance teacher for 25 years and completed her third season as Lockport's head coach, was very happy.

"It was a good last push to conference," Miranda said after the home invite. "We've done really well this season. The girls were definitely determined on their home floor.

"They wanted to leave it out there one more time on their home floor."

The song that the Porters performed to all season was "Dream On," by Cinematic Pop. A neat thing for them at their invite was that they got to do the entire performance on their home floor at halftime of the boys' basketball game against Bolingbrook the night before.

"It helped a bunch," Lockport senior Nina Kundrat said of performing the night before on their home floor. "It made us have the feel of what the floor was like and it helped a ton."

Fellow senior Isabella Steffgen loved being able to perform back-to-back days on their home floor.

"Just having the community of everyone watching us and performing on our floor," Steffgen said after the invite. "The community being here really helped us."

Six seniors on the team performed at the invite. They were Mikayla Dragosh, Avril Elledge, Kundrat, Nicole Mikols, Leah Muska, and Steffgen.

The rest of the team was Krysta Beske, Hailey Brazao, Kennidie Byrdak, Isabel Collins, Lily Duval, Ava Fox, Madeline Hindhaugh, Paige Ignasiak, Madison Kelso, Kara Kinney, Alexis Kropf, Lauren Kropf, Julia Marino, Madelyn Morack, Elena Rheingans, Ireland Roberson, and Grace Wedewer.

"It was just the feeling of being together," Dragosh said following the Lockport Invite. "Because we worked on it so much, we felt so together. We felt supported. Our coaches and this team are amazing."

Having a newer version of the Aerosmith classic "Dream On" to perform worked well for the Porters.

"It's just the build in the music and the build in our motions," Elledge said of Dream On. "It's really an impactful song for a really impactful team. It felt good to portray the emotions of the song in our movements."

The Porters opened their competitive part of the season on Sunday, Nov. 12 at the Andrew Invite. There they got second place with a score of 85.33. The host Thunderbolts took first with an 86.43 score.

On Sunday, December 3, Lockport placed eighth with a mark of 86.60 at the Naperville North Invite. Just a week later, on Sunday, December 10, the Porters had another very good score of 86.83 and placed second behind Lincoln-Way East (87.57 score) at the Lincoln-Way Central Invite.

After a nearly four-week break from competing, the Porters finished first on Saturday, January 6, with a season-high score of 87.17. That's what they wanted, to be performing their best down the stretch.

Especially since the conference tournament was only four days later. On Wednesday, January 10, Lockport competed in the Blue Division of the SouthWest Suburban Conference Tournament at Andrew.

There the Porters captured their third-ever SWSC Blue title and second in three years. They also won in 2014 and 2022. The standings were Lockport (86.37), Lincoln-Way East (82.53), Sandburg (81.83), Homewood-Flossmoor (76.83), and Bolingbrook (73.93).

"It's definitely the confidence, this gives us confidence," Mikols said following the Lockport Invite win. "We were definitely going into the conference to win. It's just everyone together as a team and being positive."

The Porters were positive that they could advance to the State Finals again this season. After all, they were coming off of two straight championship performances. But they fell short by two spots on Saturday, January 20 in the Large School competition of the Joliet West Sectional.

The final Large School standing at the sectional were Naperville Central (91.37), Andrew (90.20), Naperville North (89.57), Nequa Valley (85.70), Minooka (85.37), and Joliet West (84.20) made up the state qualifying teams.

Lincoln Way East (83.42), placed seventh. Lockport (81.95), Sandburg (81.85), H-F (78.20), Stagg (74.73), Bolingbrook (74.70), Rich Township (74.68), Metea Valley (74.63), and Joliet Central (73.73) rounded out the 15 Large School teams.

The Top Six teams make it to the State Finals. Those are held on Friday, January 26, and Saturday, January 27 at Grossinger Motors Arena in Bloomington. There are 30 teams in each class on Friday and the top 12 make it to the second day at state.

The Porters last qualified for state in 2022. They have advanced to state six times in the 12 years that there has been a state final. But Lockport has never made the final day.

Still, it was an outstanding season for the Porters as they won their invite for the second straight season and then captured the conference in less than a week. That and the emotion of it all is what they will remember

"I cried," said Muska, a four-year varsity veteran of winning their invite. "That's because we put so much work and effort into it and it was such a good feeling to win.

"We had lots of emotion and that's how bad we wanted it. To see our hard work pay off."