

IOWA HIGH SCHOOL HOCKEY LEAGUE

State tournament slides into town

Des Moines Oak Leafs, who won their first title in regular season, host event.

By LISA COLONNO
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

The differences quickly became apparent to Joseph Harcharik when he first strapped on his ice skates and shoulder pads.

The Des Moines Oak Leafs forward switched from roller hockey to ice hockey at age 11 and had to relearn the basics with blades on his skates.

Six years later, Harcharik has developed into the most prolific single-season scorer in the history of the Iowa High School Hockey League.

Harcharik came to the sport much later than most of the players he competes against, but has quickly found success.

The Johnston junior helped lead the Oak Leafs to their first regular-season title and brings them into this weekend's state tournament seeking their first state championship.

Harcharik remembers when he first removed his wheels and stepped on the ice.

"Most kids have been skating since they were 3 on the ice," said Harcharik, 17. "I'd say it probably took me a good year to get my stopping down. It was so tough. Everything else is different. Turning and everything. You have to get a feel for the balance on the ice."

Harcharik was born in Peoria, Ill., but moved to central Iowa at a young age and grew up in the Johnston school district.

The Oak Leafs' captain finished in the top five varsity points leaders as a sophomore last season.

But breaking the 100-point barrier in 33 regular-season games even caught Harcharik off-guard.

He finished with 52 goals and 49 assists for 101 points. His goals and points totals broke records set during the 1990-91 season.

"I didn't even think I would even get close to 100," Harcharik said. "I had 65 last year. I knew we'd have three more games, so maybe I'd get a little more than 60, but I never would have dreamed 100, or 101."

The Oak Leafs' potent offense leads the 12-team league with 188 goals scored.

Harcharik's forward line has dominated the IHSHL.

Linedmate Matt Trout ranks in the league's top 10 with 43 total points.

Linedmate and former roller hockey buddy Derek Hansen broke the league's assist record with 53. He ranks second in the league in points with 85.

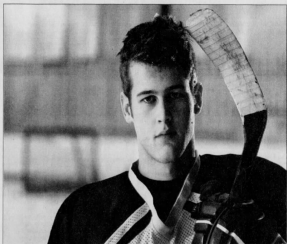
"We have Joseph and when I feed him the puck I'm going to get some assists," said Hansen, 18. "It's pretty cool I beat (the record), but it doesn't mean anything unless we win this weekend."

State tournament tickets

Weekend
pass, \$20

Day pass,
\$8

Children
age 12 and
under, free.



DAVID PETERSON/THE REGISTER

A leader: Joseph Harcharik, 17, finished the Des Moines Oak Leafs' season with 52 goals and 101 points — both Iowa High School Hockey League records. He switched from roller hockey at 11.

TEAM CAPSULES

DES MOINES OAK LEAFS

Record: 31-2-0-0 Seed: 1

About the Oak Leafs: Five of the league's top 17 points leaders play for the Oak Leafs. ... The team enters the tournament on a 19-game winning streak. ... The Oak Leafs' two losses this season were to Kansas City in November and Mason City in December.

MASON CITY MOHAWKS

Record: 25-5-2-1 Seed: 2

About the Mohawks: Goaltender Austin Maginnis posted 10 shutouts in the regular season — an IHSHL record.

DES MOINES CAPITALS

Record: 25-5-2-1 Seed: 3

About the Capitals: They won the past two state titles and have been in the championship game five of the past six years. ... Josh Hens leads the team with 49 points from 30 goals and 19 assists.

QUAD CITY BLUES

Record: 20-11-2-0 Seed: 4

About the Blues: Kendall Price leads the Blues with 45 points from 19 goals and 26 assists.

OMAHA JR. LANCERS

Record: 19-13-0-1 Seed: 5

About the Lancers: Goaltender Donovan Conway's .974 save percentage ranks fifth in the league. ... Luke Johnson ranks fifth in the league in points with 58. ... The Lancers won the tie-breaker with Kansas City.

KANSAS CITY JR. OUTLAWS

Record: 18-12-2-1 Seed: 6

About the Blades: They closed the season with two wins against Waterloo. ... Jake Osh leads Kansas City with 39 points.

WATERLOO WARRIORS

Record: 15-17-1-0 Seed: 7

About the Warriors: Jacob Ivey ranks in the league's top 10 with 40 points. ... They closed the season with two losses.

SIOUX CITY METROS

Record: 14-19-0-0 Seed: 8

About the Metros: They won the past three games entering the tournament. ... Sioux City leads all state tournament qualifying teams with 651 penalty minutes.

— Lisa Colonna

Tourney schedule

FRIDAY'S QUARTERFINALS

noon — Quad Cities (4) vs. Omaha (5)
2:15 — Mason City (2) vs. Waterloo (7)
4:30 — Capitals (3) vs. Kansas City (6)
6:45 — Oak Leafs (1) vs. Sioux City (8)

SATURDAY'S SEMIFINALS

12:30 — Capitals or Kansas City vs. Mason City or Waterloo
2:45 — Oak Leafs or Sioux City vs. Quad Cities or Omaha

SUNDAY'S FINALS

11:30 a.m. — Third-place game
1:45 — Championship

NOTES: 1) Team tournament seed listed in parentheses; 2) consolation bracket starts at 8 a.m. Saturday.

semifinals are Saturday.

"I want to play the Capitals in the championship," said Buerling, who attends Ankeny High School. "That would be great for the city of Des Moines to have us going at each other."

Harcharik hopes to follow a state title with his junior hockey debut.

He practices with the Des Moines Buccaneers and plans to finish out the season playing some games in the North American Hockey League for the North Iowa Outlaws.

He wants to try out for the Buccaneers in June and hopes to stay in the Des Moines area for his senior year of high school at Johnston.

"My goal is to make that team, like every other Des Moines kid's dream," Harcharik said.

But his immediate goal rests on shooting for the Oak Leafs' first state championship.

"It would be such a great accomplishment for the program and the little kids who want to play for the Oak Leafs when they get older," Harcharik said. "It'd great to have another Des Moines team win a championship."

But the Oak Leafs' (31-2-0-0), who host the state tournament, are not a one-dimensional team. They also led the league in goals against.

The Oak Leafs have allowed 37 goals in 33 games — an average of 1.12 per game.

Goaltender Jordan Buerling ranks second in the league with a .945 save percentage.

"We were able to do both," Oak Leafs coach Doug Borud said. "That's a good thing. A lot of teams you might only get it one way — score a lot or give up a lot."

The team seeks Des Moines dominance for the first time after finishing as state runner-up twice in the past three seasons.

The rival Des Moines Capitals, seeded third, won the past two regular-season titles and enter the tournament Friday as two-time defending state champions.

The Oak Leafs swept the Capitals (25-5-2-1) in three regular-season games for the first time since the Oak Leafs formed in 1998.

Quarterfinals are Friday and