

Warriors open season with weekend pair

By **DOUG NEWHOFF**
Assistant Sports Editor

Waterloo's Warriors will soon find out if the chain that linked the city's two high school hockey programs three years ago is strong enough to lift the Warriors back to the top of the Iowa High School Hockey League.

The merger of the Columbus High program with that of the Warriors came full circle over the summer when former Sailor coach Mike Brown was named to succeed Dave Swick after 13 seasons that included four state tournament championships, three runner-up finishes and a pair of IHSHL regular-season crowns.

Brown and his new team make their 1992-93 debut this weekend. Dubuque visits McElroy Auditorium Friday and Valley-Dowling is the opponent Saturday in a pair of 7:40 p.m. faceoffs.

Brown won't be alone as a new coach this season, and he certainly won't be a stranger. At least one of his former Columbus players, Ben Buckley, remains with the Warriors and Brown is familiar with most of the others on his squad.

Dubuque, Sioux City, Ames, Valley-Dowling and the Omaha Gladiators also have new leadership behind the bench as the Iowa prep circuit begins its 17th season.

Brown and the Warriors have spent their preseason adapting to each other and waiting for those still involved in football to join the team. One by one, the players have been trickling in from the metro high schools and the surrounding area, including Hudson,

Grundy Center and La Porte City.

"I think the response has been good from everybody," says Brown, whose resume includes two regular-season championships, two coach of the year awards and a 67-37-3 record in five seasons at Columbus.

"The transition for the kids to playing for me will be the only real difference. Once we get used to each other, I believe we'll be somewhere right up in the pack."

If everyone expected to join the team follows through, Brown will have a group of around 45 to work with. That will include as many as 15 who have little or no organized hockey experience, but appear to be quality athletes, Brown says. They'll be divided into varsity and junior varsity squads.

The Warriors got their first taste of competition last weekend at the league's annual preseason jamboree in Mason City. Waterloo went 1-3 without a half-dozen players Brown expects to contribute for the varsity.

"We learned a lot," he says. "I think we got better all weekend and I think in a month or so, we'll be all right."

Ames, one of the teams expected to contend for the 1992-93 title, routed the Warriors 7-0 to open the jamboree.

"They were easily the best team at the jamboree," Brown says. "Five of their first six shots went in the net."

Waterloo gave Valley-Dowling a tough time before a goal in the final minute secured a 3-1 win for the Tigers. The Warriors then blanked St.

Joseph 2-0 and suffered a 4-0 shutout at the hands of Omaha's Gladiators.

"We played four freshmen who had never played high school hockey before among our six defensemen," Brown points out. "And we only had one goaltender all weekend."

Seven of the nine IHSHL members participated in the jamboree. Defending league and tournament champion Sioux City, along with Omaha's Junior Lancers, were not present.

More than a look at the other teams, Brown wanted a chance to evaluate the available Warriors' personnel.

The veterans, in addition to Buckley, include Chad Fordyce, Brian Varney, Wade Eldridge, Aaron Kaufman, Brett Klima, Matt Lange, Tim Markey and Mike Rupkey. Eldridge and Buckley led a team that lacked offensive punch during a 5-17 1991-92 season with 16 points each. Buckley was an IHSHL all-star as a defenseman, but he may see swing duty on a forward line, too.

Klima, Fordyce and Varney also scored in double digits a year ago.

"I think we're going to have some solid defensemen," Brown assesses. "And I think we'll have two pretty good lines of kids who have played before. If we get decent goaltending, we'll be fine."

Eldridge and Matt Miller, both junior varsity goalies last year, have the inside track on the vacant varsity job, but Brown was still waiting for Miller to join the team early in the week.

Brown's coaching staff, however,

is in place. Scott Murphy, who shared the coaching duties of the United States Hockey League's Waterloo Black Hawks with Brown a few years ago, will be Brown's varsity assistant. Bob Ames, a product of the Warriors' program, is the junior varsity head coach.

Together, the team's new leadership will try to return the Warriors to a position of power in the IHSHL. Waterloo's last regular-season league crown came in 1982-83 although the Warriors won their fourth state tournament title in 1990.

Warriors' schedule

Head coach: Mike Brown (1st season)
1991-92 record: 5-19-0
Nov. 13 — Dubuque, 7:40 p.m.
Nov. 14 — Valley-Dowling, 7:40 p.m.
Nov. 20 — at Omaha Jr. Lancers, 8:30 p.m.
Nov. 21 — at St. Joseph, 5:15 p.m.
Nov. 27 — St. Joseph, 7:40 p.m.
Dec. 4 — Ames, 7:40 p.m.
Dec. 11 — at Valley-Dowling, 7 p.m.
Dec. 12-13 — at Mason City Tournament
Dec. 19 — at Mason City, 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 26-27 — at Minnetonka, Minn., Junior Golf Tournament
Dec. 28 — Warriors Alumni game, 7 p.m.
Jan. 8 — at Ames, 8 p.m.
Jan. 9 — Omaha Jr. Lancers, 7:40 p.m.
Jan. 16 — at Dubuque, 4:10 p.m.
Jan. 19 — at All-Star game (Mason City)
Jan. 22 — Mason City, 7:40 p.m.
Jan. 23 — Sioux City, 7:40 p.m.
Jan. 29 — at Omaha Gladiators, 8:30 p.m.
Jan. 30 — at Sioux City, 2:45 p.m.
Feb. 5 — Ames, 7:40 p.m.
Feb. 6 — Omaha Gladiators, 7:40 p.m.
Feb. 7 — at Dubuque, 11 a.m.
Feb. 12 — Mason City, 7:40 p.m.
Feb. 13 — at Ames, 7:30 p.m.
Feb. 19 — Dubuque, 7:40 p.m.
Feb. 26 — at Mason City, 8 p.m.
March 4-7 — at State Tour. (Mason City)
March 13-14 — at Junior Varsity State Tournament (Mason City)
RETURNING LETTERWINNERS (9) — Aaron Kaufman, Brett Klima, Ben Buckley, Wade Eldridge, Matt Lange, Chad Fordyce, Brian Varney, Tim Markey, Mike Rupkey.