

Defensive-laden Metros ready for postseason

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The Sioux City Metros hockey team has been one of the top three teams all season in the Midwest High School Hockey League.

At times, the Metros were the top team in the league. Then Waterloo overtook them and the two swapped spots a few times. Kansas City was right behind the two and started swapping spots with Sioux City.

By the end of the regular season, the three teams were separated by only two points. Waterloo got the top seed going into the postseason tournament, which begins on Friday in Ames, with 56 points. Kansas City and Sioux City were tied with 54 points each. Kansas City won the tiebreaker to get the No. 2 seed and Sioux City is the No. 3 seed.

Sioux City and Kansas City still finished nine points ahead of Omaha, the fourth seed. Metros head coach Jesse Monell thinks there is a logjam in terms of who could win the whole tournament this weekend.

"The top probably seven teams, they all have a chance. You just don't know if someone gets hot," Monell said. "Team one through seven, everyone has an

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honest chance. We just have to stay away from the turnovers and the high-risk plays. Stick to what you are doing, what you know and do the high-percentage stuff and things will work out for us."

The Metros accomplished a 26-4-1-1 record despite dealing with injuries for much of the season. At times, the Metros had to skate with only three defensemen in a game or six forwards. Monell said the team is finally healthy going into the playoffs.

"That will be nice going into the weekend full strength," Monell

said. "The kids have been very resilient and I have asked a lot out of them and they have responded. They have stepped up and won some really big games. I look back at what they've accomplished as a group and how hard they've had to work. Just how exhausted some of them would be but they would come out with a W and they forgot how fatigued they are."

While Sioux City has scored a number of goals (157), the Metros are led by their defensive unit. They set the program-record for fewest goals allowed this season with only 38, which leads the lead. One of those goals was an empty-netter. The MHSIH record for the fewest goals is 31.

Metros goaltender Collin Patrick has a program-record 12 shut-outs. Ethan Burge, Tyler Ownby, Kai Barner and Colby Nieman are the top-four defensemen for the Metros.

"That's how we coach our team, we coach a lot from the back end. We generate our offense from the defense," Monell said. "Our four guys back there are highly skilled and can play any position. A couple of those guys are forwards at heart but they had to make some sacrifices and it's worked out. Those guys don't get their name in the paper all of the time but are doing the work on the ice."

Taylor Frerichs leads the Metros with 67 points on 32 goals and 35

assists. He has seven game-winning goals and Cale Bricker had 53 points and four game-winning goals. Chase Mann has 31 assists and 50 points and he has three game-winning goals along with defenseman Kai Barner. Smith Archer has 22 goals and Dayson Tucker has 21. Burge has 33 assists.

Sioux City gets a familiar foe in the first round of the tournament as the Metros face sixth-seeded Lincoln at 2:30 p.m. on Friday. Lincoln is 21-9-0-2 on the season.

The two teams faced off this past weekend and the Metros have won all four games against the Junior Stars. In the first two meetings back in early December,

Sioux City won both games handily, 5-1 and 6-1. This past weekend's games were tighter. Sioux City won the Saturday game 3-1 and edged Lincoln 3-2 in Sunday's game.

Last season Sioux City beat Lincoln in the first round of the playoffs.

"If you give them a goal or two early, they can thrive off that," Monell said. "The regular season doesn't count anymore so it's one game at a time. They played us tough at home. ... They were playing hard. We fought back from 2-0 on Sunday and continued on our path and played for each other and didn't change our gameplan."