

Yankton High athlete leads way for Metros hockey squad

By Steven Allsop

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For high school hockey, metro Sioux City extends to Yankton, S.D.

That's a stretch, to be sure, but it's a good thing for the Sioux City Metros.

When the Metros open play in the Iowa High School Hockey League state tournament today at the Five Flags Center in Dubuque, a high-scoring sophomore from Yankton High School will lead the charge.

Kyle Rogers, one of three Sioux City players named recently to participate in the league's All-Star game in Waterloo March 9, leads the Metros in scoring with 32 goals and 55 points in 32 games.

Rogers finished third in IHSLL scoring, one point behind Cole Despenas of the Mason City Hockey Club and 11 back of Dubuque's Tim Roth.

Dubuque, which qualified for the tournament solely because it is the host team, was just 10-23 in regular season play with Roth scoring 35 goals and registering 66 points to lead the prep league in both categories.

Rogers and linemate Kyle Jacobson, a sophomore at North High, have been selected to play in the league All-Star game, along with defenseman Mike Axelsen, a senior at North. Rogers was a unanimous selection.

Jacobson has 13 goals and 33 points this season.

The Metros make their tournament debut today at 5:30 p.m. against the Des Moines Oak

Leafs. It's a favorable draw for the Metros since they've beaten the Oak Leafs in all three regular-season meetings.

Fifth-seeded Sioux City and the Oak Leafs sport identical 20-13 records, but the Des Moines team earned the fourth seed despite losing the three games to the Metros.

The next round, should the Metros prevail over the Oak Leafs, will be a more daunting task since the foe likely would be the league champion Omaha Junior Lancers.

The Junior Lancers, top-seeded the competition, put a 32-1 record on the line against host Dubuque, the eighth seed, in the final game of the first round tonight.

"When we play with purpose we can beat any team in the league and that includes the Oak Leafs," says Jim Peck, who coaches the Metros with Jeff Gray and Landon Blatchford. "Discipline and defense have been a little inconsistent for us.

"But if we can put all the ingredients together we can have a very good tournament run. We've got eight seniors and we're counting on them to provide leadership."

Peck says goaltending will be key to tournament success.

Beau Erickson will start in goal for the Metros against the Oak Leafs.

"Beau has shown tremendous potential all season, but if he can focus and play consistently well we could surprise some people," said Peck.

Erickson is 9-7-0 with a 2.60 goals against average and .869

save percentage. Travis Shoemaker, the other regular goaltender, is 9-6-0 with a 2.06 goals against average and .912 save percentage.

The Metros have beaten the Oak Leafs 4-2, 4-0 and 4-2, but have lost to the Junior Lancers 2-0, 5-1 and 4-2.

Rogers, a 6-3, 175-pounder, operates on a line with fellow sophomore Jacobson and senior Andy Vogt, a 6-2, 185-pounder who also played football at Heelan.

A second line includes sophomore Alex Lukehart, junior Sam Schweigert and senior Alex Lyle.

Seniors James Davies, Cameron Newell and junior Cody Muir skate on another line and a fourth trio features juniors Rick Chartier and Jack Brooks and senior Steve Babe.

The blue line tandems are junior Aaron Limoges-Axelsen, sophomore Daren Rife-senior Casey Mills and juniors Jon Soole and Joel Kemper.

If the Metros lose their opener they would drop into the consolation bracket and face the loser of the Junior Lancers-Dubuque first-round contest Saturday at 11:15 a.m.

Place games for third (11:30 a.m.) fifth (9:15 a.m.) and seventh (7 a.m.) are Sunday in the Five Flags Center. The championship game is Sunday at 1:45 p.m.

FIRST ROUND PAIRINGS

Seeding in Parentheses

- 1 p.m.: Des Moines Capitals 25-8 (3) vs. Lincoln 13-19 (6)
3:15: Mason City 25-6 (2) vs. Waterloo 13-19 (7)
5:30: Sioux City 20-13 (5) vs. Des Moines Oak Leafs 20-13 (4)
7:45: Omaha Junior Lancers 32-1 (1) vs. Dubuque 10-23 (8)