

Metros host Lincoln in season opener

By Tom Block

Journal sports writer

The Sioux City Metros will start the 1999-2000 season by remembering one of their former teammates.

A ceremony honoring Dustin White will take place between the junior varsity and varsity games tonight when the Metros host Lincoln in their Iowa High School Hockey League season opener at the IBP Ice Center. White, who would have been a junior at East High School, died in a summer swimming accident. He tallied 39 goals and 43 assists in 83 combined junior varsity and varsity hockey games during his freshman and sophomore seasons.

"There's a hole to fill, physically and spiritually," said Metros Coach Walt Johnson. "I don't know if we can fill it or not, but we'll try."

Sioux City figures to be among the Iowa High School Hockey League elite again this year after sweeping both the varsity and junior varsity state tournament crowns last season.

The Metros, in fact, are two-time defending state champions in the varsity division. They went into the 1999 state tournament on a roll after winning all 13 of their regular season games in January and February. Sioux City compiled a 21-5 regular-season record a year ago and finished second in the IHSHL West Division with a 15-5 mark. Three of those losses were to the West Division champion Omaha Gladiators, who went 16-4 in the league. The Des Moines Capitals posted the loop's top record while winning the East Division with a 17-3 mark.

Sioux City's team is made up of athletes from the five metro high schools as well as several area school districts including Sergeant Bluff-Luton, Lawton-Bronson, Cherokee and O'Neill, Neb.

Ben Deck is the top returning scorer for the Metros after tallying 15 goals and 25 assists in 26 varsity games last season. The North High junior ranked second in the league's junior varsity division behind teammate Brant Mozak with an additional 22 goals and 33 assists in JV contests. Mozak, who scored 19 varsity goals and added 35 more with the JV, is playing Triple A Midget hockey in Vail, Colo., this winter.

Forward Robby Lessard, a senior at Sergeant Bluff-Luton, returns as the Sioux City's second-leading scorer with 15 goals and 17 assists a year ago.

Other returning forwards with varsity experience include Zach Lanning, Chris Porter, Andy Hockenson and Jeremy McClennen. Top defenders lacing up the skates for another season are Tim Johnson, Brandon Lake, Jesse Cowles, Ben Gill, Brian Swanson and Casey Mills.

The Metros are faced with the somewhat daunting task of replacing goaltender Jake Hindermann, who logged 18 appearances in 26 regular season games during the 1998-99 season.

The top contenders for the job are Ross Patrick and Ryan Dohrmann, a pair of North High juniors, who each received limited varsity experience last season. Patrick fashioned a 3-0 record, while Dohrmann went 2-1. Other goaltenders on the roster are Travis Shoemaker and Marie Witche, a home-schooled student from O'Neill who is the team's only female member.

Tonight's varsity contest is scheduled for a 7 o'clock faceoff. The pre-game ceremony will include retiring White's jersey and the unveiling of the Dustin White Award, which will go to a player who exemplifies White's characteristics of being an impact player on the ice and a gentleman off the ice.