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**Photo by Wallace M. Chrouh**

**Macomb Dakota junior Chris Meade checks Utica High junior Chad Jetts into the boards during the Cougars' 6-4 loss Dec. 22 at Macomb Suburban Ice Arena.**

# Defensive minded

## Seniors push Macomb Dakota boys hockey to top of league

By Brad D. Bates  
C & G Sports Writer

MACOMB — Everything is in place for the Macomb Dakota boys hockey team and second-year coach Dave Koons.

After a 17-6-1 finish to the 2006-'07 season, Koons welcomes back 12 seniors to a squad that was atop the Macomb Area Conference Red Division at 5-1-2 at press time.

“We’re where I expected us to be,” Koons said. “I didn’t specifically expect to be in first, but I thought we’d be playing well.

“The kids worked real hard in the summer and fall to get ready for this year.”

That work, combined with senior depth, allows Koons to employ four experienced forward lines. Those four lines have averaged more than four goals a game, which matches last year’s offensive output, but what’s different from last year is the defense.

Led by senior goalie Paul Savage and senior blue liners Ken Kolb and Tom Beres, the Cougars have allowed 2.46 goals per game, down from last year’s average of three.

That defense, combined with senior forwards David Demeck, Eddie Lewis and Josh Agrusa’s depth on offense, makes Dakota dangerous at both ends of the ice.

“Paul Savage has been amazing for us,” Koons said. “We’re really fortunate this year that we have a lot of experienced, talented players that allow us to have four lines and keep everyone fresh.”

The Cougar may be at the top of the MAC now, but they have plenty of company, as five teams have a shot at a MAC Red championship.

At press time, Dakota led the league with 12 points. Just behind the Cougars are Utica High (11), Clinton Township Chippewa Valley (9), St. Clair High (7) and defending champion St. Clair Shores Unified (7).

“It’s a lot of good teams,” Koons said of the league’s makeup. “Macomb (County) is

finally getting a lot of respect as a place where kids can build their game and advance to the next level.”

Koons is hoping that his mix of experience, on defense and offense, is enough to end St. Clair Shores Unified’s three-year run as MAC Red champs, as well as extend the Cougars’ season.

Dakota has never advanced past the second round of the Michigan High School Athletic Association playoffs, and with the taste of last year’s season-ending, 7-6 double-overtime loss to Utica still fresh in his team’s mind, Koons is confident that a tougher league slate will have them prepared for an improved postseason.

“Our goal is to get beyond the pre-regional round and then to the big time,” Koons said. “As the MAC gets stronger, the more you’ll see its teams in the (state) semifinals. So it’s definitely on our radar.”

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