

with Register staff writer Lisa Colonno

Oak Leafs pick up where they left off

New coach takes over for defending champs, who return key players.

By LISA COLONNO
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Jeff Richer will move a few steps over on the Des Moines Oak Leafs' bench Friday to fulfill his new role as head coach.

"I spent the last seven years at the defensive end of the bench," Richer said. "I'm looking forward to moving to the offensive end."

Richer replaced the Midwest High School Hockey League team's first and only other head coach, Doug Borud, this summer. Borud became coach when the Oak Leafs formed in 1998 and left after last season's second consecutive championship to spend more time with his family.

His longtime assistant and former Iowa State hockey teammate Richer, 34, took over. He is one of seven new head coaches in the 13-team league this season, including the first-year Tri-City Jr. Storm and Kansas City Stars.

"Those were the nine best years of hockey I've ever had," Borud said. "It was great to be able to take a program just starting to where it is now and getting the program built to where it needed to be. It's nice to give it to a guy who is an Oak Leaf and has been



Richer

D.M. Capitals

2006-07 record:
19-10-4-0

Key returners: Forward A.J. Krist had seven points in 11 games, but is expected to be a top forward after missing most of the 2006-07 season with a broken leg; Tyler Scott had 10 points last season.

D.M. Oak Leafs

2006-07 record:
26-4-1-2

Key returners: Senior defenseman Chris Kunnen posted 41 points, including 27 assists, last season; forward Troy Du Bay also was a league all-star.

there for the bad years and there for the good years."

The league's 2007-08 schedule opens Friday with the Oak Leafs hosting Mason City at 7:45 p.m. at Metro Ice Sports Facility and their in-town rival Des Moines Capitals hosting the new Kansas City Stars at 8 p.m. at 95KGGG Arena.

Capitals coach Scott Long is entering his second season. He previously coached with Richer and the Oak Leafs.

"I have nothing but the most respect for him," Long said. "The transition will be easy since he was with Doug for seven years. I expect a similar style. They are a team to beat this year. They have a lot

of kids coming back."

The Oak Leafs return 11 players with varsity experience and 12 seniors, including six senior defensemen.

The Oak Leafs have participated in the last three state championship games, winning in 2006 and 2007. They won the past two regular-season titles.

Expectations remain high.

"It's hard to settle for anything less after you've been there for so long," said Robbie George, a senior Oak Leafs defenseman from Valley. "My goal is to win a state championship because I envy those seniors who get to go out on top."

The Capitals lost in last season's state tournament semifinals to the Oak Leafs 4-3 in overtime.

They graduated 12 players and lost a couple more to midget triple-A teams, so the Capitals will be lacking in age and experience.

"I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do," Long said. "Maybe we'll surprise some teams."

The Capitals and Oak Leafs have the first of three meetings this season in their annual Turkey Cup game, at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 20 at 95KGGG Arena.

Elementary teacher Richer played hockey for Valley-Dowling, which evolved into the Capitals.

"Now I'm coaching in the same league as I played in," Richer said. "It's giving back to a game I've loved all my life; being a part of it from a different perspective."

OTHER MIDWEST HIGH SCHOOL LEAGUE TEAMS

Ames Little Cyclones

2006-07 record: 5-27-1-0

Key returner: Forward Jake Scebold was named a league all-star last season as a sophomore.

Cedar Rapids Mustangs

2006-07 record: 2-29-0-2

Key returner: Senior defenseman John Rainey was a league all-star in 2006-07.

Dubuque Devils

2006-07 record: 10-18-3-2

Key returner: Forward Tyler Porter posted 14 points last season to rank tied for third on the team.

Kansas City Jr. Outlaws

2006-07 record: 18-10-4-1

Key returners: League all-star forwards Mike Rogers (33 points) and David Phillips (32 points) are back.

Lincoln Jr. Stars

2006-07 record: 15-13-2-3

Key returners: Bryce Buchmann (46 points) and Jorgan Kontar (40 points) both finished among the league's top 10 points leaders.

Mason City Mohawks

2006-07 record: 16-12-3-2

Key returners: Team points leader Chris Jensen (40 points) and league all-star forward Spencer Poppinga return.

Quad City Blues

2006-07 record: 20-9-3-1

Key returners: Josh Prygon finished among the league's top 10 scorers with 42 points (27 assists); all-star Jeff Morris had 34 points.

Sioux City Metros

2006-07 record: 14-17-0-2

Key returner: Forward Andrew Bauer was named a league all-star and finished second on the Metros with 25 points.

Waterloo Warriors

2006-07 record: 19-10-2-2

Key returners: Goaltender Brian Dobes finished second in the league with 19 wins; forward Jake Irey was an all-league pick and named to the all-star team with forward Tyler Mahnick and defenseman Zach Hester.

Across the league

- The Kansas City Stars and Tri-City Jr. Storm are new to the league this season. The Omaha Jr. Lancers dropped out.
- The Quad City Blues will host the 2008 varsity championship tournament Feb. 29-March 2. The tournament will become centralized starting in 2009 and be hosted by the league in Ames.