

TRUE COLORS

Mohawks' Hepperly to play on Team USA in Deaflympics

By JAMIE SUHR

Of The Globe Gazette
MASON CITY — Garrett Hepperly is used to donning the red, white and black. In January, he'll have to get used to a different color scheme — the red, white and blue. Hepperly, a member of the Mohawk Hockey Club, will skate for Team USA in the Deaflympics.



Hepperly

"I was pretty happy for myself and for my family," Hepperly said of making the final roster. "They gave me a lot of support all the way through. I couldn't have done it without them."

The trip to the Deaflympics was four years in the making. Hepperly, a 6-foot-1, 170-pound defenseman, used to attend camps at the Stan Mikita Hockey School for the Hearing Impaired in Chicago. There, he learned about the Deaflympics.

After six tryouts, including trips to Chicago, Ann Arbor, Mich., and Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Hepperly made the final roster of 17, which was whittled down from 55.

"It's not only good for him — he's such a good kid — but it's good for us and the league for people to see we produce good hockey players."

Hepperly, however, will have to leave the Mohawks on Jan. 18 for training camp in Colorado Springs, Colo., the site of



SARAH ARONSEN/The Globe Gazette

Mohawks open season against Dubuque today

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MASON CITY — Every year it seems like the same old story for the Mohawk Hockey Club.

The Mohawks must replace their top two scorers, a top defenseman and maybe a goaltender.

"In high school hockey, you have to replace people," said coach Mark Hicks, whose team opens the season today at home against Dubuque at 5 p.m. "I don't see why we can't continue to do what we've done over the past four or five years."



Hicks

And that's been one of the winningest teams in the Iowa High School Hockey League, which is now known as Midwest Hockey League.

Gene are Mohawk forwards Brent Schloemer and Mitch Paulsen, two of the top scorers in the league last season.

Making matters worse, the Mohawks lost Austin Maginnis, the IHSHL's top goalender a year ago, and defenseman Matt Adamski. Both skipped their senior seasons to play minor league hockey in hopes of getting more exposure to college scouts.

"Austin is a pretty big loss to fill," defenseman Garrett Hepperly said. "I've seen a lot of improvement from LeeBreeze (Lowery), and I'm glad to see Austin play hockey at a higher level."

Hicks said Lowery will be



SARAH ARONSEN/The Globe Gazette

Mohawk goalie LeeBreeze Lowery attempts to stop the puck during a Friday practice at the North Iowa Ice Arena.

Hockey: Lowery is No. 1 goalie

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the No. 1 goalie this year, although freshman Nolan Murphy will also see playing time.

"LeeBreeze knows it's his position," Hicks said.

As for goal scoring, Hicks thinks the Mohawks will have that covered.

From Alex Maginnis to Mike Murtagh to last year's scoring duo of Schloemer and Paulsen, scoring hasn't been much of a problem for Mason City.

"We have a good offensive program here," Hicks said. "Those players looked up to Maginnis and Murtagh and then Schloemer and Paulsen. Now it's players like (Chris) Jessen."

Jessen, a senior, was the Mohawks' third-leading scorer last season. "This year the team will be looking to me to fill in the scoring," Jessen said. "We're going to have to step up our scoring. No one will expect this team to be a great scoring team."

The could be said of last year's squad, which made a run to the title game before falling to the Des Moines Oak Leafs 4-1

in the championship.

The 2005-06 Mohawks weren't supposed to be an explosive offensive team but worked their way into one.

"I wasn't convinced we had the goal-scoring ability, but the kids proved me wrong," Hicks said. "I don't want to take away their strength this year. I'm going to let them do what they're good at."

Jessen said one of the Mohawks' strengths is their size.

"We'll probably be the biggest team in the league," he said. "We'll have to be physical and be a presence on the ice."

2006-07 Mohawk Hockey schedule

November
4 — vs. Dubuque, 5 — vs. Dubuque, 11 — at Cedar Rapids, 12 — at Cedar Rapids, 18 — vs. Des Moines Capitals, 22 — at Ames, 24 — at Waterloo, 25 — vs. Kansas City

December
1 — at Omaha, 2 — at Lincoln, 3 — at Omaha, 8 — at Des Moines Capitals, 9 — vs. Cedar Rapids, 16 — at Sioux City, 17 — at Sioux City, 21 — vs. Ames.

January
5 — vs. Ames, 6 — at Grand Oaks, 7 — at Dubuque, 12 — vs. Grand Oaks, 13 — vs. Grand Oaks, 18 — vs. Des Moines Oak Leafs, 28 — vs. Omaha, 27 — vs. Lincoln, 29 — vs. Lincoln.

February
2 — at Des Moines Oak Leafs, 3 — at Kansas City, 4 — at Kansas City, 10 — vs. Ames, 18 — vs. Des Moines Oak Leafs, 17 — at Waterloo, 23 — at Des Moines Capitals, 24 — vs. Waterloo.

Hepperly: Will leave Mohawks for Team USA for almost a month

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the U.S. Olympic headquarters.

The competition is Feb. 1-10 in Salt Lake City. Team USA competes in a round-robin tournament against Germany, Finland, Russia, Canada and Sweden.

That means Hepperly will miss nearly a month of the Mohawks' season.

"I believe in the guys," he said. "They can still win without me. They've got some good defensemen who they can win with."

Hepperly says he feels plenty of responsibility in wearing the red, white and blue.

"I want to be a role model for other kids with disabilities like I have," Hepperly said.