

State hockey tourney opens at McElroy Thursday

By JIM SULLIVAN
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Ken Francis doesn't believe in three-peats. Yes, his Valley-Dowling hockey team has won the last two state titles. Yet he says he's starting from scratch when the 1990 Iowa High School Hockey Tournament gets underway.

"As far as we're concerned, this is the first tournament and that has the players as excited as anything else," Francis said. "We feel we have something to prove to ourselves and our alumni."

The proving ground is McElroy Auditorium, as Waterloo hosts the state tournament for the first time since 1984. Action gets underway Thursday as Urbandale meets Mason City at 6 p.m. and it's Sioux City vs. Dubuque at 9 p.m.

The rest of the nine-team field begins Friday. Top-seeded Columbus of Waterloo takes on the Urbandale-Mason City winner at 2 p.m. The Waterloo Warriors play Omaha at 11 a.m. and Valley-Dowling starts with Ames at 8 a.m.

Francis' team owns the league's second-best record behind Columbus, and the tradition

Tournament schedule

FIRST ROUND

GAMES THURSDAY

6 p.m. — Urbandale (6-15-1) vs. Mason City (0-20-0).
9 p.m. — Sioux City (14-6-2) vs. Dubuque (7-12-1).

GAMES FRIDAY

8 a.m. — Valley Dowling (16-5-1) vs. Ames (7-13-0).
11 a.m. — Waterloo Warriors (13-6-1) vs. Omaha (9-11-2).
2 p.m. — Columbus (18-2-0) vs. Urbandale-Mason City winner.

born of two straight state championships. Still, he's a little surprised at a 16-5-1 overall record, given the loss of 14 veterans from 1989.

"We didn't anticipate it being quite as good a year as it has," the Valley-Dowling coach said. "We feel fortunate to be where we are. We figured out that something like 80 percent of our wins have been by a goal. We don't have a lot of high-scoring players, but we're battling when we play well."

Valley-Dowling's top scorer is sophomore, Nick Krueger with 25 goals and 42 total points. He ranks ninth in points scored.

Lately, the defending champs have slumped, going 0-2-1 to finish out the regular season. One of those defeats came against Ames, by 3-2.

Francis gives the Little Cyclones plenty of credit for that triumph. He also knows that his young team can be hurt badly by mistakes, and the Ames loss was no exception.

"We expect this game to be just as tough," Francis said. "We're so young that when we make mistakes, it's tough to bounce back."

Francis, asked to pick a front-runner for the 1990 crown, leans with Columbus, citing an explosive offense that's averaged 7.7 goals a game. Valley-Dowling and the Sailors split their two regular season meetings, with Columbus winning the rematch, 7-3.

"We hope to meet them in the final," Francis said. Yet he knows it won't be easy getting there, and Mike Brown sees the tournament exactly the same way.

"I don't think we have a big advantage over anybody," said the coach of the Sailors, who were an IHSHL-best 18-2-0. "Nobody is going to roll over for us. We have to go out Friday afternoon, buckle our helmets and work hard."

Columbus owns the top two scorers in the league — Corey Simon (37 goals, 36 assists

and Justin Smith (34-39).

Dave Swick, the Waterloo Warriors coach, knows his team will have to work hard, especially at the offensive end. He also knows the Warriors are winless against Columbus (a possible semifinal foe) and Valley-Dowling. Yet he likes the Warriors' chances.

"I don't know if there isn't a team that on a given day we can't beat," Swick said. "I hope we can start scoring on some of the chances we get; it's haunted us all year ... We can play with everybody, we just don't score with everybody."

Still, the Warriors average 5.1 goals a game and have allowed a league-low 47. K.C. Doland is the top goalie with a 91.5 save percentage.

The tournament concludes Sunday at 4 p.m. with the title game. The Warriors haven't finished on top since 1985, while Columbus' last crown came eight years ago.

Tournament passes cost \$10 for adults and \$5 for students.