

# Gymnastics: Ta savors sharing gold medal with Rufenacht on beam

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Photos by Mark Nesbitt

Verona senior Ella Crowley competes on the uneven bars at the WIAA Division 1 state meet on Saturday, March 4, in Wisconsin Rapids.

bars (9.483) and tied junior teammate Denise Ta for the title on the balance beam (9.517).

"I was really shocked," Rufenacht said of repeating as the all-around state champion. "I really didn't think it was going to happen. It's insane. I just tried to focus on myself during the meet and not anyone else. I think that benefited me. I wasn't really afraid about what other people were doing."

She's the ninth gymnast to repeat as an all-around state champion.

"It's almost unheard of to repeat as an all-around champion in high school," Hauser said. "It's never expected. We started from the beginning of the season and said there are no expectations to repeat that, but we will try."

With six Wildcat/Crusader individual state qualifiers, if the second day of the state meet would have been scored as a team, VA/ME would have scored a season-high 146.864.

"It's incredibly rewarding to come back and improve," Hauser said. "Just in case anyone thought yesterday was a fluke. We did it again today and we did it better."

Rufenacht finished second on the vault (9.765) and fourth in the floor exercise (9.333).

"I know she was definitely stressing the vault a little bit, but to be that close to first you can't be disappointed," Hauser said. "The bars routine was a total surprise. We knew she had a good

routine, but we weren't expecting first place on bars."

Rufenacht wasn't the only one for the Wildcat/Crusaders to surprise. Ta savored her chance to tie Rufenacht for a state title on the beam.

"I think it's crazy," Ta said. "I did not expect to do something like that."

Ta is one of the gymnasts who does a dismount off the beam to the side. She does a split three-quarter back tuck off the side of the beam.

"The key for me is the back tuck," Ta said. "Once I get the back tuck, I know the rest of my routine is going to be pretty solid."

Senior Ella Crowley won two medals in her final individual state meet. She tied Franklin/Muskego junior Ellie Johnson for third place in the vault (9.950) and added a sixth-place finish on the floor (9.267). Junior Anna Messner finished fifth in the all-around (36.783) and fifth on the balance beam (9.367).

Crowley – a four-time state qualifier – relied on her state meet experience.

"Being here four years has really calmed my nerves, knowing that we are capable of doing what we are," Crowley said. "To end my career that high is awesome. I'm really sad to leave them all."

Crowley said last year a lot of gymnasts had new skills.

"It was new (routine) to us," she said. "We worked on them over the summer and were more consistent...

We have been able to hone in on certain skills and just knowing where we are in the air."

Messner took fifth on the balance beam (9.367) and senior Katie Ryan placed ninth (9.183). Crowley finished 13th in the all-around (35.417), giving the Wildcat/Crusaders three of the state's top 15 gymnasts.

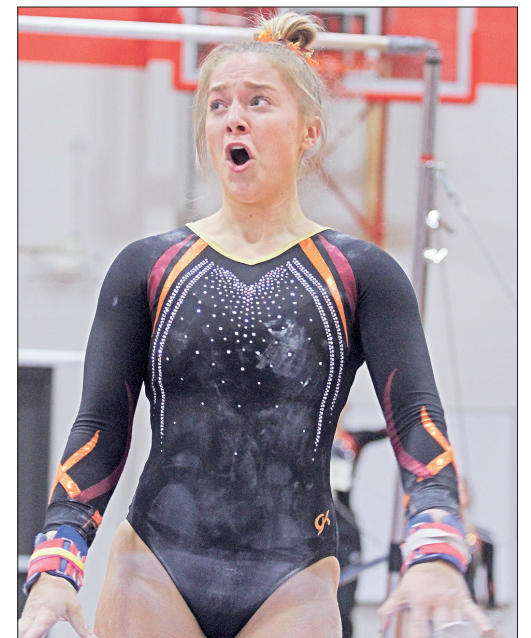
Freshman Dominika Ziemba placed 12th on the floor exercise (9.033). On the uneven bars, Messner took 11th (8.9) and Ta placed 13th (8.7). Crowley added a 23rd-place finish on the uneven bars (7.6). Messner placed 12th on the vault (9.267) and Ryan took 16th (9.133).

Even though she missed competing in the state meet in the all-around competition by 0.05 of a point, Ryan was honored to win a gold trophy with her teammates.

"I was more concerned about the team making it than making it as an individual," Ryan said. "I couldn't be happier that we won."

For VA/ME, it was the end of Crowley and Ryan's prep careers. They are two seniors that brought a ton of experience and leadership.

"We can train skills over the summer, but there is more to them than just the skills they bring to the team," Hauser said. "Their personalities and the humans they are (are) absolutely amazing leaders who have taught the freshmen a lot and lead by example."



Photos by Mark Nesbitt

**Above:** Senior Ella Crowley reacts after her uneven bars routine at the WIAA Division 1 state meet for Verona Area/Madison Edgewood on Friday, March 3, in Wisconsin Rapids. The Wildcat/Crusaders scored 146.1167 points to edge Franklin/Muskego for the state championship by 0.8 points.

**Below:** Verona senior Katie Ryan executes an aerial in a balance beam routine.

