

Prep of the week: Pabst putting together historic season for Warriors

WATERLOO — Chase Pabst is the first to credit the guys in front of him.

Even so, it's impossible to downplay the numbers the Waterloo West senior is putting up for the first-place Waterloo Warriors in the Midwest High School Hockey League.

With 12 games left in the regular season, the Warriors' starting goalie holds a 19-0-0-1 record with a 0.80 goals-against average and a .961 save percentage.

“We have a very good defensive group, a group full of juniors and seniors,” said Pabst, whose nine shutouts have already tied the Warrior single-season mark set by Brian Dobes in both 2007-08 and 2008-09. One more will match the league mark of 10 set by Austin Maginnis of Mason City in 2005-06.

“Those guys allow only an average of 22 shots per game when the league average is 28 shots per game.”

Pabst's current save percentage and goals-against average are below current single-season league records, as well.

After spending his first two seasons on the junior varsity squad, Pabst shared time in net on the varsity last year with now graduated senior Dawson Sturch. He posted a 7-6-1 mark with a 2.75 goals-against average a year ago.

“That prepared me for this year because I got a lot more time, a lot more experience and I learned how to win,” Pabst said. “Learned how to take failures, not be too hard on yourself.

“You are always going to be your biggest critic, always asking yourself what can you do better, what can you do different. I’m better at handling that this year.”

Warriors head coach Brian Cook said that is the No. 1 reason the 6-foot-3, 175-pound Pabst has made a huge jump.

“He has learned how to win,” Cook said. “When he was a little younger, if he let up a goal or two he would tend to get down on himself. I wouldn’t say quit, but the rest of the way was a struggle. If he started off strong, then it was okay.

“But this year, if he has a slow start or if one gets by him early, he doesn’t worry about that. He just goes right back to playing his game.”

Cook and his coaching staff have also challenged Pabst to be more aggressive, get out of the net more often and cut down his opponents’ angles.

“Big goaltenders ... when they cut down the angles, the skaters look up and they don’t see anything,” Cook added. “His opponents look up and they just see him and they try to be a little bit sharper, try to hit corners, and it is hard to score that way.”

Pabst has posted back-to-back shutouts and has not allowed a goal in 103 minutes, 44 seconds as the Warriors get set to host Dubuque Friday and the second-place Quad City Blues Saturday and Sunday in a showdown of the two top teams in the MSHSL.

It is a critical weekend series for a Pabst and his teammates, who are chasing Warriors history.

Pabst was a Waterloo Junior Hawk when Chance Kremer won 31 games as part of the Warriors' 2011-12 state championship team that went 31-1-0. Waterloo's only loss this season was in a shootout on Dec. 2 (2-1) to Sioux City.

"I always came to Warriors games growing up, and I looked up to the Warriors goalies," Pabst said. "I just began to think to myself, 'What can I do to get to that position?' And then, the 2012 team won state and got second at nationals, and I was like, 'I'd love to do that.'"

That's when Pabst began refining his goalie play with a bigger purpose.

"I began working harder than I had been working," he added.

His thing with former Warrior goalies goes even farther back.

At the encouragement of neighborhood friends Jackson Doland and IJ Strein, Pabst took up hockey when he was four years old. He was a skater in those days.

But after a year of that, Jackson's dad, K.C., who was the starting goalie for the 1990 Warriors' state championship team, encouraged him to try goalie.

"I played one year as a skater and it was okay," Pabst smiled. "I tried goalie out in practice one day and I found out I was a lot better at it than I was at skating, so I stuck with it."

Now, with goals of winning the program's sixth state title in March and advancing to nationals, Pabst says his team knows what it can't do.

"We can't get comfortable," he said. "Once you get too comfortable you become lackadaisical ... and that could cost us a pretty big opportunity."