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## Back in the saddle

### Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse boys hockey climbs into league title race

By Brad D. Bates  
C & G Sports Writer

With 14 seniors on the roster, it shouldn't be a surprise to see the Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse boys hockey team vying for a Macomb Area Conference title.

But after failing to reach 10 wins in the past two years, the Lancers — under first-year head coach Bob Kotowski — are one of the surprise teams of the 2007-'08 season.

"In years past, we took our lumps," said Kotowski, who took over the Lancers' program after serving as an assistant for four years. "Everyone knew the talent was there this year, but the most important part was getting everyone to believe.

"The boys really bonded early, and you could see a different atmosphere this year."



Photo by Patricia O'Blenes  
Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse senior captain Ryan Champine celebrates a goal during the Lancers' 5-0 win against Walled Lake Western Jan. 18 at Great Lakes Ice Arena.

The Lancers were in second place in the MAC White at press time at 8-3-0, two points behind 8-2-2 Utica Henry Ford II.

Along with the veteran experience and talent, the team's biggest asset is a defense that has given up an average of just 2.28 goals a game, down from last year's 3.52.

"I told the guys early on that this team could win if we dedicated ourselves to defense," Kotowski said. "Our goalie (senior) Justin Hentschel comes every night to compete, and the guys have really accepted the challenge."

The reason behind such a quick acceptance of Kotowski's challenge dates back to the end of the 2006-'07 season.

The Lancers had stumbled out of the gates, but a strong close showed them what might lie ahead for this season.

"Because we were sluggish last season, everyone really wanted to get the early points," Kotowski said. "Last year, we had to dig out of a hole and couldn't. So this year, we didn't want to be in that hole."

The senior captains are in charge of making sure everyone understands and takes Kotowski's message to heart.

Forwards Ryan Champine and Scott Anderson, along with defenseman Anthony Fronteria, have kept the Lancers focused and on a roll.

"My senior captains are my voice when I'm not there," Kotowski said. "They keep everyone in line, and good, disciplined hockey is key in our league.

"Penalties will kill you, so as long as those guys keep us playing our game, we'll be fine."

Kotowski is hoping the Lancers stay on task as they look to finish their first winning season since 2004-'05, when they went 10-4-6 and took home the MAC White title. But more importantly, he's hoping these seniors can go even further and buck another trend — early postseason exits.

"We're accepting the challenge," Kotowski said of his team's Division 2 pre-regional at Great Lakes Ice Arena with Macomb L'Anse Creuse North and Warren De La Salle.

“Confidence is one thing this team has more of than anything else. I know that win or lose, our guys can look at themselves in the mirror and know they did the best they could.”

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