

A different challenge

Metros dealing with unknown entering new tournament

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SIoux CITY — There's a certain beauty about the USA Hockey High School National Championships.

It's not only the 3-risk Plymouth Arena. It's the fact that teams like the Sioux City Metros and the Manatee Admirals (Fla.) know little about each other.

Metros Coach Dave LeGree isn't concerned. The squad's soon-to-be retiring fourth-year boss figures all it will take is the game's first five to 10 minutes to make adjustments.

He did it during a 25-2-1 season where the Metros won the program's first Midwest High School Hockey League regular-season title. It continued as they won the league's tournament at Ames and now, they're in the nationals for the first time ever.

"We don't know who their top player is, they don't know who ours is," said LeGree, whose squad will also face the Colorado Monarchs and the Newark Generals in Group F action during the 32-team tournament begins Thursday in Plymouth, Minnesota. (see schedule)

"It's a matter of staying composed. It's different because you have to be sharp and see what they do with their game style. I think there will be a lot of good skills, good skating, good passing, moving the puck in open space. What we've been doing is working to improve our neutral zone play. Some of the goals that were scored against us were our own mistakes with the puck caught in the neutral zone."

A program that has won eight MHSJHL Tournaments, Sioux City scored the league's most goals (110) and allowed the fewest (42). The squad showed their depth as seven players scored at least one goal in the tournament.

"I feel like we're really balanced," said Metros' scoring leader Drake DeEer (26 goals, 43 assists). "Our defense is strong. Our offense is strong. We play well at our positions. I think our biggest strength is our depth, how all our lines rotate so no one gets tired. We have guys who compete and



D. Beller

Newman

B. DeEer



Sioux City Metros' Connor Sand practices in Sioux City on Tuesday as the team prepares to take part in the USA Hockey High School National Championships. JUSTIN WAN, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

USA Hockey National Championships

Sioux City Metros Pool F Schedule

Thursday, 9:15 a.m.: Metros vs. Manatee Admirals (Fla.)

Friday, 5 p.m.: Metros vs. Colorado Monarchs

Saturday, 3 p.m.: Metros vs. Newark Generals (Ohio)

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Metros

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who will do a good job up there."

Beller, of course, is the left wing on a line along with center James Page (31, 26) and right wing Connor Sand (13, 20). Beller and Page each won first-team MHSJHL honors along with defenseman Grant Newman (5, 19) and goaltender Blake Beller (25-1-2, 1.49 GAA).

Blake Beller was named the MHSJHL Tournament's most valuable player, allowing just three goals in as many games. He had a sparkling .962 (76 of 79) save percentage and counting the 1-0 semifinal victory over the Des Moines Capitals, recorded six shutouts this season.

Newman and Walter Werden (4, 27) form a solid blue-line duo. Max Beller (8, 5), Alec Nieman (3 assists) and Ethan Burge (2 assists) are also hard-working defensemen from a team that haven't allowed three goals in a game in six weeks.

Meanwhile, forwards such as Chase Lewison (10, 11), Reese McDonald (8, 7) and Kolton Kane (6, 9) add to the scoring depth.

"It helps a lot, playing in the

(MHSJHL)," said Drake Beller. "There's a lot of teams with different styles. Our team is able to change our style for every game we play. If (opponents) have a couple of strong defensemen, we'll change our neutral zone to adjust to their fore check. We will be prepared because of the different styles we have seen."

The scores of the games may not have dictated it to the fans, but LeGree felt his team dominated play in the 2-1 and 1-0 double-overtime wins over Waterloo and the Capitals in the first two rounds of the tournament. LeGree said the Metros stayed to their game plan and in both cases, the game-winning goals from Sand (against Waterloo) and Werden (versus the Capitals) were set up by puck pressure.

"Our team is a well-balance team with no superstars," said LeGree. "It's a team that works well together. We need to score goals, get good goaltending, stay out of the (penalty) box and just play our game. That's what we need to do. I'm sure the kids are ready for it. Our team plays disciplined and doesn't beat themselves."