Caring is sharing puck for Latusick

Warriors' talented forward is now MHSHL's assists leader

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WATERLOO — Well into his high school years, Kole Latusick's parents are still preaching the importance of sharing.

The Cedar Falls native has become the most proficient passer in Midwest High School Hockey League history. Latusick entered Tuesday's game against Mason City two back of the league's career assists record of 124 set by Mason City's Cole Despenas from 2000-2004. He caught Despenas in the first period, then passed him early in the second.

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"It means a lot to me," Latusick said, addressing the assists mark. "All the time and effort I put into it – not so much perfecting the game but practice – it all stems from by dad (Brian) and mom (Kara) preaching pass first and assists."

Kansas State football preferred walk-on Ben Sinnott has been a consistent goal-scorer on the receiving end of Latusick's passes. They've been linemates for the 13 years since they first learned to skate. Sinnott has 42 goals this season and Latusick has 41 assists for the 26-2 Warriors.

Often the biggest player on the ice equipped with one of the hardest slap shots, Sinnott is an easy target. He's been a valuable outlet option and reliable finisher on breakaway opportunities.

"I could probably play with my eyes closed and tell you exactly where he's going to be, and he could do the same for me," Latusick said. "It's really special. We've been able to match our game."

A product of Waterloo's Junior Hawk program, Latusick quickly revealed that he's able to listen to instruction and make immediate adjustments. Warriors' coach Brian Cook recalls a JV game his freshman year when Latusick took the puck from the corner to the side of the net and tried

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to jam it in. He came back to the bench and was told to go to the front of the net next time in order to open up more scoring angles.

Two shifts later, Latusick shifted from his natural instinct and went to the front of the net. His shot was blocked, but that didn't matter to his coach.

"Right then and there I knew that he was coachable and he was going to do good things," Cook related.

In addition to serving as one of the team's leading goal-scorers over the last three seasons, Latusick has become more of a playmaker with his ability to locate teammates.

"To be a good passer you've got to have great vision," Cook said. "Kole has always had good vision on the ice. He also has a very good hockey sense which seems pretty easy to have, but you'd be surprised how few hockey players have hockey sense.

"He reads the play very well when he does and doesn't have the puck and he knows where his players should be most of the time."

A first-year captain, Latusick says he's tried to lead by example within a team that has seen its younger players step up and make winning plays.

While Waterloo dominated its way to a state championship last season, this year's Warriors have showed they can win the close games. Waterloo earned come-from-behind road wins over Quad Cities and the Des Moines Capitals as part of its rise to the top of the standings.

A state championship this season would give the Warriors back-to-back titles for the first time in program history. It would also be the third title in four years for Waterloo's senior class.

"Playing for a team like this and the history we have here, it's special being able to build onto a legacy and cement our own legacy in the process," Latusick said.

The Warriors' facilitator says he plans to attend a few camps this summer after generating interest from tier two and three programs. If nothing works out with those teams, he'll play club hockey at the University of Iowa.

"Hockey creates lifetime memories and lifetime bonds," Latusick said. "This group of seniors, I'll probably consider best friends for the rest of my life. The memories we've had since three or four years old all the way up until now winning state titles together – it's been an unreal ride."