



BRANDON POLLOCK / Courier Staff Photographer

Waterloo Warriors assistant coaches Scott Murphy and Shawn Wienke talk to the team before practice Tuesday. The Warriors hope to end a 10-year drought with a state high school hockey title.

Warriors take aim at state hockey

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WATERLOO

It's been 10 years since Waterloo last won the Iowa High School Hockey League's postseason tournament.

The 1999-2000 Warriors hope the puck stops in Sioux City this weekend.

Waterloo faces the Omaha Lancers (14-7-1) in a first-round game at 1:30 p.m. Friday. The winner advances to a semifinal clash at 1 p.m. Saturday against the Des Moines Capitals-Kansas City winner. Sunday's championship game is at 1:30 p.m.

"I think it would be a good way to start 2000 - with a state championship," said Blake Knoll, who has contributed 19 points as one of seven

seniors on a team that went 16-6 during the regular IHSHL season.

Bryce Anderson (33 points), Josh Braby (29 points), Jon Schell (17 points) and Chad Cutsforth (13 points from his defense position) have also made major impacts while Joe McCaron has contributed in a supporting role.

"This is probably the best team I've played on in high school so far," added junior Zach Smith. "It's probably one of our best teams in the '90s, and it's probably our best shot at winning state in awhile."

For the record, Waterloo's regular-season winning percentage of .727 is its best since the 1985-86 team went 14-4 (.778). Six Warriors were selected for the IHSHL all-star team. For the

first time in several years, a couple of them even have a chance to play junior hockey, according to head coach Mike Brown.

It's the culmination of a steady climb for those seniors, who went 11-14-1 as freshmen, 11-13-2 as sophomores and 16-9-1 as juniors.

"Our seniors have been a really great group," said junior Josh Dicken. "They bring great leadership, and they score points. We've got some newcomers playing well, too."

Brown wasn't sure how his team would handle a season that began with eight straight road games. The Warriors won five of their first six away from home before stumbling during a

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Seniors have gone through a lot during careers

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pair of games at Sioux City.

"You've got to play well defensively, and you can't be intimidated (on the road)," said Brown. "You have to have a good, strong nucleus of kids. This senior group has been every place for the last three or four years. Our kids just reacted well, especially early in the season."

Brown is happy for his upperclassmen, who have taken their share of lumps the last few years but persevered.

"These kids have taken their share of whippings as they came up the last three years," he explained. "They've stuck with it. They deserve a lot of credit."

"I think there's a lot of respect for that senior bunch, and what they've been through. I think our seniors have actually given some confidence to our younger players. That's spe-

cial because we've got kids from eight different schools on our varsity roster alone."

The junior class has made a considerable impact, too.

Ryan Shaw has scored 33 points, goaltender Zach Goodsell has been steady and stingy, and Dicken, Smith, Andy Kutz, Jared Boller, Tony Grapp and Josh Kelly have all come up big at times. Sophomores Luke Langdale, Bryan Corwin, Shane Metz and Ben Brown were seeing regular duty by the end of the season, as was freshman Michael Fritts.

"We've gotten pretty good play from all three of our lines," said Brown. "Some of those guys who haven't gotten a lot of recognition playing on the second and third lines have really done a good job."

Eight Warriors scored in double digits during the regular season.

"That's probably the main reason we've been successful," said Smith, who has provided eight goals and seven assists. "We're not getting all our points from one guy. We're getting it from the whole team."

"We've all played together really

since we were kids. We get along, and we're used to working with each other."

Knoll agreed.

"Everyone has been playing their roles, like they're supposed to," he said. "We've put a lot of hard work into being here."

Waterloo defeated the Lancers 3-1 and 3-2 on the road early in the season. Friday's game figures to be a similar defensive struggle. The Warriors gave up just 50 goals in 22 games, but the Lancers allowed only 39.

"It's goaltending and defense, taking advantage of opportunities, playing on the power play and staying out of the penalty box," said Brown.

"We'll need some guys to be able to play under pressure and protect one-goal leads."

Waterloo has won 10 of its last 11 games heading into the postseason. Only a 7-3 road loss to the league-champion Des Moines Capitals has blemished the Warriors' record in 2000.

"The success we've had so far has really got us excited for state," said Smith.