

Up-and-down Metros begin defense of IHSHL crown

By Barry Poe

Journal sports writer

It's been an up-and-down season, to be sure, for the Sioux City Metros, who begin defense of their Iowa High School Hockey League tournament championship today.

The Metros, seeded fourth in the eight-team tourney at the sparkling Young Arena in Waterloo, face fifth seed Ames at 1 o'clock.

Sioux City is shooting for its fifth straight berth in the championship game and its third title in the last four years. The Metros defeated the Omaha Gladiators 8-1 in last year's championship game.

"It's been a strange year, that's for sure," said second-year Metros Coach Jim Peck. "We weren't prepared to play right away and lost our first three games, which hurt us right off the bat.

"We did alright for awhile, then went on another tailspin, but finished the year with three straight road wins, which was nice."

The Metros finished third in the IHSHL West Division with a 15-9 record, while Ames, 9-12-1, was second in the East Division.

Today's winner gets a shot at the unbeaten Omaha Junior Lancers, boasting a 24-0 record, at 12:30 p.m. Saturday. The loser drops to the consolation bracket, playing again tonight at 6 o'clock.

Peck said that although his team

hasn't had the scoring power he expected, one of the major problems has been inconsistent goaltending.

"We just didn't have the strong goaltending we have in the past," said Peck, who guided the Metros to a 24-6 record in his first year as head coach. "It was very sporadic at the beginning of the season."

That's a bit of a surprise, considering Dirk Worner and Matt Sewalson shared starting duties a year ago.

Sewalson, a senior from East High, is 7-4 with a save percentage of .850 and goals-against average of 3.51, while Worner, a sophomore from North, is 7-5 with a .870 save percentage and 2.66 goals-against average.

Mark Doren, Nate Kelly and Mike Stoneburg are the three leading Metro scorers. Doren, a senior from West, has 23 goals and 22 assists for 45 points, Kelly, a senior from East, 17 goals and 16 assists for 33 points and Stoneburg, a junior from North, 17 goals and 10 assists for 27 points.

"I really thought we'd have four or five guys who would score 20 goals," said Peck. "But we have averaged six goals a game in the last three games."

The Metros, who closed the regular season with a road win over the Omaha Gladiators and two at St. Joseph, Mo., scored 119 goals while giving up 74.

"Our defensemen have played well, considering that our tending hasn't been that great," said Peck. "They've allowed an average of only three goals a game and have done a good job of keeping the puck out of our zone."

Defensive stalwarts are Chris Hedquist (South Sioux City), Seth Schramm (East), Josh Strong (Dakota Valley) and Garret Heyns (North).

Others expected to contribute offensively are senior Robert Jaynes of North (12 goals, 21 points), sophomore Walt Johnson of North (11 assists, 15 points) and Johan Jigenstedt, a foreign exchange student from Sweden who attends North (14 points).

Matt Andrews, a sophomore from South Sioux City, and West High foreign exchange student Ari Helenius from Sweden have 12 points each.

The Junior Lancers, of course, are the tournament's top seed, followed by East Division champion Mason City (17-5), Des Moines (17-7) and Sioux City. Those four are the only teams with winning records.

"We just want to get by our first game with Ames," said Peck. "I'd think we'd have a pretty good shot at winning this thing again, since some of our kids have been here three or four years."

Sioux City split regular season games with Ames, winning 6-5 in Ames while losing 5-2 in its final home game at the Sioux City Auditorium.

The unbeaten Omaha Junior Lancers have beaten the Metros four times, but the last victory came by a slim 2-1 margin Feb. 11 in Sioux City.

Sioux City finished runner-up in 1993 after capturing back-to-back IHSHL tournament titles.

METRO SPORTS

Saturday is 'Dunk Em Chiefs Day'

Sioux City Mayor Bob Scott will officially declare Saturday "Dunk Em Chiefs Day" when the Morningside College men's basketball team faces Regis College in the NCAA Division II North Central Region tournament at Hays, Kan.

An official team send-off will be held today at 2:15 at Sioux Gateway