

Mohawk hockey team seeks title

□ Mason City opens state tournament today with a game against Waterloo (13-19-1-1) at 3:15 p.m. The tournament, held at the Five Flags Center, runs through Sunday.

By DOUG BARRETT
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DUBUQUE — After a full season of work just a few games now separate the Mason City Hockey Club from its dream of a state championship.

The Mohawks (25-8-0-1)

begin state tournament play today with a game against Waterloo (13-19-1-1) at 3:15 p.m. The tournament, held at the Five Flags Center, runs through Sunday.



Despenas

A win today, combined with a win on Saturday, will put the Mohawks in the tournament championship

game. If things follow the seedings, second-seeded Mason City would face the top-rated Omaha Jr. Lancers (32-1-0-0) in Sunday's title game.

But to get to Sunday Mason City must win today and Saturday.

"To us, losing is not an option," said Mohawks coach Mark Hicks. "Our goal is to win the state championship, and if we don't win the first game, that goal is out of there. It would be a long climb."

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STATE HOCKEY PAIRINGS

At Dubuque (Five Flags Center)

Today's Games

- Game 1** — (3) DM Capitals vs (5) Lincoln, 1 p.m.
Game 2 — (2) Mason City vs (7) Waterloo, 3:15 p.m.
Game 3 — (4) DM Oak Leafs vs (5) Sioux City, 5:30 p.m.
Game 4 — (1) Omaha Junior Lancers vs (8) Dubuque, 7:45 p.m.

Saturday's Games

- Game 5** — Loser Game 1 vs. Loser Game 6, 9 a.m.
Game 6 — Loser Game 3 vs. Loser Game 4, 11:15 a.m.
Game 7 — Winner Game 1 vs. Winner Game 2, 1:30 p.m.
Game 8 — Winner Game 3 vs. Winner Game 4, 3:45 p.m.

Sunday's Games

- Game 9** — 7th place: Loser Game 5 vs. Loser Game 6, 7 a.m.
Game 10 — 5th place: Winner Game 5 vs. Winner Game 6, 9:15 a.m.
Game 11 — 3rd place: Loser Game 7 vs. Loser Game 8, 11:30 a.m.
Game 12 — Championship game, 1:45 p.m.

HOCKEY

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"We've had a great year. No matter what happens at the state tournament, I'm sure we'll all look back and say it was a good year. But our short-term focus is to win the state tournament."



Fox

Mason City went 5-0 against the Waterloo Warriors during the regular season. The Mohawks posted a 5-2 win on Nov. 16 and following that with a narrow 1-0 decision Feb. 1. Mason City closed out the season series with an 8-4 victory Feb. 8.

The test for Waterloo, as with any team Mason City faces, will be to contain the Mohawks potent offense. Mason City finished the year with three of the top-10 scorers in the Iowa High School Hockey League and averaged 4.3 goals a game.

Sophomore forward Cole Despenas, who averages 1.75 points per game, is the second leading scorer in the IHSHL. He enters the state tournament with 29 goals and 27 assists in 32 games.

Senior forward Erik Fox, the league's fourth leading scorer, has 21 goals and 33 assists this season. Kyle Abben, also a forward, has turned in a 24-goal, 25-assist campaign.

"I think right now were at the top of our game," said Fox. "We've been putting in the puck pretty well. Cole, Kyle and I have been working well together and the other two lines have been really working well."

Despenas, Abben and Fox play on the same line. Other teams will focus on that group, but the Mohawks are equally strong when it comes to depth, experienced leadership and goaltending.

Mason City's third line can provide points and rest for its first two lines. Twelve members of this year's team were on last year's state tournament team.

Brandon Lind, goalie, is 21-5-0 with a .911 save percentage in his first year as a full-time varsity starter.

"Hopefully, Lind will be at the top of his game and every body is going to have to play

THE SEASON

Mason City (25-8-0-1)

Mohawks	Sioux City 3
Mohawks 2	Sioux City 1
Mohawks 7	Ames 1
Mohawks 5	Oak Leafs 3
Mohawks 5	Waterloo 2
Mohawks 6	Capitals 2
Mohawks 5	Quad Cities 2
Mohawks 4	Quad Cities 1
Mohawks 2	Dubuque 5
Mohawks 7	Galadron 1
Mohawks 1	Jr. Lancers 3
Mohawks 0	Jr. Lancers 2
Mohawks 0	Jr. Lancers 1
Mohawks 2	Oak Leafs 1
Ames 3	Mohawks 5
Mohawks 0	Capitals 1
Mohawks 4	Galadron 1
Mohawks 1	Kansas City 1
Mohawks 8	Lincoln 3
Mohawks 7	Dubuque 1
Mohawks 13	Dubuque 0
Mohawks 6	Kansas City 9
Mohawks 3	Kansas City 5 (OT)
Mohawks 3	Ames 2
Capitals 2	Mohawks 1
Mohawks 1	Waterloo 0
Mohawks 4	Galadron 1
Mohawks 5	Quad Cities 1
Mohawks 8	Waterloo 0
Oak Leafs 3	Mohawks 1
Mohawks 4	Sioux City 2
Mohawks 0	Lincoln 3
Mohawks 7	Lincoln 4

together," said senior defenseman Jon Bushbaum. "Hopefully, it all comes together defensively and offensively."

The formula for Mason City won't change much. Mason City can score goals in bunches, but will rely on goaltending and a defense spearheaded by forwards who aren't shy about forechecking. Other teams may juggle things a bit to try and cool off the Mohawk offense, however.

"I think they're going to be more strategic than we are," said Hicks. "We've got a lot of firepower at forward and we can score goals, but we've also got a good defense and a good goalie. I think we'll go out and play our game and let them try to figure us out."

A win this afternoon and Mason City will face either the Des Moines Capitals or Lincoln Stars in the semifinals. A loss and the Mohawks would face the loser of the Capitals/Stars game in consolation play.

But the Mohawks would much rather be on the other side of the bracket.

"I think we're going to go into Friday with a lot of confidence," said senior forward Kyle Huff. "The first game of the tournament really sets the tone for how we play for the rest of it. So we want to come out with a lot of intensity on Friday and play well, take it one game at a time and play well all weekend."

— For more information on the state hockey tournament, see B2.