

Warriors, Caps a perfect match

By DOUG NEWHOFF
Sports Editor

WATERLOO — The Waterloo Warriors are no longer on slippery ice.

When the metro area's only prep hockey team takes the frozen surface at Urbandale's Metro Ice Sports Facility for this weekend's Midwest High School Hockey League Tournament, it will be a squad with its feet firmly planted among the league's top teams.

The Warriors, 19-10-2-2 on the season, tangle with the Des Moines Capitals (19-10-4-0) in a quarterfinal matchup at 12:30 p.m. Friday.

In years past, that prospect would have chilled the Warriors and their fans.

Not this year.

"They've been kind of a thorn in our sides the last few years," said Waterloo head coach Shawn Weinke. "There's always been kind of a mental thing. This year, it's not there. We've taken that step.

"This year, every time we took the ice we expected to win."

Waterloo and Des Moines are about as well-matched as two teams could be. They went 1-1-1 during the regular season. The Warriors won, 8-3, the Capitals won, 2-1 in overtime, and the two teams played to a 3-3 overtime tie.

Both have 19 wins. Waterloo scored 110 goals and gave up 78. Des Moines put 104 in the net and surrendered 68.

"We probably match up as well against them as we do anybody," said Weinke.

Des Moines' strength is its special teams play.

"The key there is discipline," Weinke explained. "Against the Capitals, our best penalty-kill will just be staying out of the box. When we've been five-on-five with them, we have played with them and actually taken it to them at times."

The Warriors have matured this season, Weinke continued.

Jake Irey has had an outstanding offensive year, finishing third in the league in scoring with 52 points. Tyler Mahncke added 29 points. Goaltender Brian Dobes ranked second in save percentage at 926 while posting five shutouts. Irey and Dobes were named to the league's All-Star team.

"Irey is just a playmaker, and with Brian making the saves he's needed to, he's kept us in all the games," said Weinke.

But it's been the development of the entire team that has produced success, Weinke continued.

"Probably our depth has been the biggest thing," he said. "We've changed a few lines around with

Tournament glance

GAMES FRIDAY

(Seeding in parentheses)

12:30 p.m. - (4) Des Moines

Capitals vs. (5) Waterloo

3 p.m. - (3) Quad Cities vs. (6)

Kansas City

5 p.m. - (2) Omaha vs. (7)

Mason City

7:15 p.m. - (1) Des Moines Oak

Leafs vs. (8) Lincoln

GAMES SATURDAY

Semifinals

12:30 p.m. - Oakleafs-Lincoln winner vs. Capitals-Waterloo winner

2:45 p.m. - Omaha-Mason City winner vs. Quad Cities-Kansas City winner

Consolation

8 a.m. - Omaha-Mason City loser vs. Quad Cities-Kansas City loser

10:15 a.m. - Oakleafs-Lincoln loser vs. Capitals-Waterloo loser

GAMES SUNDAY

Championship

1:45 p.m. - semifinal winners

Third place

11:30 a.m. - semifinal losers

5th place

9:15 a.m. - consolation winners

7th place

7 a.m. - consolation losers

some different combinations and given some guys some different responsibilities. They've accepted them and done a nice job.

"No one thing really sticks out about this team. It's just everybody doing their job and working hard and not trying to do too much.

"Some of our younger guys have stepped up, and they've complemented the senior guys who have been around. This senior group were all freshmen my first year, and they've been a good foundation. They learned early on what I wanted, and it wasn't easy by any means, but they've learned and grown.

"This year, even minus the wins, has been my most enjoyable. I enjoy going to the rink every day. I'm excited about the weekend, but I hate to see it end at the same time."

The Warriors hope that doesn't happen until they have a trophy in hand Sunday.

If they can defeat the Capitals, their likely semifinal opponent is the regular-season and defending champion Des Moines Oak Leafs, who have racked up a 26-4-1-2 record to date.

"They're disciplined, they don't give up a lot of special teams opportunities, and their goaltender is as good as anybody in the league," said Weinke. "They don't score goals like they have in the past, but they don't give up many quality shots, either.

"If somebody gets a hot goalie against them or can pop a few in, I think they can surprise them."

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