



RODNEY WHITE/THE REGISTER

Robbie George, left, Troy Du Bay and Tyler Belling are the top scorers for the defending Midwest High School tournament champion Des Moines Oak Leafs.

Senior-laden Leafs look for three-peat

By LISA COLONNO
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

A move from defenseman to forward brought a fresh perspective for Des Moines Oak Leafs senior Robbie George.

"It's a lot more work," he said.

George is one of four Oak Leafs players who rank among the Midwest High School Hockey League's top 21 in scoring.

The top-seeded Oak Leafs enter this weekend's league championship tournament trying to become the first team to win three straight titles. They open the three-day event at 8 p.m. Friday against Sioux City at the Quad City Sports Center in Davenport.

The fourth-seeded Des Moines Capitals play the Kansas City Jr. Outlaws at 5 p.m. on Friday.

"This is what we've been preparing for," said Oak Leafs forward Tyler Belling, who has scored a team-leading 31 goals. "The league regular season is great to win and it means that you are consistent throughout, but if you win the state tournament, that's what people will remember the next year."

The Oak Leafs (31-2-2-1) scored a league-high 196 goals this season, averaging 5.44 a game en route to their third regular-season title in a row.

Defenseman Chris Kunnen leads the team with 68 points. His 44 assists lead the league. His points total ranks fifth overall and first among defenseman.

"The great thing about Chris is, yeah, he's an offen-

Schedule

Midwest High School Hockey Championship Tournament at Quad City Sports Center, Davenport (seeds in parenthesis):

FRIDAY

8:00 — D.M. Capitals (4) vs. Kansas City Jr. Outlaws (5)
8:30 — Waterloo (3) vs. Lincoln (6)
7:30 — Quad Cities (2) vs. Mason City (7)
8:00 — D.M. Oak Leafs (1) vs. Sioux City (8)

SATURDAY

8:30 a.m. — Consolation semifinal
11 a.m. — Consolation semifinal
1:30 — Semifinal
4:00 — Semifinal

SUNDAY

9 a.m. — Seventh-place game
9:30 a.m. — Fifth-place game
11:30 a.m. — Third-place game
2:00 — Championship

Notes: For results, box scores or for more information, log on to www.midwesthighschoolhockey.com

sive threat, but he still plays strong defense," Oak Leafs coach Jeff Richer said.

Belling, George and Troy Du Bay are the team's top three scoring forwards with more than 40 points each.

"Going into the state tournament the offense is looking pretty good," Du Bay said. "We're looking pretty sharp passing, shooting and moving the puck back and forth."

The Oak Leafs also own the 13-team league's top defense, allowing 1.61 goals a game. The anticipation of that prompted George's move.

"(He's) a great defenseman and the thing is we

had a lot of great defensemen returning this year," Richer said. "We had a couple of guys that didn't come back and play with us (on offense), so we had some spots we needed to fill. He's got such great speed and puck awareness and understands how the game works offensively. It's nice to have him available and throw him up there."

The Capitals (25-8-1-2) also have one of the league's top defenses, allowing just 73 goals.

Goaltender Derek Temple ranks second in the league with 21 wins.

"I like our chances," Capitals coach Scott Long said. "We've been young, but we beat every team in the tournament with the exception of the Oak Leafs."

If both Des Moines' teams advance to the semifinals, they would meet at 4 p.m. Saturday. The Leafs won the season series 3-0. They also beat the Capitals in last season's semifinals, 4-3 in overtime.

"Obviously they're a great team," Long said. "We'd love the challenge. Last year in the semifinals was the best game I've been involved with."

The Oak Leafs have 12 seniors on their roster.

"When you have all of these players who are outstanding players, sometimes there is a tendency to become more individuals," Richer said. "That hasn't happened."

A Des Moines team has advanced to the championship game the last eight years and won the last four tournament titles.