

Metros take fresh approach to new prep hockey season

By Steve Allspach
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Their new home is called the Marina Inn Convention Center.

However, for a program filled with hope and optimism, maybe Dante's Inferno would be a better title. After all, didn't Dante once say "abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

The dichotomy here is distinct.

The Sioux City Metro hockey team hopes to make gigantic improvements on a disastrous 1981-82 season and in doing so, crush the victory hopes of Iowa High School Hockey League opponents who take the vast ice in its new Convention Center home in South Sioux City.

"In no way do I want to discount the efforts and work put forth by the previous Metro coaches because they're my friends," said new Metro co-coach Barry Head when the team was displayed in an intrasquad game Wednesday night, "but we honestly feel there is a new winning attitude around here and that attitude comes from a lot of things — new rules, a desire on the part of the players to be more dedicated and more intense competition for positions — that have really nothing to do with previous coaching."

Head, Dave LeGree and Les Batog, all former Sioux City Musketeer players, will serve as Metro coaches.

The Metros were just 2-14 last season and finished last in the nine-team IHSHL, which expands to 10 teams this year with the addition of Dubuque.

The "new-look" Metros open the season Saturday afternoon (3:30), hosting Waterloo Public, which finished third (10-6) in the high school league last season.

Waterloo Columbus won the 1982 title (15-1), followed by West Des Moines Valley (14-2), Waterloo Public (10-6), Des Moines Hoover-Roosevelt (9-6-1), Urbandale (8-8), Mason City (7-9), West Des Moines Dowling (3-12-1), Ames (3-13) and the Metros (2-14).

The 1982-83 state tournament will be held in Mason City's new ice arena.

"We have nearly 40 kids working out and another strength of the program will be a junior varsity team," added Head, a former forward who is seventh all-time in Musketeer scoring. "The junior varsity squad is scheduled to play eight games and we'll be bringing kids up from that squad to the varsity on and off all season."

Bob Sutherland, a North product who played collegiately at Wisconsin-Stevens Point, will coach the junior varsity squad and Wayne Johnson, a former Metro coach, will again be the Sioux City league representative.

Winger Bob Batcheller (North senior) and center Brad Hanson (West senior) were the top two goal scorers on last year's team and return to form the nucleus of the offense.

Head, LeGree and Batog are currently working with a 20-man varsity unit.

Defensemen Matt Anderson (East senior), Rob Casper (North freshman), Don Kisela (North junior), Gene Logsdon (West senior), Kirk Swanson (West sophomore) and Bryan Swartzel (Sergeant Bluff-Luton sophomore) are expected to play a major role in the improvement picture.

"We should be very strong defensively and mobile enough to carry the puck well," said Head. LeGree, a former Musketeer goalie, points to increased competition for positions as a key. "We told the kids, even the veterans, that no position on the team is secure. The 18 or 20 guys we start with on the varsity aren't guaranteed spots all year," said LeGree, the Musketeer career leader for wins in goal.

Other candidates at wing are Bill Emerick (Heelan senior), Mick Emerick (Heelan sophomore), Brian Kearns (West junior), Ted O'Brien (North junior), Doug Richou (West junior), Chap Cuthbert (North junior) and Craig Stoeve (West senior).

Also battling at center are Steve Erps (Woodbury Central junior), Troy Levich (East sophomore) and Shane Rol (East sophomore). Erps is in his first year with the Metros after transferring to Woodbury Central from the Detroit area, where he played junior hockey.

The Metros should also be solid in goal with returnees Brett Kieler (North senior) and newcomer Juha Seipajarvi.

Seipajarvi, an exchange student from Finland, attends West. Big things are expected from the rangy 6-foot-2, 155-pounder.

"Our toughest job has been selecting this original group who make up the varsity," said Head. "We want to keep all the kids interested and hope everyone remains with the team."

"The ideal situation for us is to become good enough that we can act as a feeder program for the Musketeers. With a facility like the Convention Center and all the ice time we want, we've got no excuses for having another record like we had last year."

Other squad members are Mike Adam (wing), Keith Becker (wing), Mike Derby (defense), David Dirks (defense), Chris Engle (goal), Mike Hanson (goal), Rex Hofer (center), Dave Holmes (wing), Ben Johnson (wing), Tom Leuenhagen (center), Scott Smith (goal), John Sorensen (wing), Mike Sturgeon (wing), Brad Tullis (defense) and Dennis Uhl (defense).