

METROS HOCKEY

Newman steady on the blue line for top-seeded Metros

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SIoux CITY — Grant Newman is an offensive-minded defenseman.

The East High senior has career-highs of five goals and 19 assists for the top-seeded Sioux City Metros team that begins play in the Midwest High School Hockey League's Varsity Championship Tournament Friday at Ames/ISU Arena.



Newman

Newman is also well-known for his defensive skills. He plays taller than his 5-foot-10, 175-pound frame.

Along with fellow blue-line partner Walter Werden (4, 27), Newman forces turnovers and blocks shots. It's a plus for a squad that not only scored the MHSHL's most goals (120), it gave up the fewest (42).

"I think it all started last year, midway through the season when we played at Dubuque, when he gave the puck away," said Metros Coach Dave LeGree. "I sat him for a period. There was no more of that. He improved on his game and he was solid."

"Each year, he's gotten better with his puck control. This year, I wanted him to carry the puck up the ice. He did it at state last year

Metros

From B1

and he scored a goal. It's carried over into this year. He will not hesitate. If he's open, he will go. That's what I want."

Newman's offensive play gives the MHSHL's regular-season champions the option to take four skaters for scoring chances. Many times, the Metros have the advantage taking the puck down the ice against odd-man rushes and it has led to goals. Several have come from the top line of left wing Drake Beller (26 goals, 43 assists), center Connor Sand (13, 20) and right wing James Page (31, 26).

Newman participated along with Page and Drake Beller in last April's America's Showcase in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Prior to the start of his final MHSHL season, Newman played for Team Midwest, a group of MHSHL all-stars that competed against AAA-level Minnesota squads.

LeGree said while Newman's extra hockey was a plus, his maturity also played a key role, especially while playing in front of goaltender Blake Beller (25-2-1, 1.45 GAA, 5 shutouts). Sioux City allowed more than two goals only three times this season.

"Part of his play in the defensive zone, he will block shots, which

is helpful to a goaltender," said LeGree. "When players come on to him, he makes them go wide, so they take poor angle shots off to the side. He won't give them the center of the ice to shoot."

Newman is also part of the "process" which has carried Sioux City from sixth-place in the 2015 MHSHL Tournament to third in 2016, then second a year ago. The Metros fell 2-1 in the finals to Waterloo, Friday's 6 p.m. first-round opponent.

According to LeGree, his squad has realized what it has done this season. Still, the Metros know their regular-season accomplishments won't mean anything if they don't win the title, something which last happened in 2003 when the program won its sixth championship.

Something like a multiple-goal lead in the first period would be a key to victory for a coach, who like his players plan to take it one game at a time. Chase Lewison (10 goals, 11 assists) is another solid scorer for the club along with forwards Reece McDonald (8, 7) and Kolten Kane (6, 9).

Max Beller (8, 5), Alec Nieman (3 assists) and Ethan Burge (2 assists) are also key defensemen for a team that hasn't allowed three goals in a game for nearly a month.

"If we snag a few (goals) in the first period, it would get us good

MHSHL Tournament

First-Round Pairings

(All games at Ames/ISU Ice Arena)

#4 Cedar Rapids (17-7-4) vs. #5 Des Moines Capitals (17-7-4), Noon

#3 Mason City (18-8-2) vs. #6 Omaha (18-9-1), 2 p.m.

#2 Kansas City (19-7-2) vs. #7 Des Moines Oak Leafs (16-11-1), 4 p.m.

#1 Sioux City (25-2-1) vs. #8 Waterloo (15-10-3), 6 p.m.

momentum," said LeGree. "We've been outshooting teams, but we haven't put the biscuit in like we have. We need to do that. I have a feeling some of those who haven't been scoring will score this weekend. We have to be disciplined on defense."

"They understand the history that the league championship won't mean anything unless we win state. Everyone remembers who the state champion is. Our season is not over yet. I don't have to tell them that. We're a very mature team. We understand the situation. The kids understand they still have a job to do."