

Restocked Metros seek another title run

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Though the Sioux City Metros varsity hockey team is coming off winning a national championship, there's no shortage of motivation for the team entering the new campaign.

For starters, the Metros are happy to be back on the ice

Hockey isn't exactly the easiest sport to replicate in the offseason, and few other athletics match the intensity.

Still, it's an ongoing to process to seek the best on-ice product.

"I feel like I'm still learning how to skate," said Ryan Hedquist, who goes to school at South Sioux City. "My dad taught me to skate when I was little and I started playing in third-grade, but I still fall sometimes."

Last season ended with a Division II national championship won in West Chester, Penn., where Sioux City finished 6-0 at the five-day tournament under head coach Jesse Monell.

Prior to that, the club last won the national tournament in 2018.

The tournament culminated in a



JESSE BROTHERS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Sioux City's Hunter Echter keeps the puck away from Lincoln's Andrew Balkovec during Sioux City Metros vs Lincoln Junior Stars hockey action at IBP Ice Center in Sioux City on Feb. 17.

5-2 victory over the East Islip (NY) Chiefs.

Tied at two, Karson Fitch (Bishop Heelan) scored the go-ahead goal and the Metros held control from there.

"It'll be a big thing if we can make it back to nationals," said Fitch, a senior forward. "We had

a few losses, but I think we're filling in pretty nicely. We have some younger kids coming up that have done a good job."

Fitch scored a power play goal with under four minutes left in the final frame to set the Metros up for victory.

The 2023-24 Metros won a

team-best 28 games against just four losses.

"I expect a good season, we have a lot of experience behind us," said senior defenseman Jackson Pinney, who goes to Sergeant Bluff-Luton High School.

Still, a third-place finish at the Iowa state tournament lingers as a box that went left unchecked.

"We want to finish the job at state," Pinney said. "We feel like we played pretty well at state, just came up short. But that's something I'd like to get checked off this year.

"The atmosphere of the sport is great. It's a bunch of guys that I've played with since I've been four years old. We're definitely competitive, and it does get a little heated sometimes. But we're all here for each other, and that's the most important part."

Sioux City has a considerable number of returners for this winter, but did suffer some losses due to graduation. Ryan Solma ended with Metros career last season as the team's all-time leading goal scorer with over 100 for his career.

Though the team has a key piece

back in junior goaltender Cameron Patrick. Patrick was a key figure in Sioux City's success throughout the season, and especially at the national tournament as the Metros outscored opponents 43-8 over their six games at nationals.

"The adrenaline rush of the sport is something that can't be matched," Fitch said.

In the team's final preseason tune up, the Metros beat Brookings by a 3-0 final. Brookings was the Division I runner-up at nationals last winter.

"I have a lot of fun with these guys on the team," said senior captain and defenseman Noah Dirkschneider of North. "Your with them six months a year competing, so it helps when we all get along as well as we do. It shows on the ice.

"Team morale is high. When everyone is on the same page, everyone keeps working hard and it gets easier to reach the goals we set together. There's no other sport like hockey. You skate around on little blades hitting each other while trying to put a little puck into a net. But there's just nothing like it."