

# Warriors' eyes on tourney title

Regular-season champions begin postseason bid Friday

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WATERLOO — A journey that began five months ago reaches its destination for the Waterloo Warriors this weekend.

When the Waterloo bus pulls away from the Ames/ISU Ice Arena at the end of the Midwest High School Hockey League tournament, it'll either be filled with celebrating champions who realized every bit of their potential or a team of devastated players who feel like they let one get away.

There is no in between for this year's Warriors.

"A championship," states senior goaltender Chase Pabst when asked what it will take to make the

Midwest High School Hockey League's postseason tournament a success. "That's what we're going for, and we don't want anything else."

"If we play as a team and play our game, we're unbeatable," adds high-scoring forward Kyle Latusick. "It's been the defense, we have the offense, and we have the best goaltender in the state."

In the 29-2-0-1, dominated the regular season.

The Warriors led the league in wins, shutouts (14) and fastest goals against (3) while finishing second in goals scored (105). In 29 wins, Waterloo's average margin of victory was 5.2-0-2, and the Warriors were undefeated on their home ice at Young Arena.

Pabst ranked first in shutouts, save percentage (.956) and goals-against average (0.94). Despite missing two games, Ben Skoett

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## Hockey

From B1

set an MHSHL record with 54 goals and topped the league in total points (92). Latusick finished No. 1 in assists (54) and second in points (84). Carter Herbst was sixth in goals (28), third in assists (40) and fourth in total points (68).

"I thought we could win the league, but 29 wins and only two losses and a shootout loss? That was probably a little bit unexpected," says head coach Brian Cook, who also led the Warriors to the 2017 tournament title.

The 2-1 shootout loss came on Dec. 2 at Sioux City. Waterloo didn't lose a regulation game until Feb. 13 when it fell 4-1 at Cedar Rapids. Four days later, the Warriors suffered their second defeat, 2-1 at Kansas City.

"The first game we lost (at Cedar Rapids), we were probably ready to lose," notes Cook. "We were getting a little too big of a head at times. Practices weren't as crisp as they were at the beginning of the year, but it's hard when you're win-

## MHSHL tournament

### At Ames/ISU Ice

### Arena

### VARSITY

### Games Friday

No. 3 Cedar Rapids (27-5-0-0) vs. No. 6 D.M. Capitals (17-13-2-0), 2 p.m.

No. 2 Sioux City (26-3-3-0) vs. No. 7 Lincoln (17-14-1-0), 4 p.m.

No. 4 Omaha (22-9-1-0) vs.

No. 5 Quad City (21-11-0-0), noon

No. 1 Waterloo (29-2-0-1) vs. No. 8 Kansas City (16-13-2-1), 6 p.m.

### Games Saturday

Cedar Rapids/D.M. Capitals winner vs. Sioux City/Lincoln winner, noon

Omaha/Quad City winner vs. Waterloo/Kansas City winner, 2 p.m.

### Games Sunday

Third place, 9 a.m.

Championship, 11 a.m.

### JUNIOR VARSITY

### Games Thursday

No. 3 D.M. Capitals (23-9-0-0) vs. No. 6 Dubuque (18-12-0-2), 1:30 p.m.

No. 2 Waterloo (23-8-0-1) vs. No. 7 Quad City (18-13-0-1), 3 p.m.

No. 4 Cedar Rapids (19-10-0-3) vs. No. 5 Kansas City (19-12-0-1), noon

No. 1 Omaha (29-2-0-1) vs. No. 8 Lincoln (14-13-0-5), 4:30 p.m.

### Games Friday

D.M. Capitals/Dubuque winner vs. Waterloo/Quad City winner, 9 a.m.

Cedar Rapids/Kansas City winner vs. Omaha/Lincoln winner, 10:30 a.m.

### Games Saturday

Third place, 9 a.m.

Championship, 10:30 a.m.

ning every game to continue to stay focused and strive to get better."

The two late losses weren't necessarily a red flag. The first came on a Wednesday night during a school week. The second was on a last-minute goal in the last game of a stretch where the Warriors played four times in five days because of an earlier postponement.

"We just ran out of gas, so I wasn't too worried about it," says Cook.

Still, Cook and his coaching staff did use the

brief hiccup to re-evaluate.

"Absolutely," he says. "It refocused not only the players but the coaches because at times when things are going so well it's hard to get on the kids or instruct them much because they think, 'Well, we've done it this way and we've won every game.'"

"It made us all kind of think of different ways to get re-motivated. I'm definitely happy it happened when it did as opposed to happening at the state tournament."

Most importantly, Cook

adds, Waterloo went back on the road for the final weekend of the regular season and handled a strong Quad City team in back-to-back games.

Now the Warriors head to Ames with the highest of expectations. They face No. 8 seed Kansas City in the quarterfinals Friday at 6 p.m. They'll be the team with the bulls-eye on their backs.

"I think we've handled that fairly well all season," says Latusick. "We've gotten a little over our heads every now and then, but I

think we've had the ability to come back and kind of refocus in practice and consistently play as a team and as a unit and as a family.

"I've been playing with half this team my whole life just growing up around these kids. It's just a brotherhood. Winning a championship will kind of cap it off. A lot of us won one two years ago. I think it's just more significant for us now because it's our team and we feel like we're more a part of it."