

Warriors excited to get 2016-17 season started

Waterloo opens Saturday with game at Sioux City

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WATERLOO — Last year was a trying season for the Waterloo Warriors high school hockey team.

From a change in head coaches to roster turnover, suspensions and the tragic death of popular and talented defenseman Kurt Reidy, the Warriors never quite found traction on the way to a 12-14-2 season that left them out of the Midwest High School Hockey League playoffs.

There's a different atmosphere and attitude in the Warriors' camp heading into Saturday's season-opener at Sioux City.

"Everybody was pretty disappointed not making it to the state tournament," notes second-year head coach Brian Cook. "We had

every excuse in the book from one of our best players passing away to two other good players suspended for grades. It was one of those learning, struggling years.

"This year it's just been a totally different atmosphere. It's been very positive, not as intense just so much different and I think that will be reflected in how we play and how many wins and points we get.

"It was not just the players, but the coaches, too. It took us a year to learn some things. I think we have learned from our mistakes and we're going forward."

The Warriors have been practicing for nearly a month. The familiarity that exists this season between the coaches and the players has accelerated the team's preseason development.

"I feel like we got a jump-start this year as opposed to last year," said Cook.

The Warriors got a boost, too,

with the return of Kyle Schott. After finishing second in the MSHSL in scoring with 48 points as a sophomore, Schott spent last season playing for a AAA team out of Madison, Wis. That went well, but rather than move up an age group within that program, Schott decided to play his senior season with the Warriors.

"He's been a great addition to our team," said Cook. "He will definitely help us at the offensive end. As a senior, he gives us some leadership, too, and he also has some of the other guys looking at how he plays and trying to model their game after him as far as what it takes to get to that next level of talent and competitiveness."

The Warriors will also look to senior Drew Westphal and sophomores Carter Herbst and Nick Samuelson for scoring, but points could come from many sources.

"One of our strengths is definitely our forwards and the speed

of our players," said Cook. "We have some very quick, fast players we are really going to try to utilize this year on that Olympic-sized rink (at Young Arena), and we're pretty deep with our forwards, too. We go 9, 10, 11 deep there with pretty good confidence."

Another area of strength is in the net where last year's top goalie, Dawson Sturch, returns and Chase Pabst, who was in primarily a backup role last season but is challenging for more minutes this fall.

"We feel very confident with that," noted Cook.

"On defense, we're probably not quite as deep as we'd like, but we do have some very good defensemen."

That group includes veterans Kyle Cowell, Cade Saeugling and Dylan Stech.

All in all, optimism is running high.

"One thing that's nice for us

2016-17 schedule

Oct. 29—at Sioux City, 3 p.m., Oct. 30—at Sioux City, 10 a.m.
Nov. 5—Omaha, 2 p.m., Nov. 6—Omaha, 11 a.m., Nov. 12—Des Moines Oak Leafs, 8 p.m., Nov. 19—Cedar Rapids, 2 p.m., Nov. 26—Dubuque, 8 p.m.
Dec. 3—at Kansas City, 6 p.m., Dec. 4—at Kansas City, 10:50 a.m., Dec. 10—at Mason City, 7:15 p.m., Dec. 11—at Mason City, 11 a.m., Dec. 14—at Dubuque, 6:30 p.m., Dec. 21—at Cedar Rapids, 8 p.m., Dec. 30—Lincoln, 8 p.m., Dec. 31—Lincoln, 11 a.m.
Jan. 7—Des Moines Capitals, 8 p.m., Jan. 8—Des Moines Capitals, 11 a.m., Jan. 13—Quad City, 8 p.m., Jan. 14—Quad City, 8 p.m., Jan. 28—Dubuque, 2 p.m.
Feb. 3—at Ames, 6:45 p.m., Feb. 4—at Ames, 6:30 p.m., Feb. 7—at Cedar Rapids, 8 p.m., Feb. 10—Des Moines Oak Leafs, 8 p.m., Feb. 11—Cedar Rapids, 2 p.m., Feb. 15—at Dubuque, 6:30 p.m., Feb. 24—at Quad City, 7 p.m., Feb. 25—at Quad City, 5:15 p.m.

is we have an older team this year with a lot of seniors," said Cook. "Our goaltending is a year older, which will help us in those tougher games. Last year we let a couple of games we should have won slip away I think just because of the inexperience of the players and myself. This year, I think we can win those games we should win and pick off a few games from those top teams that I feel like we can compete with this year."