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VARSITY BLUES

Q-C hockey team begins another season with a new coach

By Andrew Petersen
QUAD-CITY TIMES

THE members of the Quad-City Blues hockey team have been at it awhile, but the thrill of travel hasn't wavered. If ever there was a fusion between prep and professional sports, the Midwest High School Hockey League is it.

Two road games into their eighth season, the Blues have regained their taste for charter buses, hotel rooms and, of course, competition. Yet for all the antics and debauchery of the road, playing at home is especially meaningful.

As the Blues prepare to open the home portion of their 36-game schedule Friday, several of the team's seniors will begin the final stretch of their Quad-City careers. When the Quad-City Sports Center opened on the Davenport riverfront in 1995, these boys were there, stumbling across the ice.

BLUES HOME OPENER

When: Friday 8 p.m. (junior varsity at 6:30)
Where: Quad-City Sports Center
Tickets: Free admission for children; \$5 for adults
On the web: www.midwesthighschoolhockey.com/QCQCmain.htm
Players to watch: Jake Hemmen (Sr., F, Altamira); Rich Moran (Sr., F, Bettendorf); Colin DeBayerre (Sr., D, Geneseo); Bennett Weiser (Sr., F, Moline); Ryan Giertz (Sr., D, Rivermont Collegiate)

Bettendorf senior Rich Moran started playing hockey at age 3 and is just as captivated 14 years later.

"I have fun with it," he said. "It's a rush. And it's not just your high school group."
The Blues represent 11 area high schools from Iowa and Illinois.

They've been part of the Midwest High School Hockey League since 2000, and the league first began play in 1972.

Changes to the league this season include the addition of the Kansas City Stars and Tri-City Junior Storm out of Kearney, Neb. The Omaha, Neb., team left, giving the league 13 teams.

The biggest change within the Blues organization is the hiring of former Quad-City Mallards president Paul O'Dacre as coach.

Since resigning from the Mallards in April 2006, O'Dacre has remained in the area. He readily took the chance to return to coaching.

"I've always been in the business," he said. "I have a college-age boy and a high school-age boy so I know what to expect."

Additionally, O'Dacre added Les Teplicky to his coaching staff. Teplicky helped found organized ice hockey in the Quad-Cities and coached much of the current Blues team as

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youngsters.

"Back when the kids were 6 or 7, they really took to hockey," Teplicky said. "They embraced everything about it."

And they got better and better.

This year's team is off to a respectable start, particularly considering its first two games (a win and an overtime loss) were played short-handed.

Several team members recently returned from football seasons, and a few more Bettendorf players still are on the gridiron.

When everyone's back, the Blues have every intention of building on last season's 20 wins.

"We're solid throughout," Rivermont Collegiate senior Ryan Giertz said. "These guys can really put the puck in the net."

"It always helps that you know where everyone is. You give them a no-look pass, and it's not being fancy, you just know you can get it through."

But like traditional sanctioned Iowa and Illinois prep sports, no one's playing if they aren't making grades.

One player is sitting out 20 games for failing a class, O'Dacre said. League rules stipulate that teams must adhere to the eligibility guidelines of each player's individual school.

For the most part, O'Dacre said, the players are model students.

"These seniors, they were the original guys in the program," O'Dacre said. "We want them to leave their mark on the Quad-Cities."

As long as they continue to hone their skills and keep road trip antics to a minimum, that shouldn't be a problem.

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PAUL O'DACRE

New coach of the Blues, and former president of the Mallards



ONLINE

Check out video of the Quad-City Blues at www.qctimes.com.