



The Mason City Mohawks huddle during a tournament game against the Omaha Junior Lancers at the RecPlex in Des Moines on March 3, 2023. The Lancers beat the Mohawks, 3-1.

Mohawks eliminated from MHSHL Tourney

Omaha's superb goaltending dooms Mason City

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The Mason City Mohawks looked solid against the Omaha Junior Lancers Friday, but the scoreboard didn't reflect their efforts. The Mohawks fell to the Lancers, 3-1, in the first round of the Midwest High School Hockey League's season-end tournament.

Mason City outshot Omaha, 28-25, and did not make a single trip to the penalty box. Omaha was penalized four times on the

court, racking up over eight minutes of infraction time. No matter the advantages the Mohawks seemed to gain, Lancer goalkeeper Jake Salado was an equalizer. Salado racked up 27 saves in 31 minutes of action.

"Their goalies kept them in it, I thought," Mason City forward Kellen Kantaris said postgame. "If they didn't have him, I thought we would've had a pretty good chance. We couldn't get the puck to bounce our way."

In a pregame interview on Thursday, Mason City head coach P.K. O'Handley said Salado was a different market. He also suggested that something

Salado requires a high volume of shots.

Salado proved O'Handley was correct — even though the Mohawks outplayed the Lancers on offense, at times.

"It's unfortunate," O'Handley said Friday. "I thought one more time, certainly in the third, was exceptional. We just couldn't find a way to get it to the back of the net, which is unfortunate."

Turning point

The second period proved to be the most explosive of Friday's game. Mason City and Omaha scored three times in a four-minute stretch.

Omaha's Cody Parsons and Michael Chase put the puck in the back of the net once each in less than three minutes. Fifty seconds after the Lancers nabbed their goals, forward Dominik Despenas cut the Mohawks' deficit in half with a score of his own eight minutes and 17 seconds into the second period.

Three of the game's four total goals were put up during the quick flurry in the second. Omaha scored on an empty net with 11 seconds left in the third period to clinch a win.

The Mohawks had pulled their goaltender, Chandler Radcliffe, moments earlier to put an extra

offensive player into the game. The 4-on-5 advantage was not enough to help Mason City tie the game and force overtime.

Big picture

Kantaris and Jack Crane both said their team's goal was to make the state tournament and win it this season.

The Mohawks tackled the first leg of their objective without any issues, finishing the regular season with 34 standings points. Mason City finished five points ahead of the MHSHL's postseason cut. The league's top eight

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The Omaha Junior Lancers celebrate a save during a tournament game against the Mason City Mohawks at the RecPlex in Des Moines on March 3, 2023. The Lancers beat the Mohawks, 3-1.

Mohawks

From B1

teams qualify for the season-end tournament.

Mason City also wrapped up the regular season with 16 wins and 14 losses. The Mohawks dropped two additional games in overtime and shootout situations.

The Mohawks had not finished a season with a winning record since 2017-18, when they went 18-8 and racked up 38 points in the standings.

"Our goal was to win state," defenseman Jack Crane said. "We didn't quite get there, but we made it here. So, that was pretty good. We had a fun season. We were over .500 for the year ... We did pretty good. I'm proud of our team, what we accomplished."

Up next

Twenty-five of Mason City's 30

players will be eligible to return for the 2023-24 season. The Mohawks will lose Crane, Radcliffe, and goalie Zane Redfern in the offseason.

Freshman Jacob Barr and junior Nate Foster are the only other goalies on Mason City's roster right now. Neither player saw any time in the back of the net at the varsity level in 2022-23.

The Mohawks will still have a number of key pieces from this year's team back next season, including Kantaris and Despenas.

"I'm very proud," O'Handley said of the 2022-23 Mohawks. "Our staff is incredibly proud of the kids. We told them that after the game. We thought we played well enough to win, it just wasn't in the cards. Sometimes, that's how it goes. It's gonna hurt a little bit, but also the kids can look at the season as a positive. Hopefully, the program can build."



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The Mason City Mohawks and Omaha Junior Lancers scramble for the puck during a tournament game at the RecPlex in Des Moines on March 3, 2023. The Lancers beat the Mohawks, 3-1.