

New attitude

Warriors carry high expectations to tourney

By DOUG NEWHOFF
Sports Editor

WATERLOO—Doubt can be a formidable foe.

However, it's one the Waterloo Warriors don't expect to encounter this weekend during the Midwest High School Hockey League tournament at Davenport's Quad City Sports Center.

The Warriors (28-6-2-0) open postseason play at 5:30 p.m. Friday against Lincoln (22-11-1-2), and for the first time in recent history they will go into the league's showcase event expecting to challenge for the championship.

And why not?

Waterloo has won 28 games this season, 11 of its last 12 and has defeated every team in the league at least once. That includes the regular-season champion Des Moines Oak Leafs, who finished with a 31-22-1 record.

The Warriors followed their win on the Oak Leafs' home ice last weekend with their second victory of the season over another longtime nemesis, the Des Moines Capitals.

It was exactly the type of finish to the regular season coach Shawn Weinke hoped to see.

"We needed to play the caliber of teams we're going to play (in Davenport) with that intensity," said Weinke. "The Caps and Oak Leafs come to play every night. It was a nice stepping stone to the tournament."

"We know we can do it if we bring our 'A' game. We played a nice seed in the tournament."

It was also a barrier that needed to fall, said several of the Warriors' players.

"Growing up, we were pretty even with Des Moines," noted senior Jacob Schutte. "When we got to high school, everything turned over and they just dominated us every year. I knew one year we were gonna take over and show them they were beatable."

As a result, junior Jake Irey said the Warriors take a different attitude into this year's tournament.

"It definitely helps knowing we can play with any of the other teams," he said. "The atmosphere and attitude is really positive. We're going there to win it."

On paper, Waterloo has all the pieces to make a run at the title.

Offensively, Irey finished as

MHSHL tournament

At Davenport

GAMES FRIDAY

Quarterfinals

Des Moines Capitals (25-8-1-2) vs. Kansas City Jr. Outlaws (24-11-0-1), 5 p.m.

Waterloo (28-6-2-0) vs. Lincoln (22-11-1-2), 5:30 p.m.

Quad Cities (29-6-0-1) vs. Mason City (21-14-1-0), 7:30 p.m.

Des Moines Oak Leafs (31-2-2-1) vs. Sioux City (13-20-1-2), 8 p.m.

GAMES SATURDAY

Consolation semifinals

Quad Cities-Mason City loser vs. Waterloo-Lincoln loser, 8:30 a.m.

D.M. Capitals-K.C. Jr. Outlaws loser vs. D.M. Oak Leafs-Sioux City loser, 11 a.m.

Semifinals

Quad Cities-Mason City winner vs. Waterloo-Lincoln winner, 1:30 p.m.

D.M. Capitals-K.C. Jr. Outlaws winner vs. D.M. Oak Leafs-Sioux City winner, 4 p.m.

GAMES SUNDAY

Fourth place, 9 a.m.

Fifth place, 9:30 a.m.

Third place, 11:30 a.m.

Championship, 2 p.m.

the MHSHL's second-leading scorer with 85 points. Schutte (57 points), sophomore Dawson Kuhlmann (48), senior Jayson Beal (36), senior Zach Hester (26) and senior MacKenzie Cain (23) provide added firepower.

Defensively, junior Brian Dobes is one of the league's top goaltenders, and the supporting cast in front of him is tough, experienced and back at full strength with the return of senior all-star Tyler Mahncke from a Dec. 18 knee injury that limited him to 24 games.

Mahncke, who moved from forward to defense this season, made a determined effort to get back on the ice and returned nearly two weeks ahead of schedule.

"When he came back and when he was healthy, he gave us a huge spark," said Weinke. "When everybody saw that he was back to 100 percent, it really gave us a boost."

Mahncke had two choices—surgery or extensive rehab. He chose the latter.

"It's my senior year. My main goal at first was just to make it back for the state tournament," said Mahncke. "Then as things got going, they (medical personnel) started telling me I'd be able to make it back a little bit before."

"I was just motivated to get back as soon as possible so I could get my confidence back for the state tournament. I



MATTHEW PUTNEY / Courier Staff Photographer

Tyler Mahncke (9) is one of a core group of veterans who will lead the Waterloo Warriors into the Midwest High School Hockey League tournament this weekend in Davenport.

learned a lot up there in the stands, but it hurt being up there watching. One thing I learned is to play every game like it's your last."

Overall, the Warriors are a group that is reaping the benefits of the sacrifices and hard work it has invested into the season.

"We just go to practice every day with the mentality that we need to work hard and get the job done," said Schutte. "We do a lot of skating and a lot of conditioning, but we all know it's for the good of the team."

"It's a good atmosphere. A lot of the guys we've played with since we were younger, just different years. We know each other pretty good. We know how we play, and we know where everyone's going to be at."

"There's no superstars. There's no egos," added Weinke. "It's just everybody coming to work hard."

"I wasn't sure what we were getting into. Every team has its own personality. This one is just kind of above average at just about everything, but they don't let it get to their heads."

"They compete against each other and make everybody better. This has been the most enjoyable year of coaching at any level, and not just because we're winning. It's been fun to come to the rink because the guys work hard and are coachable, and we continue to see progress even up to this last week."

That's the biggest differ-

ence Mahncke sees in this Waterloo team compared to the past few.

"Everybody comes here to work every day," he explained. "In past years, we've had cliques kind of. This year, everybody plays as a unit and everybody gets along."

"We have fun together, and we work hard together. We enjoy winning."

Cain said it was obvious in August that the Warriors had the foundation for a big season, but they had to continue to develop and prove it over a grueling, 36-game schedule.

"We thought we could do it, and we worked hard for it," he said. "We had to overcome a lot of injuries."

Weinke has instituted a "hold the rope" motto that has also served the Warriors well.

"We lean on each other and trust that we have each other's back," said Irey. "It's like if you're hanging off a cliff, can you trust your teammates to be on the other end keeping you alive."

"It's really cool to see that we can lean on each other. I think that's where our greatest strength's at."

The Warriors know they will have to be on their game this weekend.

Lincoln went 0-2-1 against Waterloo during the regular season, losing by 4-2 and 6-0 margins around a 4-4 tie. The Jr. Stars feature an explosive offense that averaged 4.53 goals per game, led by MHSHL scoring champion Jorgan Kontor (88 points).

"We need to outwork everybody," said Weinke. "We're not the most skilled team, but when we work hard we can take away some of the other teams' advantages. Small goals turn into big goals."

"We just need to get into the mode that we're not gonna lose... seriously," said Schutte. "We need to work hard and forecheck and do all the little things that get us where we are today."

Several of Lincoln's top players have been suspended for disciplinary reasons, Weinke said, so it will be a different team than the Warriors saw during the regular season. And Kontor is still in the lineup.

"They're a wounded dog," said Weinke. "They're gonna battle. They've got nothing to lose. The pressure's on us. We're the higher seed."

"Any time Kontor gets loose and he gets a lot of ice, he's as good as anybody in the league. We know just having Irey around, guys like that are difference-makers. If we don't take care of him and his line, we're gonna be in some trouble."

Mahncke said the Warriors will be ready.

"From day one, our goal has been to win the state championship," he said.

"In the past, the Warriors haven't been looked at as a powerhouse. We're motivated to change the tradition here."

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