

Championship Dreams

□ Mason City hockey club begins quest for state title

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Of The Globe Gazette

MASON CITY — Last season, the Mason City hockey club was 15 minutes away from playing for a state championship.

The Mohawks held a 4-1 lead over the Des Moines Capitals after the second period of their semifinal round game at the state tournament. Then the Capitals scored a power play goal here, another there, and soon Mason City's dreams of a state title went bust in a 5-4 loss.

The Mohawks believe that

fatal 15 minutes was a fluke. They'll spend between now and the state tournament in March trying to prove it to the other teams in the Iowa High School Hockey League.

"That game, the way we were playing the first two periods, no one could touch us," said junior forward Cole Despenas. "We were flying around...then we just kind of gave up."

Mason City, along with the Omaha Jr. Lancers and Des Moines Capitals, occupy the highest tier of the IHSHL. Any of the three could win a

title. Given that, Mason City's formula for winning a state title won't change much.

"I think if we would have played the Capitals 30 times last year we would have gone 15 and 15," said second-year coach Mark Hicks. "I think we have a better chance of winning state this year. We have a good nucleus of guys coming back."

Mason City, which open the season on Saturday at home against the Quad Cities Blues (junior varsity at 5 p.m. with varsity at 6:45 p.m.), likes to

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Despenas



Abben

MOHAWKS

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score goals.

The Mohawks lit the lamp 141 times in 33 regular season games last season. They would love to average four goals a game again this season; and play the same high intensity, up tempo style that is their trademark.

Last season, Despenas was second in the league in scoring with 29 goals and 27 assists. Senior Kyle Abben was sixth overall with 24 goals and 25 assists.

Conditioning played a big role in the Mohawks' success on offense.

"You can run all you want

all summer and rollerblade, and you come out here and it's a whole different thing," Despenas said. "You're out of shape no matter what you do."

"The biggest thing for me is getting my hands back. Passing, shooting, stick handling. It's tough."

Mason City wants to be solid in goal. Last season, as a junior, Brandon Lind was 21-5 with three shutouts and a .911 goals against average. A year older, Lind is in position to be even better this season.

"I think he's one of the top two goalies in our league, if he wants to be," said Hicks. "There are a couple of good ones, but he should be right there."

The Mohawks will need a defensive effort from everybody on the ice. It's here where Mason City feels it's better than last season.

Team defense has been an area of emphasis in the preseason, as has been penalty killing.

The team is one of the biggest and strongest in the league. Expect the Mohawks to be more enthusiastic about checking and the other physical aspects of the game, especially the forwards.

"It gets the intensity up and gets your adrenaline going," Abben said. "You give a hit or take a hit, and it gets you going."

Defense might be an issue

the first few weeks of the season. The Mohawks won't compete with a full roster until the players in football finish their seasons. Most of the missing play defense.

Until their return, the Mohawks may protect their defense by putting an extra shooter on the ice. Mason City could hit the ice with four forwards and a defenseman, instead of the usual three-forward, two-defense-men setup.

"This will make us concentrate on team defense a little more," Hicks said. "This will make us a better team come tournament time because our forwards will be better defensive players."

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