

PREP HOCKEY

Warriors put the focus on defense

■ Dietz to count on
veterans along the
blue line

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WATERLOO — A year ago, the Waterloo Warriors were one of the highest-scoring teams in the Midwest High School Hockey League.

But for every four goals the Warriors scored, they surrendered three on the way to an 18-10 regular season and a fourth-place finish in the league's postseason tournament.

The young Warriors team that takes the ice to open the 2014-15 season Saturday night at Young Arena won't have quite as much offensive punch as a year ago. That means lowering those defensive numbers will be important, and head coach Doug Dietz has the weapons to get that done.

"Our defensive corps will be probably our strongest position," said the fifth-year head coach. "We have a couple of seniors there in Dylan Johnson and Connor Luck, along with Kurt Kelly and Luke Powell. Those four will log a lot of minutes on the blue line. We have to figure out who the fifth, sixth and seventh guys are there throughout the season."

"We are going to have to tighten down on the defensive side of the puck. That's one of the things we have stressed. We had a few exhibition games, and there were some good things I saw."

Behind those blue-liners are two experienced goaltenders in Sam Metcalf (14-5-0, .884 save percentage last season) and Jordan Messerer-Mellin (4-5-0, .869%). Football season kept Metcalf off the ice until this week, but Dietz expects him to catch up quickly.

"We know Metcalf can play," he said. "He just needs time on the ice."

The Warriors will look for Cameron Pries, Kyle Schott and Joshua Almaraz to get the puck in the net. Pries, who tied for 11th in the league in scoring last season with 42 points, is currently injured and likely to miss most of November. Schott contributed 25 points a year ago as a freshman, and Almaraz scored 10 points while playing defense but has returned to his more natural forward position. Dylan Storch will also be a factor on the attack, once his football season at Union High is over. Sam Richter, whose 55 points last season led the team and ranked third in the league, has left the program for AAA hockey.

"We've got some young kids who need to step up," said Dietz.

2014-15 schedule

Nov. 1 — Des Moines Oak Leafs, 6 p.m., Nov. 15 — at Mason City, 4 p.m., Nov. 22 — Des Moines Oak Leafs, 6 p.m., Nov. 26 — at Cedar Rapids, 6 p.m., Nov. 29 — Des Moines Capitals, 6 p.m.

Dec. 2 — Dubuque, Dec. 4 — at Dubuque, 6:30 p.m., Dec. 6 — at Mason City, 8:15 p.m., Dec. 11 — Cedar Rapids, 6 p.m., Dec. 13 — at Sioux City, 3 p.m., Dec. 14 — at Sioux City, 10 a.m., Dec. 17 — at Ames, 6:30 p.m.

Jan. 3 — Omaha, 6 p.m., Jan. 4 — Omaha, 7:45 a.m., Jan. 9 — Dubuque, 6 p.m., Jan. 10 — Des Moines Capitals, 6 p.m., Jan. 17 — at Quad City, 3 p.m., Jan. 18 — at Quad City, 8 a.m., Jan. 21 — at Dubuque, 6:30 p.m., Jan. 30 — at Cedar Rapids, 6 p.m., Jan. 31 — Lincoln, 6 p.m.

Feb. 1 — Lincoln, 7:45 a.m., Feb. 7 — at Kansas City, 5:40 p.m., Feb. 8 — at Kansas City, 11 a.m., Feb. 14 — Quad City, 6 p.m., Feb. 15 — Quad City, 7:45 a.m., Feb. 20 — at Ames, 6:45 p.m., Feb. 21 — Cedar Rapids, 6 p.m.