

# Warriors ready for biggest test

## Waterloo sets sights on MHSHL tourney title

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WATERLOO — Brian Cook knew his Waterloo Warriors hockey team would face a rough beginning to the season.

He also knew his team had the potential to develop into a force in the Midwest High School Hockey League.

The Warriors lost their first four games, but after a big 1-0 home victory over the Des Moines Oak Leafs, the confidence began to grow and it hasn't stopped since.

The Warriors (21-7-0) won 20 of their remaining 23 games and head into the MHSHL tournament in Ames this weekend as the No. 3 seed behind Omaha (23-4-1) and the Des Moines Capitals (25-1-1-

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Cook believes his balanced and tested team has as good a chance as any to win its first title since 2012.

"We did think it would be a little rough at first, but it all fell into place much better than I thought," Cook said. "These guys all work for the same goal. It is all about the 'W' here. I think the strongest part of this team really, is that they are playing together as a team. No individual stars.

"We have two strong lines and our defense gives a great effort and our goaltending has been very solid this year."

Waterloo is one of the stingiest defensive teams in the league, allowing the fewest goals (62). It starts between the pipes where Dawson Sturch has stood tall.

The Waterloo West High junior lost his first three starts, but has

loomed large in the net with a 19-3 record since.

"It was a slow start for everyone, me included," Sturch said. "We had some guys missing that were playing other sports, but once we got them back, we found our groove. A lot of times us goalies get most of the credit, but the guys in front of me deserve most of the credit. They put themselves out there and take the hard shots and take away the odd man rushes."

Keeping things in line up front are Union of La Porte City's Dylan Stech and Waterloo West senior Drew Westphal.

"Honestly, we do what we are supposed to do and give the goalie all the credit, he has to stop the shots," said Stech. "We help him out by cleaning up our chances and stopping them from getting the shot, but he is the last one to

stop it.

"We are playing with a lot of confidence right now and we need to stay humble when we are playing. We can celebrate after we win our last game."

Offensively, leading scorer Kyle Schott knows what he and the rest of the forwards have to do. Schott has made a healthy return after sitting out for eight games due to an injury.

The Warriors dropped three games in a row after Schott got hurt, but rallied to win the next five, starting a 12-game win streak to end the season.

"When I got hurt, there were a lot of guys that just stepped in and took over," said Schott. "I am very confident with who we have on the ice and they all fit their rolls and do their job. This team is not selfish and they always find the open guy and they seem to make

good plays."

Schott is fourth in the league with 55 points, scoring 26 goals and 29 assists, including six game-winners.

Cade Saeugling, a senior at Independence, complements Schott's output with 14 goals and 19 assists.

"This team is very talented and we have a deep bench," Cook said. "We have freshmen that have come up from JV and contributed, and we have confidence in (Chase) Pabst if something should happen to Sturchy."

The first roadblock in the Warriors' quest this weekend will be Kansas City (15-11-1-1). Waterloo swept the Jets in early December, 4-1 and 3-1 in Kansas City.

"This team has settled into where we need to be and they are going down there to win it all," said Cook.