

Warriors hockey coming back with better numbers

By **DOUG NEUHOFF**
Assistant Sports Editor
WATERLOO

A resurgence in youth hockey and a summer league for high school players has given the Waterloo Warriors a shot in the arm.

How long it takes to feel the effects at the varsity level is the key to how competitive the Warriors will be in Iowa High School Hockey League play this season.

"Our numbers are a little better," says head coach Mike Brown, whose team opened its season Nov. 8 at Mason City. "We've got 36 players and we're still missing a few kids because of football injuries and stuff like that.

"But our numbers are better, and they should continue to get there. The new rink (Young Arena) is one reason, and the numbers for the last 10 years have been good at the real young ages. Those kids are working their way up."

Brown is building his 1996-97 team around 10 letterwinners — Brian Schaefer, Wes True, Travis Jones, Rick Reicherts, Matt Dray, Jason Bolter, Graham Towlerton, Jason Verbraken, Ben Kutz and Curt Shaw.

He got a look at them, and his younger players, over the summer when they participated in a four-team prep league that played twice per week.

"It provided me an opportunity to watch a lot of the younger kids and get an idea where we're gonna be and what our strengths and weaknesses might be," says Brown.

"I think it's given the kids some confidence, too. I think they've played harder against each other since practice started this year than we have in the past."

Kutz, Verbraken and Bolter were all double-digit scorers a year ago when the Warriors went 5-21 while Kutz and Reicherts were the top scorers for a junior varsity team that went 14-12.

HOCKEY

1995-96 IHSHL standings

EAST DIVISION					
Team	W-L-T	Pct.	GF	GA	
Mason City	22-3-1	.865	220	71	
Des Moines	17-8-1	.673	97	78	
Dubuque	13-12-1	.519	127	154	
Ames	10-16-0	.385	117	138	
Waterloo	5-21-0	.192	65	128	

WEST DIVISION					
Team	W-L-T	Pct.	GF	GA	
Omaha Lancers	21-4-1	.827	147	56	
Omaha Gladiators	19-7-0	.731	126	65	
Sioux City	16-10-0	.615	115	90	
Kansas City	3-23-0	.115	91	172	
St. Joseph	2-24-0	.077	54	206	

Scoring has been an area of concern for a team that ranked next-to-last in the IHSHL a year ago with just 65 goals in 26 games.

"We have a foreign exchange student (Petr Kunpan) and it appears he can handle the puck," says Brown. "We have a lot of veterans who have played at the varsity level for at least two years. And we took Brian Schaefer, who has been a defenseman, and moved him to forward to give us some size up front. All that is gonna help us offensively.

"It's the other end of the rink that's the question mark now, and that comes with hard work."

The Warriors could be young in the net and on defense. Regular goaltender Steve Cak, one of the league's best last season, is playing in Casper, Wyo. That competition includes two sophomores, a freshman and junior Travis Klima, who handled most of the net-minding duties for the JV team last season.

"Our defense will probably have some young guys, too," says Brown. "Our only two veteran defensemen are Jones and Towlerton. We'll have to find at least two young kids who can play there."

Elsewhere in the IHSHL, Mason City is the defending league champion after a 22-3-1 campaign while the Omaha Lancers took the tournament title after going 21-4-1 through the regular season.

The league's annual all-star game is Feb. 28 in Ames where the junior varsity tournament will be played Feb. 28-March 2. The 1996-97 varsity tournament is March 7-9 at Omaha's Hitchcock Park.

Here's a brief look at the league: **AMES** — The Little Cyclones return 20 players from a 10-16 squad, including all three goaltenders and double-digit scorers Steve Huebsch (28 points) Jamie Lawlor (22) and Anders Hagberg (19). Losses include Matt Huebsch, Dustin Morrison and Andrew Murdoch, who combined for 143 points and 76 goals a year ago.

DES MOINES — Balance was the key to the Capitals' 17-8-1 season, and only four players who scored 12 points or more must be replaced. Five players who tallied at least 11 points return, along with two others who scored more than 20 points at the JV level. Backup goaltender Sean Allison is back after going 2-1-1 in varsity games a year ago and 6-3-1 with a 91.2 save percentage for a 19-5-2 JV squad.

DUBUQUE — The Devils should be tough in 1996-97 with 20 veterans back from a 13-12-1 team, including seven of the top nine scorers. Jeff Smith leads the way after a 51-point season and is joined by Marc Brock (45 points) and Zach Schultz (29 points). Jeremy Avenarius is the top goaltending candidate after going 7-3-1 with a save percentage of 84.5 in varsity action last year.

OMAHA GLADIATORS — The Gladiators have plenty of holes to fill with six double-digit scorers gone, but a 22-2-1 junior varsity team should help. The top returning scorer is Brett Duncan, who tallied 30 points in varsity games and 61 points in JV competition with a league-best 36 goals. Mike Kelly added 17 varsity points and 60 at the JV level. Omaha also returns the top varsity goaltender in Joel Ruegg,

See **HOCKEY**, page F4

HOCKEY

Omaha Lancers return seven double-digit scorers

Continued from page F3

who went 12-4-0 with a 92.7 save percentage.

OMAHA LANCERS — There's no lack of firepower in the Lancers' camp with veterans Jed Ortmeier (57 points), Tom Ogee (50 points) and Jeremiah Johnson (29 points) back. Seven double-digit scorers return in all among 13 veterans. The Lancers have also added Mike Kempkes, who tallied 37 junior varsity points while playing

for Kansas City last season.

KANSAS CITY — Experience is abundant, but the losses were significant with three players who contributed 109 total points gone. A strong JV team (21-4-1) will help, as will the remaining 15 veterans from last year's varsity squad. Shane Soltvedt is the top returning scorer after a 23-point season.

MASON CITY — The Mohawks' graduation losses were probably the most severe in the IHSHL. Seven players who poured in at least 30 points won't be back, nor will the top goaltender. The list of veterans numbers 12, including the league's top returning scorer in Jason Andereg (64 points,

35 goals). He's joined by Cory Clifton (35 points), Jim Shovein (21 points) and goalie Isaac Sorensen (10-0-0, .896 save percentage).

SIoux CITY — The Metros have a solid nucleus to work with that features 17 players with varsity experience. Seven of those scored in double figures, led by Trent Mozak (34 points) and Walt Johnson (31). Both Damon Keith and Jacob Hindermann return in goal.

ST. JOSEPH — The good news for the Griffons is that 13 players return. The bad news is that 36 of their league-low 54 goals are gone and the junior varsity team went just 1-25 with 35 scores last season.