



Jeff Cook/QUAD-CITY TIMES

Nick Swisher, left, and Kendall Price, who are the two top scorers for the Quad-City Blues, have helped the high school hockey team to a 14-3-1 record this season.

DOORMATS NO MORE

In their previous five seasons, the most wins the Quad-City Blues have recorded in a 33-game season is nine. This season the Blues already have rolled up 14 victories

By Sean Moeller
QUAD-CITY TIMES

THE 2004-05 season seemed to hold such great promise for the Quad-City Blues high school hockey team.

Head coach Jim Thomson was looking forward to taking what he perceived to be an ample, even abundant, number of goal-scorers and play-makers into the program's fifth year in the 10-team, Iowa High School Hockey League. Over a 33-game schedule, the Blues had a team-record nine victories in a season and never had advanced to the playoffs.

"They were pretty much considered the doormats of this league," Thomson said this week. A year ago, with all that hopeful optimism seeking to be backed up with results, the Blues came out against Ames but outshot them 40-15, but lost in overtime.

You could see their shoulders drop great

NO MORE BLUES

Q-C Blues records

through the years:

2000-01 4-24-0

2001-02 9-24-0

2002-03 7-24-1

2003-04 6-22-0

2004-05 9-18-1

2005-06 14-3-1

BLUES

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inches," Thomson said of his players. "It was like they were all thinking, 'Not again.' There was a tradition of losing, and that's a hard thing to change.

"Losing begets losing, and winning begets winning."

The Blues finally are getting those wins they thought they should have been getting last year, and that breakout season finally has arrived, just a year later than anticipated.

The team is 14-3-1 and in third place behind the Des Moines Oak Leafs and Des Moines Capitals, heading into an extended holiday break.

No such pall, as the one that struck the Blues in their first game last year, fell over them this season as they won 14 straight games — after an 0-2 start — waiting for some football players to come to practice for the first time — to instill a different mentality.

"It's been so great. Last year was kind of a downer since we didn't win too many games," Blues leading scorer and Riverdale High School junior Kendall Price said. "When you aren't winning many games, you start to get down on people and you say things that you don't mean, and it can put get kind of depressing. The confidence is definitely there this year. Everybody's getting along. Everything's more positive."

Riding the momentum of a six-game winning streak to end last year, the Blues upped the ante with a more intense summer practice schedule that centered on a new objective.

"Before those last six games of last season we, as a coaching staff, made a shift to get these kids stronger and to play a more physically aggressive game," Thomson said. "This is a very physical league."

Price has 15 goals and 21 assists, while Davenport West

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KENDALL PRICE

Riverdale junior, who leads the Quad-City Blues in scoring

senior Nick Swisher has remained on his heels with 14 goals and 18 assists, benefiting from the more aggressive approach.

But more than the scoring is a defense that's given up just over 1½ goals per game, numbers inflated by a 5-0 opening game blowout loss to Ames.

"I wouldn't trade any of my defensemen for any other defensemen in the league," Thomson said of Davenport Central's Andy Dotterer, Pleasant Valley's Eric Warta, Bettendorf's Steven Nicholas, United Township's Zach Honert and Rock Island's Alex Lambert. "And we're within a handful of goals of what we scored all year last year."

They've still yet to beat either of the Des Moines clubs, though they did earn a 3-3 tie against the Capitals on their home ice last Friday and lost 2-1 on Saturday, with the Des Moines goaltender gloving a Price shot near the end of the game.

"They've had strong programs since I was a kid," Price said of the Des Moines teams. "But we're keeping up with them now."

Thomson seemed taken aback when it was stated that even if the Blues lose out the rest of their games, they're playoff-bound for the first time in team history.

Last year's team might have gotten more excited.

"Honestly, I hadn't even thought of that," Thomson said. "We're kind of changed our focus. We're taking a run at this."

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