

By Randy Whalen

A new performance proved to be just what the Lockport Township competitive dance team needed.

Hosting their own invite, the Porter's performance netted them the Class 3A title of their large invite. That was held on Saturday, Jan. 7 in the gym at the main Lockport campus. In all, there were 45 performances in three different classes on both the varsity and JV level that were packed into the six-plus hour day.

Lockport saved its best for last in front of the home crowd. The Porter's second varsity performance of the day netted them the top award with a score of 81.05 points. The Lincoln-Way Central second performance got the Knights second with a mark of 80.63. Lincoln-Way East (80.53) was third, the initial Lockport (78.53) performance was fourth and Plainfield South (77.30) placed fifth out of the 10 teams that performed in the large school competition.

Including JV and freshmen, there were 47 performances at the invite. Willowbrook (80.93) won the Class 2A title and Glenbard South (75.77) captured the Class 1A crown. So Lockport's 81.05 score was the all-around top one on the day.

"We performed to 'Love on the Brain for our second routine,'" Porter competitive dance coach Gina Miranda said of the song by Rihanna. "We just learned it over Christmas break. Our first one wasn't hitting, so we wanted to come out with something new. It's good and a good costume song and we just have a good connection during it."

The Porters wore blue dresses for their winning performance. Earlier they had a red jacket look for their first dance.

Miranda, who has been a dance teacher for 24 years, is in her second season as Lockport's head coach. She's proud of this group, which includes a lot of new people.

"Last year we graduated eight seniors," she said. "So we only have a handful of girls here from last season."

Those include the four seniors that are on this year's squad. They are Mackenzie Christopher, Bella Fitch, Brenna Labus, and Marissa Marra.

"I think we did well," Marra said before the judge's awards came out. "We've worked on our routines and we were excited for 'Love on the Brian.' It meant the world to be doing this at home and be able to dance on our own floor."

Fitch thought so too.

"So far it's been really good and all our hard work has paid off," she said. "I'm really noticing a difference this season. My big thing is the team. Everyone loves each other and there's a family feeling with everyone."

Christopher and Labus have been on the varsity all four years.

"I've been dancing since I was two," Labus said. "Mackenzie and I were at the same studio, Wings Dance Studio (in downtown Lockport). I love dancing because it's very relieving of stress. I know that I can relieve that and be with the people that I love.

"I was very excited for our second dance to 'Love on the Brain.' From the beginning of the season, our goal has been to set to Day 2 of state. So we want the team to have a chance to do that."

Christopher savored the feeling of performing before her home crowd.

"It's definitely a cool feeling being at home," she said. "It's the last time for me so I wanted to live in the moment, be with everyone and work hard.

"We also do some halftime performances at the basketball games. I like being with everyone and that we all have the same passion. We all understand each other and it's a comfortable feeling when you are with everyone that you love."

The rest of the varsity members are juniors Krysta Beske, Isabel Collins, Mikayla Dragosh, Avril Elledge, Nicole Mikols, Leah Muska, and Isabella Steffgen. Madeline Hindhaugh is a sophomore and Kennidie Byrdak, Madison Kelso, Kara Kinney, and Nina Kundrat are freshmen.

There was a quick turnaround for the defending league champion Porters as they competed in the Blue Division of the SouthWest Suburban Conference on Wednesday, Jan. 11 at Andrew. There Lockport placed third. Lincoln-Way East won its first SWSC Blue title with an 87.90 score. Sandburg, which had captured the conference title for seven straight seasons before last year, was second with 83.73 points. Lockport was third with a score of 81.50, and Homewood-Flossmoor placed fourth with a 70.07 total. Bolingbrook did not field a team.

On the JV side, Lincoln-Way East (69.67) edged the Porters (69.50) for the championship. For the varsity SWSC Red standings, Andrew had the top score of the day with a 91.63. Defending Red Champion Lincoln-Way West was second with a mark of 87.73.

The Porter dance team performed again to 'Love on the Brain' at Lockport on Friday, Jan. 13 at halftime of the Senior Night boys basketball game against Bradley-Bourbonnais.

The state tournament is this weekend. Lockport will travel two hours, near Peoria, to the Washington Sectional. There are 47 teams there in three classes. The Porters are one of 15 teams in Class 3A and are scheduled to perform at 3 PM. The top six advance to the state finals.

Those are held on Friday, Jan. 27, and Saturday, Jan. 28 at Bloomington 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 qualified for state last season for the sixth time in the 10 years that there has been a state final.

But in that decade, Lockport has never made the final day. Last season's score was 86.26, which was less than a point away from placing 12th. Andrew (87.02) took the 12th and final spot.

"That's what we want as a program, day two of state," Miranda said. "Last year we were 13th and only .76 of a point away. "That would be fitting for this group. They perform well together and are all supportive of each other."