

Metros expecting to be improved

By Steve Allspach

Journal sports writer

Steve Nichol, a young man for all athletic seasons, has good reason to believe the Sioux City Metros can win the Iowa High School Hockey League championship.

Nichol, a senior at Heelan, also believes he can make a greater contribution to Metro success by not fighting a switch.

The lithe 6-2 Nichol, who plays varsity football, tennis and baseball at Heelan, has been shifted from forward to defense by new Metros Coach Jim Coyle.

"We're going to be a greatly improved team," said Nichol. "Mr. Coyle is a very good coach. I don't mind playing defense at all if it will help the team.

"With Mr. Coyle, we'll play more disciplined hockey. I really think we can be the class of the high school league," added Nichol.

"Steve Nichol was all-state honorable mention last season and I'm extremely confident he'll be an all-state defenseman by the end of the year," surmised Coyle, who played 10 seasons for the Waterloo Black Hawks in the days before the United States Hockey League became a Junior A league.

Nichol scored 25 points, including 11 goals, in 25 regular-season games last year.

Forward Mark Graber, a junior at Sergeant Bluff-Luton High School, also scored 25 points last season and collected 12 goals in regular-season play.

Another high-scoring forward is Brian Burke. Burke whistled home 13 goals last season and tallied 23 points.

The Metros finished third in the seven-team IHSHL last season with a 9-9 record, posted a 12-13 record in all regular-season games, then won two of three games in the state tournament to earn fifth place and finish with an overall record of 14-14.

The 46-year-old Coyle replaces Barry Head as the Metros coach.

Coyle, a 1961 University of Michigan graduate and scholarship hockey player there, retired as an active goaltender in 1973.

He's a native of Tillsonburg, Ontario, and has been an employee of Iowa Public Service since 1963. The Coyle family has lived in Sioux City for nearly three years and Coyle has been actively involved as a coach in squirt and bantam level youth hockey in both Waterloo and Sioux City for several years.

His coaching experience also includes a stint as goaltenders coach for the Columbus, Ohio, professional franchise.

"Speaking as an ex-goaltender, nobody's watched the game more than I have," said Coyle, who admits his memories of playing in the nets for Waterloo in Sioux City Auditorium are not exactly fond ones. "I like a solid, fundamental style of hockey with discipline.

"By discipline, I don't necessarily mean shouting and barking at players and having stringent rules. Discipline in hockey to me is learning to stay in position and be in control of yourself.

"It's my job as a coach to develop drills and skills that will improve individual weaknesses and strengthen the overall team."

Coyle also contends his goaltending will be top notch.

Scott Patrick, an East High junior, earned all-state honors last season with a 3.71 goals against average. Jeff Rowland is the backup goalie.

Nichol and fellow defenseman Mike Swartzel and forward Tom O'Brien are the tri-captains of the team.

Swartzel, a senior at Sergeant

Bluff-Luton, also earned all-state honors last year. Burke, like Nichol, was an honorable mention all-state choice.

Another imposing defenseman is Mike Scott.

Scott, a starting defensive tackle on the East team that won the Sioux Interstate Conference football title and reached the Class 4A state playoffs, is probably one of, if not the biggest, high school hockey player in the United States.

The 6-foot-5, 268-pound Scott should be a menacing force as long as opposition rinks don't have thin ice.

Coyle is also blessed with several other forwards who picked up valuable experience at both the varsity and junior varsity levels last season.

The Metros coach has established three lines, all considered equal.

O'Brien will team with Chad McCormick and Kyle Claffin on one line, while Graber, Kelly Goosman and Duane Erickson will collaborate on another line.

The third line features Chris Swanson, Burke and Todd Coyle, the coach's son.

Also back on defense is Brian Reynolds. Forward Mark Post has also been promoted to the varsity.

The Metros played in the IHSHL jamboree in Des Moines last weekend and outshot three foes 63-22 in winning three two-period games.

"One thing that pleased me was that approximately one-third of our shots were by defensemen," said Coyle. "Hopefully, our lines will be balanced as the season progresses. Speed will be one of our assets. We've got some kids who can really fly on the ice."

Mark Adam, a former Metros player, will be Coyle's assistant coach this season. Larry Swartzel is the team's league representative.

The Metros open the season at home Nov. 29 against Mason City. All the home games will be played in Sioux City Auditorium.

Ames won the IHSHL regular-season title last year with a 17-1 record, then won the state championship. The Waterloo Public Warriors finished second win the league with a 14-4 record.

METROS ROSTER

Forwards: Kelly Goosman, North, jr.; Chris Swanson, West, jr.; Duane Erickson, North, sr.; Mark Graber, Sergeant Bluff-Luton, jr.; Brian Burke, West, jr.; Todd Coyle, North, jr.; Kyle Claffin, East, sr.; Chad McCormick, Heelan, sr.; Tom O'Brien, North, sr.; Mark Post, North, jr.

Defensemen: Mike Swartzel, Sergeant Bluff-Luton, sr.; Steve Nichol, Heelan, sr.; Brian Reynolds, West, sr.; Mike Scott, East, sr.

Goalies: Scott Patrick, East, jr.; Jeff Rowland, East, jr.

METROS SCHEDULE

(Home games at Sioux City Auditorium)
November: 29 — Mason City, 3:15 p.m.
December: 6 — Urbandale, 3:15 p.m. 7 — Urbandale, 3:15 p.m. 12 — at Waterloo Public, 10 — at Waterloo Columbus, 20 — at Waterloo Public.
January: 2 — Ames, 7:30 p.m. 3 — Ames, 3:15 p.m. 10 — West Des Moines Valley-Dowling, 3:15 p.m. 11 — West Des Moines Valley-Dowling, 3:15 p.m. 17 — at Waterloo Columbus, 18 — at Mason City, 24 — Waterloo-Columbus, 3:15 p.m.
February: 6 — at Urbandale, 7 — at West Des Moines Valley-Dowling, 14 — Waterloo Public, 3:15 p.m. 21 — at Mason City, 22 — at Ames.
March: 6-7-8 — Iowa High School Hockey League state tournament in Sioux City.

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