

Warriors eager to test themselves at nationals

Waterloo opens play at USA national tourney Wednesday

By JIM SULLIVAN

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WATERLOO — The local golf courses might be one man short for just a while longer.

Right now, Doug Dietz' hockey season is going into overtime.

The head coach of the Waterloo Warriors is preparing his team for the high school portion of the USA Hockey National Championships, set to begin Wednesday in Salt Lake City. Three weeks ago, Dietz' boys won the Midwest High School Hockey League championship after losing just once in regular-season play.

Normally, the end of the Warriors' year means a little bit of rest and recreation time. As Dietz said it, "I would probably put down my hockey hat and put on my golf hat right now. ... "I leave hockey alone; I put it

Around the boards

■ **What:** 2012 USA Hockey National Championships, high school division

■ **Where:** Salt Lake City, Utah

■ **When:** March 21 through March 25

■ **Who:** The Waterloo Warriors, champions of the Midwest High School Hockey League, will be one of 24 teams from around the United States participating in the prep portion of the championships.

■ **The format:** Pool play, then single-elimination.

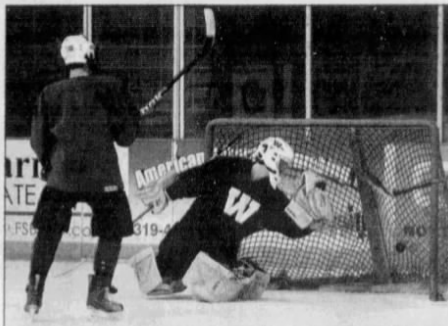
■ **2011 high school champion:** New Trier, Illinois.

to bed."

But hockey never really sleeps for Dietz or the players. In past years, the Waterloo coach worked at at USA Hockey tryout camps, for example. He's making that circuit again in 2012.

As for the Warriors, extra practice is an extension of their off-season activity.

"I'd still be trying to get on the ice, you know?" said



RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer

Austin Jackson, left, and goalie Chance Kremer go through drills during a Waterloo Warriors practice Wednesday at Young Arena.

goalie Chance Kremer. "I'd be staying in shape for the summer."

Summer is later. Now, the Warriors are trying to re-start the competitive engines.

Following the MSHSL championship, Dietz gave the team a few days off. Then, he said, "I let them Mickey Mouse around the ice for about a half-hour (for) three days."

Monday, it was back to work.

"It hasn't been hard to get focused," said forward Jake Lichty, the Warriors' captain. "But it's been really exciting. I've been kind of waiting on this all year."

From Dietz' perspective, it's been a challenging time.

"I think it's been a little bit hard, I think, with the emotions of going through the season and the accomplish-

ments we've had," said the Warriors' head coach. "I just think we've been on such an emotional high. That's been shut off. Now, we've gotta turn it back on. We've been kind of up and down the last week or 10 days or so."

By the time the first puck is dropped in Salt Lake City Wednesday, Dietz should have a solid scouting report on the opening opponent. At mid-week, he didn't even know who the Warriors would play.

So, the Warriors waited.

Said Dietz, "Once USA Hockey puts the (tournament) teams on the Website, with my connections throughout the country, I can start making phone calls and figure out what the teams have and what they're gonna do during particular times of the game. Right now, we're just going in blind."

In one respect, though, it doesn't matter.

"It's gonna be tough competition," said Lichty. "I mean, it's the national tour-

namment. You can't expect anything less."

The national high school tournament consists of 24 teams from all over the United States. They'll be divided into three groups for pool play. Then the survivors advance to a single-elimination format to determine the champion.

Dietz thinks the Warriors' regular-season schedule, which was heavily loaded with weekend games, has prepared his team well for the possibility of five consecutive days of intense hockey.

"I just think it comes down to who's physically ready to play and mentally ready to play."

The Warriors coach also said his team faces a unique moment in its history.

"This is one of the things we talked about," said Dietz. "This is something that's in the palm of their hand right now. Some of them may never have this in their lifetimes again, and we need to make the most of it"