

Metros open IHSHL post-season tonight

By Barry Poe
Journal sports writer

Two years removed from their last Iowa High School Hockey League tournament championship, the Sioux City Metros begin play in the 1996 post-season tonight.

The Metros of Coach Jim Peck, who finished fifth in the overall IHSHL league standings with a 16-10 record, tangle with fourth-place Des Moines (17-8-1) at 6 o'clock at the Des Moines Metro Ice Arena.

Sioux City, a winner in seven of its last eight games, wound up third in the West Division behind the Omaha Jr. Lancers and Omaha Gladiators. During that eight-game span, the Metros averaged five goals per game, while giving up just 1.9.

"Our defensive play has improved immensely," said Peck, finishing his third season as head coach. "The forwards are coming

back to pick up their checks and the defensemen are maturing.

"They finish their checks and are moving the puck out of our end quickly."

The Metros finished fifth in last year's tournament after an impressive run of domination in the IHSHL. Sioux City won the 1994 state tournament in Peck's first season, was second in 1993 and also nabbed titles in 1991 and 1992 while finishing as runner-up in 1990.

"Last year was kind of a disappointing year," said Peck, a former Sioux City Musketeers standout. "Things just didn't seem to click.

"Counting all of the tournaments, these kids have played 40 to 45 games, so they're going down there to win."

Another major factor for the Metros has been the emergence of

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goaltender Damon Keith. Keith, after struggling in the early going, has played well enough to become one of five Sioux City representatives in last week's league all-star game.

"He realizes now the importance of solid, consistent goaltending and the confidence it give players in front of him," said Peck. "Damon's been keeping us in the game and giving us an opportunity to win every game we play."

Keith, a junior from North High, sports a 9-7 won-lost record and .857 save percentage.

Two more North High products, senior Mike Stoneburg and junior Walt Johnson, continue to be the Metros' go-to guys. Both veteran players took part in the all-star game and bring a tremendous amount of experience to the ice.

Stoneburg totaled 33 points during the regular season, tying Johnson for the team lead with 19 goals.

Stoneburg and Johnson play on a line that also includes freshman Jeff Kempter and Kyle Wornor.

Peck said Mark Munger, a junior from North, has been a steady performer down the stretch. Munger, who's tallied 11 goals and 24 points, centers a line of juniors Matt Andrews (South Sioux City) and Brett Frette (East), along with sophomore Willie Persinger of North.

Youngsters Trent Mozak, a freshman from East, and sophomores Clint Stiles of East and Chresten Jensen of North, have shown improvement. Mozak, in fact, led the team with 34 points,

scoring 10 goals and 24 assists.

"They had a tough time adapting to this style of play, mainly the speed," said Peck. "But they've been impressive in the latter part of the season."

Sioux City's youthful defensive corps, led by senior Sam Kincaide of Homer, Neb., will be put on the spot. Junior Jason Augustine of Heelan and sophomores Nick Mills of North and Brett Suing of East are the Metro defenders, while Jarrod Berg, a senior from Akron-Westfield, plays a reserve role.

Kincaide and Augustine were also named to the IHSHL all-star team. Jake Hinderman, a freshman from East, backs up Keith in goal.

"We're asking our defensemen to grow up in a hurry," said Peck. "Kincaide needs to provide poise and leadership, but we look for them to play a steady defensive game and eliminate the costly mistakes young players are prone to make."

Des Moines, tonight's opponent, beat the Metros twice during the regular season, 2-1 and 4-3 in overtime. Each of those games was played at Des Moines.

Should the Metros pass their first-round test, they'll more than likely get a shot at top-seeded Mason City (22-3-1) in the semifinals. Mason City, which drew a bye, plays either the Kansas City Blades or Waterloo.

St. Joseph and Ames meet at 8 a.m., with the winner meeting the Omaha Junior Lancers at 3:30. Dubuque and the Omaha Gladiators square off in the other opening-round game.

A Sioux City loss would slip the Metros into the losers bracket for a 10:30 a.m. game Saturday.