

Confident Warriors ready to make postseason run

By DOUG NEWHOFF
Sports Editor

WATERLOO — The slate has been wiped clean.

How spotless the Waterloo Warriors can keep their own goal will be a key factor in this weekend's Iowa High School Hockey League postseason tournament in Urbandale.

It's all about defense, says Waterloo coach Shawn Weinke, and he likes the way his Warriors are going about their business at that end of the ice as they prepare for Friday's 2:15 p.m. tournament quarterfinal against second-seeded Mason City.

"We've been playing much better defensively late in the season," said Weinke, whose squad had an up-and-down, 15-17-1 regular season and enters the eight-team tournament as the seventh seed.

"We haven't had much offensive punch as of late, but we've been in all the games. I feel like we're peaking at the right time."

Waterloo's defense starts with all-star goaltender Ryan Larrabee, who has posted a 911 save percentage this season. Weinke doesn't hesitate to put a net full of responsibility on his goalie's shoulders.

"He has played with a lot of confidence for the last month," said Weinke. "He's kept us in most of the games, even when we've had breakdowns, and he's won a few games for us."

"He will be the difference between us winning a championship or playing a Sunday early morning game (in the consolation round). That's a lot of pressure, but he understands his role and can handle it."

Offensively, the Warriors are led by freshman Jacob Irej, who

Tourney glance

(Seeding in parentheses)

GAMES FRIDAY

Quarterfinals

Noon - Quad City (4) vs.

Omaha (5)

2:15 p.m. - Mason City (2)

vs. Waterloo (7)

4:30 p.m. - Des Moines Cap-

itals (3) vs. Kansas City (6)

6:45 p.m. - Des Moines Oak-

leafs (1) vs. Sioux City (8)

GAMES SATURDAY

Semifinals

12:30 p.m. - D.M. Capitals-

Kansas City winner vs. Mason

City-Waterloo winner

2:45 p.m. - D.M. Oakleafs-

Sioux City winner vs. Quad

City-Omaha winner

Consolation

8 a.m. - Des Moines

Capitals-Kansas City loser vs.

Mason City-Waterloo loser

10:15 a.m. - Des Moines

Oakleafs-Sioux City loser vs.

Quad City-Omaha loser

GAMES SUNDAY

7 a.m. - Seventh place

9:15 a.m. - Fifth place

11:30 a.m. - Third place

1:45 p.m. - Championship

has tallied 29 goals and 11 assists in his first varsity season. Tyler Mahncke, Michael Davis, Joe Giachino, Scott Dobes, Blake Miehle and Bryn Klein are also double-digit scorers.

But it's Irej, also selected to the league's all-star game, who has given the team an unexpected source of firepower.

"He's a gifted player, and he gets the game," said Weinke. "He's strong for his age, and he has a knack for the net. He makes everybody better on his line. Really, he's been a wonderful surprise."

Waterloo will need any offense it can muster to get past Mason City (25-6-2). The Blackhawks are one of the league's top defensive

teams, allowing an average of just 1.24 goals per game. Goaltender Austin Maginnis leads the IHSHL in minutes played (1,502), shutouts (10) and save percentage (.948). His save percentage is the highest in league history for anyone playing more than 650 minutes, and his shutout total is a new record.

"He's good," said Weinke. "They've got two all-star defensemen in front of him, and they've been giving him a great opportunity to see the puck. Anybody who beats him has to get traffic around the net."

Waterloo went 0-2-1 against Mason City during the regular season, but could have won all three games. Four power-play goals were the difference in a 6-2 defeat, Mason City scored an empty-net goal in a 2-0 win and the teams tied 1-1.

The Mohawks' offense comes from Brent Schloemer (32 goals, 30 assists) and Mitch Paulsen (25-28). Chris Jessen and Nils Berggren have added 25 points apiece.

"Our guys are excited about it," said Weinke. "We definitely have confidence that we can go in there and play them tough and give ourselves a chance."

The three-day tournament, which concludes with Sunday's 1:45 p.m. championship game, will also showcase the talents of several other outstanding players.

Joseph Harcharik of the Des Moines Oakleafs set a new league scoring record this season with 101 points, including a record 52 goals. One of his linemates, Derek Hansen, finished with 85 points and an IHSHL record 53 assists.

Contact Doug Newhoff at (319) 291-1457 or doug.newhoff@wcfcourier.com