

Capitals-Oak Leafs rivalry intensifies

A turkey-themed trophy will be awarded to the victorious team after the Nov. 26 hockey game.

By ROB GRAY

REGISTER STAFF WRITER

High school athlete Zach Gates doesn't play baseball. He doesn't take the field on brisk football Friday nights.

Instead, the Urbandale senior's competitive stage is a sheet of ice.

"I've always played hockey," said Gates, who plays for the Des Moines Capitals. "It gives me an opportunity to play a sport in high school."

Gates, his teammates, and the rival local team — the Des Moines Oak Leafs — open the Iowa High School Hockey League season Friday.

The already heated Capitals-Oak Leafs rivalry intensifies this season. On Nov. 26, the teams will ring in a new tradition. The first of three meetings will feature a turkey-themed trophy — and early bragging rights — for the team that skates off with the early victory. The teams also will match up Feb. 5 and 21. All of these games will be at the Metro Sports Ice Arena, 7201 Hickman Road in Urbandale.

"It's just like the Valley-Dowling game," said the Oak Leafs' Drew Schade, a senior at Valley. "It's a rivalry."

Most players take part in some form of hockey year-round, which limits participation in other sports.

The costs can be steep: as much as \$3,000 for travel, food and gear in a four-month season. Rewards are plentiful: from weekend road trips to places such as Omaha and Cedar Rapids, to the chance for a league title. The payoffs might

even include a shot at playing college hockey and beyond. Scott Clemmensen, who played hockey for the Capitals when it was Des Moines' only high school team, is now a member of the National Hockey League's New Jersey Devils.

"I kind of feel lucky to be able to do it," the Oak Leafs' Kyle Norris said.

The highlight is always the intra-city match up, which the Capitals have won seven of nine times.

"It's just a tradition for the Capitals to beat the Oak Leafs," Gates said. "The pressure's going to be on us."

The Capitals expect to contend for the league crown this season. The Oak Leafs have shown steady improvement, finishing well above .500 the past two seasons.

"I can guarantee it will be a good game," Norris said of the teams' first meeting in November.

Crowds swell to more than 1,000 when the Capitals and Oak Leafs spar. The season schedule consists of 33 games, and the state tournament is Feb. 28-March 2 at Waterloo.

The Capitals lost to the Omaha Junior Lancers in the tournament title game for the second straight season last winter.

"The older guys know what it's like to finish second," said senior Kyle Walsh, who attends Roosevelt High School.

Most of the guys played together in Pee Wee leagues before splintering off into the rival teams in high school.

"Off the ice, we're buddies," Schade said.

On the ice?

"There's a time and a place for everything."

Reporter Rob Gray can be reached at (515) 284-9194 or robgray@dmreg.com



DOUG WELLS/REGISTER FILE PHOTO

Tough competition: Jason Brown of the Des Moines Oak Leafs tumbles toward the ice after making contact with David Gordon-Kamm, right, of the Des Moines Capitals during action in a 2001 match of the Iowa High School Hockey League. The teams meet Nov. 26 for the first time this season.