

# Players all 'RoughRiders at heart'

Team Midwest features  
5 preps from E. Iowa

By Lincoln Currie,  
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CEDAR RAPIDS — After earning second place at an international hockey competition, five RoughRiders look to finish the high school season strong.

Five players on the high school team were selected to play on Team Midwest at the International Silver Stick tournament held last month — Eric Wisnousky, a goalie and senior at Prairie; Ryan Carlson, a forward and senior at Kennedy; Joshua Nelson, a forward and senior at Clear Creek Amana; Ben Pizzimenti, a forward and senior at Iowa City West; and Luke Edwards, a defenseman and junior at Iowa City High.

Team Midwest also included players from Des Moines, Kansas City, Omaha, Quad Cities, Sioux City and Waterloo. The team finished second at the International Silversticks.

But back home, Tony Paoli, coach of the RoughRiders high school team, said the boys selected to play on Team



Cedar Rapids RoughRiders varsity head coach Tony Paoli in the team box during the first period of their Midwest High School Hockey League game against the Waterloo Warriors at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena on Dec. 12.

Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette

Midwest are just one of the guys.

"They tried out for the Team Midwest, and that's a nice honor for them," Paoli said. "The five guys that played with Team Midwest came back, and they know they're RoughRid-

ers at heart."

With four of the five being seniors, they have all played a significant role in leading the high school team. Cedar Rapids, which hosts unbeaten Waterloo tonight at 7 at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena, is 22-5 and in

third place in the Midwest High School Hockey League standings.

"They've been leaders in the past, but this year as the seniors they're more comfortable at that role," Paoli said. "It's great as a coaching staff to have those young men

step up."

That leadership and talent have made a big difference this season. Pizzimenti, the leading goal scorer for the high school team, said the RoughRiders' record has been the best thing about this season.

"It feels a lot more organized," Pizzimenti said. "This season's been a lot more positive than it has been last year and in years past."

Pizzimenti, Carlson, Nelson and Paoli all said the primary goal for the remainder of this season is to win a championship. With such an impressive record and a plus-93 goal differential, they may do just that.

Nonetheless, Paoli said while the end game is to win a championship, taking one step at a time is what the team is focusing on right now.

"We have the talent and the ability to be successful," Paoli said.

A championship will not define this year, however. "Regardless if we win the championship or not, it will be a successful season," Paoli said.

For these young RoughRiders, hockey may not stop at the end of this season. Nelson is deciding between going to college and playing junior hockey. Carlson said he plans to go to college unless he receives an offer at an upcoming showcase. Pizzimenti indicated an eagerness to play either college or junior hockey if the opportunity arises.