



Sioux City Metro hockey players, standing from left, Dan Davies, Terry Reeves, Kimmo Kukkonen, Daniel Thonestad and Taylor Schramm and kneeling from left, Landon Blatchford and Eric Rubel, pay attention to words of wisdom from coaches Dave Davies, right, and Jim Peck. The team opens play in the state tournament today. (Staff photo by Gary Anderson)

Metros try to give coach happy farewell

By Barry Poe
Journal sports writer

The Sioux City Metros begin defense of their Iowa High School Hockey League state championship with a particular mission in mind — to bid Coach Dave Davies a fond farewell.

Davies, who has guided the Metros to back-to-back IHSHL state titles, will step down following this weekend's state tournament after five years at the Metros helm.

Sioux City, which repeated as state titlists on its home ice a year ago, begins its quest for a third crown, facing Ames at the North Iowa Ice

Arena in Mason City at 12:30 p.m. today.

The Metros won their last three regular season games to finish with a 14-10 record, third both overall and in the ISHL's West Division. Sioux City actually tied St. Joseph for third place overall, but a tiebreaker formula taking into consideration goals for and against awarded St. Joe the No. 3 seed.

Sioux City surrendered six less goals than St. Joseph (98-92), but the Missourians had 121 goals to 113 for the Metros.

"We're in the bracket with the Gladiators now, but that suits me just fine," said Davies, still the all-time leading scorer for the Sioux City

Musketeers. "I felt we outplayed them this year, although we didn't beat them in four tries."

Omaha's Gladiators are the top-seeded squad with an 18-6 record and drew a first-round bye, facing the winner of a late Thursday game between Dubuque (3-18-1) and the Omaha Junior Lancers (6-18).

Therefore, if the Metros get by Ames (12-10), they will more than likely face the Gladiators in the second round on Saturday.

Second seed Des Moines Valley/Dowling

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Emergency appendectomy sidelines Metros' top goalie

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(17-7) plays host Mason City (9-12) in another first-round game, while St. Joseph tangles with Waterloo (10-12).

The Metros beat Mason City 5-2 in last year's championship game.

"The league is a little weaker this year, but there's a lot more parity," commented Davies. "This is the tightest it's been in my five years."

As usual, goaltending will play a major role in determining who ultimately wins the state championship. Sioux City's Jesse Basarich proved that a year ago, earning a spot on the 18-player all-state team.

The Metros, though, must do without senior netminder Ben Hudson, who recently underwent an emergency appendectomy and is lost for the season. Hudson, a Denison High School student, had an 8-2-0 record in 12 games, surrendered 34 goals and had a save percentage of 86.2.

He'll be replaced by Matt Sewalson, a sophomore from East High, who has been 6-7 in 14 contests, giving up 50 goals. Sewalson, then, will be backed up by sophomore Chad Stewart of North, who appeared in just one regular season game.

"We've got all the confidence in the world that Matt will do a good job," said Davies. "Our defense has to play solid and the forwards have to capitalize on their chances. It's a two-way street going up and down the roster."

Davies' club no doubt has athletes who can put the puck in the net.

Dan Davies, the son of the coach, put together another solid regular season, finishing eighth in the league

in scoring with an average of 1.91 points per game. An all-state football punter for Heelan, the 6-2, 190-pound defenseman rifled in 20 goals to go along with 22 assists for a team-high 42 total points.

Davies was also an all-state honoree last season after winding up third in the league scoring derby.

Veteran forward Eric Rubel of West High ranked 10th in scoring with 37 points, an average of 1.54 per game. Landon Blatchford of East, with 25 total points, also averaged over one per outing (1.04).

Meanwhile, foreign exchange students Kimmo Kukkonen of Finland and Dan Thonestad of Sweden have contributed their share on offense.

Other holdovers from last year's championship unit include seniors T.J. Juon (North) and Taylor Schramm (East) and sophomore Seth Schramm (East).

Kukkonen, who attends Sergeant Bluff-Luton High School, finished with a 1.17 points per game average with 27 points. The diminutive Thonestad, a 5-7, 135-pound forward who's a senior at Akron-Westfield, leads the team in goals with 22 and finished third on the team in scoring at 1.46 points.

Along with Davies, other Metro defensemen are Juon, Seth Schramm, sophomore Chris Hedquist of South Sioux City, senior Cory Roberts of North and sophomore Josh Strong of Jefferson, S.D.

Rubel centers one line with Thonestad on the left wing and Mike Stoneberg, a freshman from North, on the right.

Center Blatchford's line also includes sophomore left winger Mark Doren of West and Taylor Schramm.

Meanwhile, Kukkonen and senior Terry Reeves of Sergeant Bluff-Luton are the wingers on a line centered by Nate Kelly, a sophomore

from East.

Because of the evident parity, upsets may abound in this year's tournament.

"Teams that finished in the top three or four have been beaten by weaker teams in the league," said Davies. "It happened consistently throughout the regular season."

"When you're in a single elimination tournament, if the guys don't put it together for 45 minutes, then you aren't going to get it done."

The Metros lost both regular season games to Ames, the champions of the East Division, 2-0 and 5-2.

Mike Ogbourne averaged 1.16 points per game for the Little Cyclones scoring 22 in 19 games, while Rusty Crawford chipped in 1.14, netting 25 in 22 games. Goalkeeper Cory Cooper fashioned a 9-7 record with an 87.8 save percentage mark.

Today's winner moves to the semifinal round at 12:30 Saturday, while the loser drops to the consolation bracket. The championship game gets under way at 3 p.m. Sunday.

The Metros are indeed in capable hands with longtime teammates Davies and Jim Peck, who played together both at the University of St. Louis and for the Musketeers. Davies, in fact, hopes Peck will take over the head job next season.

But first, Davies' final Metros squad looks to complete an impressive hat trick.