

Metros play host to Caps in season opener today

By Steven Allspach
Journal sports writer

Goals.

The Sioux City Metros have some lofty aspirations for the upcoming Iowa High School Hockey League season and reaching those goals will depend primarily on, well, on their ability to score goals.

"We're very, very excited about the potential of this team offensively," said Jim Peck, whose fourth edition of Metro hockey debuts today in a home game at Sioux City Auditorium against the Des Moines Capitals. The Metros, 24-13 last season and fifth in the post-season IHSHL state tournament, also play Des Moines Sunday at 3 o'clock.

"There's no question our expectations are very high, but we've still got to get it done on the ice," said Peck, who will be assisted by Walt Johnson, Jeff Gray and Landon Blatchford. Peck and Johnson were Sioux City Musketeer teammates for three seasons in the pre-Junior 'A' days of the United States Hockey League.

Seven of the top nine players who registered double-digit scoring last season return to the fold, including Trent Mozak, an East sophomore who led the squad as a freshman with 10 goals and 34 points.

Johnson was third on the club with 19 goals and 31 points, followed by Mark Munger (11-13-24), Chresten Jensen (11-9-20) and Matt Andrews (12-7-19).

To be better prepared for the IHSHL season, Peck beefed up the exhibition schedule and the club has posted an 11-3-1 record going into today's official season opener.

"We're trying to get as many games as we can for this group because eventually they'll play at the Double-A Midget level later in the season with the hope of qualifying for the national tournament," said Peck.

There were just two seniors among the top scorers last season, Mike Stoneburg and Sam Kincaid. Stoneburg had 19 goals and 33 points and Kincaid three goals and 18 points.

Kincaid has made the step to the next level in amateur hockey, though, and is playing the Jackson Hole, Wyo., franchise in the Junior 'A' Frontier Hockey League.

Along with the wealth of high-powered goal-scorers returning, adding to the offensive mix is Jonas

Svensson, a senior foreign exchange student at Galva-Holstein High School.

Svensson scored 15 goals in the 15 exhibition games against the Shattuck (Minn.) St. Mary's Double-A Midget team (4-0-1), the Omaha Gladiators (4-0), the Omaha Jr. Lancers (0-3), Des Moines (2-0) and Peoria, Ill. (1-0).

"Our main concern right now is defense," said Peck. "Two our defensemen, Brent Suing and Willie Persinger, are converted forwards, but Nick Mills, Matt LeGree and Jason Augustine are experienced hands.

"We're going to lack some size on defense, though."

Augustine is the biggest man at the blue line at 6-3 and 195 pounds, but the Heelan senior is still playing with the Crusader football team that will meet West Des Moines Valley in the quarterfinals of the Class 4A playoffs Monday.

Augustine was an all-state hockey selection last season and is also a pitching standout on the Heelan baseball team.

Johnson and No. 1 goaltender Damon Keith were also all-stars a year ago and Johnson, a senior at North, was named to the IHSHL all-star team that played in the Chicago Showcase tournament.

The solidifying force on the defense will be the goaltending according to Peck, named the coach of the year in the Iowa High School Hockey League in 1996.

After guiding the Metros to the state title in his first season as coach, Peck's last two teams have won the consolation bracket of the state tournament to finish fifth.

"I feel very, very confident in both of our goaltenders," said Peck. "Damon Keith is a senior and Jake Hinderman is a sophomore.

"Both Damon and Jake have played very well in the exhibition games, but Damon is the senior and right now he'll be No. 1."

Keith, who attends North, was 9-7-0 last year with an .857 save percentage.

Hinderman, a 6-1, 200-pound sophomore, was 7-3 as a freshman with a .872 save percentage.

In the offensive zone, Munger will center a line with Mozak and Andrews on wing, while Johnson will center a line with Svensson and Jensen on wing. A third line will have Clint Stiles centering Kyle

Worner and Brett Frette. Jeff Kemper, Chris Lohr and Greg Gill could make up a fourth line, but Peck said they'll most likely interchange on the third line.

The Metros were 18-11 in games with IHSHL opponents last season.

The 21st season of the IHSHL will again include 10 teams divided into two divisions. Each team will play a 26-game schedule.

The one major change this season will be the state tournament format. Instead of playing three guaranteed games in the past, two losses will eliminate teams in 1996-97.

The 1997 varsity state tournament will be played at Hitchcock Arena in Omaha and hosted by the Omaha Gladiators March 6-9. The junior varsity state tournament in Ames will be Feb. 28-Mar. 2.

The two-time defending state champion Omaha Junior Lancers, according to Peck, should be favored to repeat.

Sioux City, Kansas City, the Jr. Lancers, the Gladiators and St. Joseph, Mo., will play in the West Division, while Mason City, Des Moines, Dubuque, Ames and Waterloo will again comprise the East Division.

Metros Roster/Schedule

SENIORS: Matt Andrews, 5-11, 150, forward, South Sioux City; Walt Johnson, 5-7, 145, forward, North; Mark Munger, 6-1, 170, forward, North; Jason Augustine, 6-3, 195, defense, Heelan; Brett Frette, 5-8, 200, defense, East; Jonas Svensson, 5-9, 165, forward, Galva-Holstein; Steve Stiles, 5-10, 180, forward, Sergeant Bluff-Luton; Damon Keith, 5-11, 180, goaltender, North.

JUNIORS: Nick Mills, 5-11, 185, defense, North; Chris Lohr, 6-0, 170, forward, Heelan; Clint Stiles, 5-9, 165, forward, East; Willie Persinger, 5-9, 170, defense, North; Chresten Jensen, 6-1, 170, forward, North; Brent Suing, 5-9, 150, defense, East.

SOPHOMORES: Matt LeGree, 5-11, 155, defense, East; Aaron Heelan, 6-0, 220, defense, West; Chris Gerner, 5-7, 130, defense, West; Golden Hughes, 6-11, 150, defense, Heelan; Trent Mozak, 5-9, 145, forward, East; Brent Sanders, 5-8, 130, forward, North; Greg Gill, 5-8, 135, forward, Heelan; Jeff Kemper, 5-8, 170, forward, North; Kyle Worner, 6-1, 190, forward, North; Matt Tornjost, 5-11, 185, forward, West; Jake Hinderman, 6-1, 200, goaltender, East.

FRESHMEN: Tim Johnson, 5-9, 145, defense, West.
EIGHTH GRADE: Ryan Dohrmann, 5-11, 100, goaltender, Hoover Middle School.

SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER: 9 - Des Moines, 3:00, 10 - Des Moines, 3:00, 22 - at Ames, 8:00, 23 - at Ames, 8:00, 28 - at Waterloo, 8:00, 30 - at Dubuque, 11:30 a.m.

DECEMBER: 1 - at Dubuque, 11:30 a.m. - Mason City, 3:00, 8 - Mason City, 3:00, 13 - at Omaha Jr. Lancers, 7:30, 14 - at Omaha Gladiators, 7:30, 20 - Omaha Gladiators, 8:00, 21 - Omaha Gladiators, 8:00.

JANUARY: 4 - Kansas City, 3:00, 5 - Kansas City, 3:00, 10 - at Omaha Jr. Lancers, 7:30, 11 - Waterloo, 8:00, 17 - at Omaha Jr. Lancers, 8:00, 25 - St. Joseph, Mo., 8:00, 28 - St. Joseph, Mo., 3:00, 31 - at Omaha Gladiators, 8:30.

FEBRUARY: 8 - at Kansas City, 6:15, 9 - at Kansas City, 11 a.m., 16 - Omaha Jr. Lancers, 3:00, 22 - at St. Joseph, Mo., 8:00, 23 - at St. Joseph, Mo., 10:30 a.m., 28-29 - Junior varsity state tournament at Ames.

MARCH: 1-2 - Junior varsity state tournament at Ames, 8-9 - Varsity state tournament at Omaha Gladiators (Hitchcock Ice Arena).

Note: All junior varsity home games begin at 7 p.m. Omaha Gladiators play at Hitchcock Arena and Omaha Jr. Lancers play at Tranquility Iceplex.