

Warriors begin title defense

By DOUG NEWHOFF

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WATERLOO — Last season's Midwest High School Hockey League tournament championship was a long time coming for the Waterloo Warriors.

In fact, it had been 19 years since the program last won a title, and the Warriors aren't quite ready to turn the page to 2009-2010.

First, there's the business of hanging a championship banner at Young Arena Friday night, where the 2008-09 Warriors will be recognized alongside champions from the former Waterloo Public and Waterloo Columbus programs. Former coaches Dave Swick and Duke Dutkowski, along with a number of ex-players, will be on hand for the occasion.

"We want to recognize Waterloo hockey and the background of our high school program and celebrate its continued growth," said Shawn Weinke, the Warriors' current head coach. "It'll be a lot of fun to have all those people who have meant so much to high school hockey here."

And then, the puck will drop on what promises to be an intriguing new season as the Warriors host Ames Friday, followed by the Kansas City Stars Saturday and Sunday.

"We're excited," said Weinke. "We're still living a little bit from last year, but we're looking forward to this year, too. I'm so happy for the guys and what they did last year, but it's time to get after it again and try to defend."

"As much as we've talked about it during the summer and enjoyed it, there's a fine line there. It's a new year. We're not entitled to any-

2009-10 schedule*

Oct. 30 - Ames; Oct. 31

- Kansas City Stars.

Nov. 1 - Kansas City Stars;

Nov. 6 - Dubuque; Nov. 7 - at

Quad Cities; Nov. 8 - at Quad

Cities; Nov. 14 - Lincoln; Nov.

15 - Lincoln; Nov. 20 - at

Des Moines Capitals; Nov.

22 - Cedar Rapids; Nov. 28

- at Kansas City Jr. Outlaws;

Nov. 29 - at Kansas City Jr.

Outlaws.

Dec. 4 - Mason City; Dec.

11 - at Dubuque; Dec. 12 - at

Cedar Rapids; Dec. 17 - Des

Moines Capitals; Dec. 18 - at

Sioux City; Dec. 19 - at Sioux

City.

Jan. 9 - at Ames; Jan. 15

- Des Moines Oak Leafs; Jan.

16 - at Des Moines Capitals;

Jan. 19 - at Cedar Rapids;

Jan. 22 - at Mason City; Jan.

24 - Quad Cities.

Feb. 5 - Des Moines Oak

Leafs; Feb. 6 - Sioux Falls;

Feb. 7 - Sioux Falls; Feb.

11 - at Mason City; Feb. 13

- at Omaha; Feb. 14 - at

Omaha; Feb. 19 - Ames; Feb.

21 - Dubuque; Feb. 26-28 -

MHSHL Tournament, Ames.

March 6 - MHSHL All-Star

game, Ames

thing. We've got to go out and work twice as hard as last year knowing there's a target on our backs.

"But we know what it takes to be there now and how much fun it was. Now we know it's attainable."

Weinke's team won't have quite the star power it enjoyed a year ago when it went 25-8-0-2 with Jake Irey (81 regular-season points), Dawson Kuhlmann (58 points) and standout goaltender Brian Dobes (1.93 goals-against average, .916 save percentage).

Irey and Dobes graduated. Kuhlmann has decided to play Midget hockey in the Chicago area.

"That will hurt us, but it's a good move for him," said Weinke.

However, there is a solid

core of veterans returning and a handful of newcomers who will contribute.

Spencer Warren is the top returning scorer after a 45-point junior season. Jeremy Wright, Marshall Cook and Tucker Schweer will help provide offensive punch, as will Trevor Tix, a senior who played at the Midget level in Omaha last season. Alex Quinones will join the team when his NU High football team's season is over.

"You're not going to replace a Jake Irey, as a captain or the points he produced," said Weinke. "That's where other guys have to step up. If it takes a couple of guys, or three or four guys, that's what we have to do."

"We do have some guys who can put the puck away."

Meanwhile, Waterloo should be a strong defensive team with Will Becker, Jordan Sheeley and Jordan Burtch. The blue-liners will get a boost when Damon Powell returns from the La Porte City Union football playoffs, and Zach Wulf of Cedar Rapids is a new addition who will add even more depth.

They'll be patrolling the ice in front of top goalie Landon Weber, a senior who has seen little varsity action playing behind Dobes the last couple of seasons.

"He hasn't played a ton, but when he has played he's been successful," said Weinke. "We expect him to make the first save and our defense to clear out those rebounds and limit second chances."

As for the MHSHL, there's a new entry this season in Sioux Falls (S.D.). The league is divided into two seven-team divisions, and each team plays a 32-game league schedule. The top eight teams overall earn berths in the MHSHL tournament in Ames Feb. 26-28.