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## Protecting home ice

Three local teams vie for state hockey crown

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The state high school hockey tournament rolls into town today, and three city teams will look to defend their home ice. The tournament kicks off with Boise facing Salmon at 3 p.m. today at Tautphaus Park before Bonneville-Hillcrest, Idaho Falls and Skyline high schools skate one after the other. Meridian enters as the favorite, but the three city schools will have something to say about that. They'll each take a different path to win on their home ice. Here's a closer look at the three local teams.



Aaron Rosenblatt / Post Register file - Jake Johnson, right, unleashes a shot while playing for the Idaho Falls Midget team in January. Johnson will be one of the key players for Idaho Falls High School in this weekend's state tournament.

Bonneville-Hillcrest

Strength: Defense

Bonneville-Hillcrest (5-5-2) doesn't want to get into a high-scoring game. It would rather sit back, play its defensive system and force teams into a 2-1 game.

The Bonneville backline boasts lots of size and of muscle, anchoring the team's strength.

"We don't have too many seniors, but we do have good size on defense," Bonneville-Hillcrest coach Gary Bowden said. "We're a little stronger defensively than offensively."

With a deep and big backline, Bonneville-Hillcrest clears traffic away from the net and plays a more conservative style than most of its opponents.

"We're still conservative," Bowden said. "Mainly from experience, we don't let it hang out too wild."

Weakness: Youth

Bonneville-Hillcrest graduated seven seniors from last year's team. With less experience, its players can be hesitant to shoot sometimes, Bowden said.

"If we need to work on anything, it's shooting the puck," Bowden said. "We don't shoot enough. But that comes with time."

Compounding its youth, Bonneville-Hillcrest has no goalie in either of its schools. It has worked out an agreement where it can select a backup goalie from either Idaho Falls or Skyline to guard its net. It can choose between Mac Cox, Liz Brown and Alex Musselman, but prefers to have Brown in net. Brown played with the team in last year's tournament and will start its opening game against Sun Valley, Bowden said.

Schedule (Pool A play): Today at Sun Valley, 4:45 p.m.; Saturday at Mountain

View, 10 a.m.; Saturday at Idaho Falls, 3:15 p.m.

Players to watch: Dylan Sherick, defenseman; Devin Crighton, forward; Jared Hergesheimer, forward

Idaho Falls

Strength: Depth

Idaho Falls (10-0-2) has the advantage of rolling three lines onto the ice without a drop in talent.

"We have a very balanced attack," Idaho Falls coach Robert Johnson said. "We have three strong lines. Some other teams have one and two, then drop off significantly by the third line."

The extra line gives everybody extra time on the bench to catch their breath and pays off in the third period.

"It gives everybody a breather," Johnson said. "Some other teams play their first and second lines heavily, and by the third period, they'll be worn down a bit."

Johnson is stepping in for coach Brian Latham, who is on his way to Iraq. Latham is on cleanup salvage duty for the Navy.

n Weakness: Size

Idaho Falls won't intimidate anyone getting off the bus. The Tigers want to play an up-and-down style and has trouble with big, physical teams.

"The Boise teams are more physical in front (of the net)," Johnson said. "If we let that affect our kids and play a physical game, we're in trouble. If we play our game, a fast game, we can handle those teams."

Idaho Falls will have to keep its head, and not let bigger opponents bait it into penalties.

"We need to let those guys go to the box and stay full strength," Johnson said. "If we play Meridian (the tournament favorite), that's how we'll beat them. Let them go to the box."

Schedule (Pool A play): Today vs. Mountain View, 6:30 p.m.; Saturday vs. Sun Valley, 8:15 a.m.; Saturday vs. Bonneville-Hillcrest, 3:15 p.m.

Players to watch: Jake Johnson, forward; Austin Mooso, goalie; Zeek Cole, defenseman

Skyline