

State prep hockey title up for grabs

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MASON CITY — Parity has thrown the Iowa High School Hockey League's state tournament into a hat for the nine teams that will take the ice at North Iowa Arena this weekend.

"I don't know if there is a team in the league that couldn't win it," says first-year Waterloo Warriors Coach Mike Brown. "With Mason City being at home, I think that should be a big advantage for them. It always is, but I think everything else is so even."

The tournament begins with a preliminary game Thursday night matching the league's last two teams — Dubuque and Omaha's Junior Lancers. Brown and the Warriors open Friday morning at 8 o'clock against St. Joseph.

The rest of the first round has the regular-season champion Omaha Gladiators playing the Junior Lancers-Dubuque winner, Valley-Dowling meeting Mason City and Sioux City tangling with Ames.

Waterloo hasn't played St. Joseph since early in the season when the two teams split. The Warriors won, 9-7, and the Griffons responded with a 4-2 triumph. That was long ago, says Brown.

"We played real good during the middle of the season, then we sort of hit a little roadblock. I think we've bounced back here the last seven or eight games and been pretty solid.

"We've been in every game for a while now."

The Warriors, 10-12-0 overall, went 4-4 over their final eight games. Three of the losses came in overtime, including two against the 18-6 record Gladiators. Waterloo was not shut out during the regular season and allowed an average of just 3.7 goals over its last six games.

"For a while there was just a period of everybody getting used to everybody," Brown explains. "Then we started to make improvement. Easily, the biggest improvement we've made has been defensively. I think our goaltender, our defensemen and our forwards have all gotten better defensively."

The Warriors will be tested by the league's No. 2 offensive team. St. Joseph poured in 121 goals over 24 regular season games and features league scoring champion Mike Siebert, who tallied 46 goals and 60 points in 22 games. Aaron Kuehl wasn't far behind with 50 points and Brandon Furlong contributed 37.

Waterloo's most consistent scorers have been senior Ben Buckley and Finnish exchange student Panu Ratala. Buckley hammered in 31 goals and totaled 51 points in 22 games. Ratala, who is a sophomore at Jesup High School, finished with 25 points.

"I think the last two weeks he's played as well as he's played all year," says Brown. "He hasn't been scoring quite as much, but he's

doing a lot of other things right."

Other players have also developed as scorers. Chad Fordyce finished with 31 points while Brett Klima, Matt Lange, Brian Varney and Wade Eldridge have made contributions.

"All of those kids at different times have come to the top and given us a big goal or a nice play when we've needed it," says their coach.

The surface at North Iowa Arena is a big one compared to many around the state, allowing the teams that skate and move the puck enough room to execute their offenses.

"It's a big rink over there. I like that," says Brown. "If we play hard, I like our chances."

The hottest team heading into the tournament is Omaha's Gladiators, with a modest five-game winning streak. They feature the No. 2 and No. 3 scorers in the league with Joey Perell and Heath Shaffer. Perell finished with 65 points in 24 games while Shaffer piled up 62 in 23 games. Omaha also has an outstanding goaltender in Scott Kincaid, who has turned away 89.8 percent of the 687 shots on goal he's faced.

IHSHL standings

EAST DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	Pct.	GF	GA
Ames	12	10	0	.545	80	86
Waterloo	10	12	0	.455	97	94
Mason City	9	12	1	.432	90	86
Dubuque	3	18	1	.159	51	132

WEST DIVISION

Team	W	L	T	Pct.	GF	GA
Omaha Gladiators	18	6	0	.750	127	85
Valley-Dowling	17	7	0	.708	126	72
St. Joseph	14	10	0	.583	121	98
Sioux City	14	10	0	.583	113	92
Omaha Jr. Lancers	6	18	0	.250	73	127

FINAL SCORING LEADERS

Player	GP	Go	As	Pts	PPG
Siebert, StJ	22	46	14	60	2.73
J.Perell, OmGl	24	30	35	65	2.71
Shaffer, OmGl	23	35	27	62	2.70
Poi, VDowl	22	30	24	54	2.45
Buckley, Wat.	22	31	20	51	2.32
Kuehl, StJ	24	24	26	50	2.08
Conard, VDowl	21	17	24	41	1.95
Davies, StCity	22	20	22	42	1.91
Casteel, OmJL	22	22	13	35	1.59
Rubel, StCity	24	16	21	37	1.54
Furlong, StJ	24	21	16	37	1.54

FINAL GOALTENDING LEADERS

Player	W-L-T	SOG	GA	Pct	SO
T.Roche, VDowl	12-4-0	340	32	90.6	2
Kincaid, OmGl	17-5-0	687	70	89.8	2
Cooper, Ames	9-7-0	449	55	87.8	1
Rudger, OmJL	3-9-0	513	67	86.9	0