

# Juniors open bid for hockey title

By Terry Hersom  
Journal Sports Editor

High school hockey has arrived in Sioux City.

With an aim to play the game well and also to attract a substantial following in the community, the Metro Junior Musketeers have reached the first of these objectives.

And what of the second ambition? Well, the prognosis is "fair" with a footnote of optimism.

Alex Shibicky, the bright, young Canadian-American who has spirited the Metro Juniors along to a new plateau since becoming their coach at mid-season, today will usher the team to Des Moines, where they'll bid for the state high school hockey championship.

"We've got quite a few people going down to watch us," says Shibicky in an appreciative tone. The Juniors' tourney bid begins with a game at 7 o'clock tonight against Roosevelt-Hoover, one of five Des Moines area teams to qualify for the eight-team state meet.

Shibicky, nonetheless, hopes to expand on what is now little more than a select band of followers. He fancies an elevation of high school hockey here to a status which would rival winter's No. 1 local sports draw, prep basketball.

"Right now, we want to start creating an image that says, 'Hey, we are a hockey team,'" says the native British Columbian. "Before our road trip to Des Moines a few weeks ago one of our players handed a note to his teacher, asking to be dismissed for a hockey game. And the teacher said, 'You mean we have a hockey team?'"

It wouldn't hurt the cause, of course, if the Metro Juniors came home Sunday night with a state championship trophy. And Shibicky thinks it's possible, though Waterloo Columbus, which has claimed the first two crowns, is a likely favorite for a third straight.

Evidence of his confidence, he says: "After we beat Roosevelt — no, I didn't say if — we'll play (in the semifinals)

Saturday at 6 o'clock against the winner between Dowling and Waterloo Public (who faced off in one of two games Thursday night)."

Victories both tonight and Saturday would send the Sioux Cityans into Sunday afternoon's 4:30 championship game, where they'd quite likely confront Columbus. The Juniors claimed their initial win with a surprising Jan. 8 upset of Columbus, which shared the regular season league title with Dowling, both teams 10-2. Then, in a later meeting, the Waterloo school avenged that loss in an overtime thriller.

Pete Inkster stepped down as coach of the Metro Juniors in late December, citing conflicts in his schedule. To that point, the team had failed to win in five league games, earning two ties while losing three.

Shibicky accepted the job, a no-pay, volunteer effort, and has since steered the team to eight wins in nine outings.

"More than anything, I want to emphasize that everything this team has done, they've done themselves...they're responsible, not me," says Shibicky, who also heaps credit on his assistant coach, Mitch Brandt.

Brian Hartman, an East High senior, is a predominate figure among the Juniors, not to mention the rest of the league, which he led in scoring last year. Hartman nearly repeated this season, but a late-season charge by Dowling's Barney Munro left the Sioux City star second in the final scoring race.

Hartman alone, however, could not have carried the Sioux Cityans to their strong surge during the last two months. Rather, a "complete team effort," Shibicky points out, made it happen.

"We've acquired a very balanced scoring attack in recent weeks," he says. "And with that, our opponents, who were used to shadowing Brian with one or two players, have started laying

off him. Before, they'd figured all they needed to do to beat Sioux City was to stop Hartman.

"The team has pulled together to perform more like a team in some not-so-publicized areas, like backchecking. And to top it off they've got the right attitude, they know they can do it. This has been a very confident bunch of young guys over the last half of the season. You get a taste of winning, it's amazing what it'll do for somebody."

The Juniors employ three offensive lines. Hartman centers a line with Paul Kambach and Scott Barta. The other lines have Dave Woolworth with Tony Valladolid and Brett Nelson, and Clay Wiffen with Dave Wiffen (his brother) and John Meine. Reserve forwards are Wade Ridemour, Doug Richer and Larry Hodgins.

Two tandems alternate on defense. One has Pat Ward with Damon Lohry, the other has Brent Hartman (Brian's brother) with Krag Lohry (Damon's brother). Additional defenders are Scott McGarr, Dan Reynolds and Steve Montross.

Mike Bennett, who notched a shutout over Ankeny in substitute play last weekend, mans the goal with Mark Hartman (no relation to Brian or Brent) the backup creaseminder.

The team is comprised 22 youngsters who range from grades 9 through 12. Five of them are freshmen, four of whom attend West Junior. The breakdown of senior high representation has North with seven players, East and West with four each, and Heelan with two.

Shibicky, himself, is well-schooled in winning. His father, Alex, Sr., played 10 years in the National Hockey League with the New York Rangers. "He was very, very good," says a proud son. "He was second in the NHL in goals one year and he played on the last

Ranger team to win the Stanley Cup — the 1939-40 season."

Tracking Dad's footsteps, Alex, Jr., went to the University of Denver, which offered one of the nation's best college hockey programs. Regarding those memories, he jokes, "I think I'm about the only one from our team at Denver who didn't make the NHL."

Graduating in 1974, Shibicky took one shot at the big leagues. After failing a tryout with the Vancouver Canucks, he came to Sioux City at the request of John Saville, an ex-teammate at Denver U., then coaching the Musketeers here. Alex spent one season on Saville's team, scoring 93 points and winning the team MVP award.

"Then I fell in love," he says, continuing on to relate his marriage to the former Kathy Lohry, daughter of K-D Stockyards developer Kermit Lohry. Meanwhile, Alex had begun his present career as an insurance underwriter. And, as he puts it, "So now I'm a permanent resident."



Alex Shibicky