



SUBMITTED

John Nienhaus earned Midwest High School Hockey League All-Star first team honors for the Quad City Blues this season.

Nienhaus excelled in key role for QC Blues

Moline High product earned All-Star first team honors

SAMEER MALLA

smalla@qctimes.com

The Quad City Storm is not the only hockey team in the Quad Cities.

The Quad City Blues, a high school team composed of players from around the area in the Midwest High School Hockey League (MHSHL), just wrapped up a banner season, reaching the playoffs for the first time since 2019 and only its second postseason appearance since 2010.

Moline High School senior John Nienhaus was a major factor in the Blues' success, finishing third among MHSHL defensemen and the team leader in assists (35). Nienhaus, a team captain, also is first all-time in assists among Blues' defensemen, dating back to 2003. For his efforts, Nienhaus was named to the MHSHL All-Star first team. Teammates Isaiah Conrad and Bleu Beckwith — senior forwards for the Blues — also were named All-Stars.

Hockey has always been Nienhaus' first love.

"I have been playing ice hockey since I was five or six years old, for the past 11 or 12 years," Nienhaus said. "My

stepdad, Jim Barnes, and I went out to a public ice rink, where you just skate around and have fun. I saw some people playing hockey, and I just asked if I could do that. Ever since then, I never looked back."

The MHSHL playoffs took place earlier this month. The fifth-seeded Blues (19-11-2-0) fell to the fourth-seeded Kansas City Jets (21-9-0-2) in double overtime in opening-round action.

"The puck bounced over one of our other defenseman's foot, and the (Jets) got a breakaway," Nienhaus said. "They scored a five-hole on our goalie, Aiden Stahr, who played a tremendous game."

That same Jets team ended up as the eventual MHSHL champion.

"We did not know that we faced the champions (in the first round) at that point, but we knew it was going to be a challenge, and we gave our best effort, but just came up a little short," Nienhaus said.

The Moline senior, who also runs track and field, was on the Maroons' football team as well. Nienhaus, like most players in the QC area, played multiple positions on both sides of the ball, including linebacker, defensive back, running back and wide receiver — a jack of all trades.

If Nienhaus were to master

one sport between ice hockey and football, he actually struggled with the decision.

"I mean, that's a really hard question," Nienhaus said. "The memories and ties that I've had with both have been really good. I don't really know. It's a hard question."

Nienhaus did conclude which is more fulfilling. He finds the bone-crushing hits on the ice more gratifying than an open-field tackle on the turf.

"Hockey hits are really more satisfying," Nienhaus said. "They happen a lot. I am one of the bigger kids on the team, and hitting and leveling somebody is awesome. The difference between hockey and football is that a hockey hit is more individual, and you get that self-gratification, where you are like 'that felt good.' For football, it is more of a group hit, and that is why hockey hits are more satisfying."

Nienhaus knows where his future is. After graduating from Moline, he will be attending the United States Military Academy at West Point.

"While it is a military college, I want to graduate with a four-year degree," Nienhaus said. "I want to graduate as an officer, and I want the opportunities that they bring out there. I just feel the need to serve our country, and just felt a calling to do just that."