

Metros begin state tournament quest

By Jason Cowley

Journal sports writer

Taking it one at a time.

Never did the old saying hold more true than this weekend's upcoming Iowa High School Hockey League varsity state tournament in Shawnee, Kan.

The fifth-seeded Sioux City Metros, 2002 IHSHL state champions, open tournament play with a 4:30 p.m. first-round game against the fourth-seeded Omaha Jr. Lancers (18-10-2-0).

Sioux City (16-11-1-2) can't look ahead to a possible semifinal showdown with top-seeded and league champion Des Moines Capitals. They must first take care of first-round business.

"Friday afternoon is the biggest game for us," Metros Co-Coach Jim Peck said. "If you don't win the first one your just playing for fifth, sixth, seventh or eighth."

The Junior Lancers own a 2-1 season series edge against the Metros, but both Sioux City losses were by one goal. Sioux City's win, in contrast, was a 3-0 thoroughly dominated performance.

"We had some good goaltending, had some solid play from our defenseman and allowed our forwards to feed off that," Peck said of the 3-0 win over Omaha on Jan. 21. "We started to play with more consistency probably the end of January into February."

"Our biggest thing is getting more consistent and better goaltending - that's been a big thing for us all year."

Adam Suing will get the nod against Omaha on Friday. The East junior is 8-10-0 on the season and has a .893 save percentage in 787 minutes of play. Eric Hoffmeyer, a senior at North, is 8-3-1 with an .867 save percentage in 585 minutes.

Suing played all three regular season meetings with the Lancers, posting a shutout while only allowing four goals in three games.

In front of the goaltenders, the Metros dress just five defenseman, but will rely heavily on Heelan junior Kyle Bennett and East sophomore Marshall Tuttle. Bennett has seven goals and 10 assists from 17 points, while Tuttle has scored four times, including two power play goals, and has 11 points.

"We hope that we get some big games out of Bennett and Marshall (Tuttle), they'll need to

carry the load for us," Peck said.

West junior Nick Bauer, North junior Tyler Hansen and East junior David Hansen are the other defenseman on Peck's varsity roster.

Offensively the Metros take their cue from the three-headed monster of Kevin Lohry, Ben Kambach and Chaz Berglin, the team's first, second and fourth leading scorers.

Lohry, the 2002 state tournament most valuable player, has scored 26 goals this season in 30 games. The West senior has 42 points while Kambach, a senior at Heelan, has 11 goals and 30 points and Berglin, a senior at Dakota Valley, has 11 goals and 23 points.

Coach Peck is hoping to get more contributions from the team's second and third lines.

"We're kind of hoping that the line of (Scott) Marsh, Daniel (Limoges) and (Ben) Held provide us with a little bit of offense," Peck said. "We can't always rely on one line, we need to get some scoring out of the other forwards, too."

Marsh, an East senior who skated on the top line a year ago, has played well as of late and has nine goals this season. Limoges, who scored three times in the final weekend of the season, has seven goals and Held, a 6-5, 200-pound senior from Hinton, has three.

"I feel we have three pretty good, solid lines," Peck said. "You just can't keep playing the top two lines all the time."

The third line will be comprised of senior Chase Peterson, senior Kyle Eyer and junior Chad Corbett.

"The guys are all pretty excited," Peck added. "If we peak at the right time we might be able to bring back the magic from a couple of years ago."

The Metros captured the 2002 state championship with three wins in three days, all come-from-behind. Sioux City, also seeded fifth that season, defeated league champion Mason City in the semifinals and Des Moines Oak Leafs in the title game.

League champion Des Moines Capitals (29-1-0-0) open the tournament with a noon contest against host Kansas City Outlaws (7-19-3-0), who finished 10th in the 11-team league, but qualified automatically with the host berth.

Should the Metros and Capitals both win, the semifinal would be 1:30 Saturday afternoon.