

## Determined Riders set for season

Written by Mike Condon

Wednesday, 25 September 2013 13:33 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 September 2013 13:44

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They all marched in and sat at tables surrounding Coach Mark Carlson on Wednesday at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

Carlson's theme for the 2013-14 Cedar Rapids RoughRiders is "team" and that was on display for the media during a preseason press conference.

In past years, Carlson was joined by selected players at the opening media press conference. This time around nearly all of his players and assistant coaches were on hand.

"We wanted to have every single one of our players be here who could be here," Carlson said. "This is a symbol of our group this year. This is going to be a team and we are conscious of everybody every night so we're starting off in this fashion."

The Riders open the regular season Friday night at Lincoln before hosting Sioux Falls in the home opener Saturday at the ice arena.

Carlson is in the unfamiliar position of entering a season looking to regain a playoff berth. After 12 straight appearances in the USHL playoffs, the Riders missed out in 2012-13, finishing sixth in the Eastern Conference, 39 points behind eventual Clark Cup champion Dubuque.

When asked about missing the playoffs, Carlson broke out in song, reciting part of a Fleetwood Mac tune.

"Don't stop thinking about tomorrow. Don't stop, it will soon be here. It will be here, better than before, yesterday's gone, yesterday's gone. That's what I think. We're about tomorrow."

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That said, Carlson knows that missing the playoffs is a motivating factor for the team.



"I'm sure they are hungry," he said. "When we made it for 12 years in a row, nobody ever heard me running around about how we made it. We're a day-by-day organization and we're thrilled with this year's group. We're hungry, we're excited, but we just take things one game at a time."

Last year's Riders were outmuscled by many opponents. Several players are returning from that squad and their goal in the offseason was to get stronger.

"We hit the weights real hard this summer," said forward Dylan Gareau. "I think we'll be much better in that part of the game. Coach keeps it pretty intense during practices, which is good. The games are going to be like that."

Carlson agreed with Gareau.

"If you look at us, we're way bigger, way stronger than we were last year," Carlson said. "The guys spent a lot of time in the weight room and have really matured and grown that way. We got a good influx of new players as well that we have been very impressed with. I think across the board we have seen really good improvements."

Forward Jack Rowe is in his third season with the Riders. He was part of a playoff team his first season and said missing last year wasn't a great experience.

"We definitely want to go out and send a message and show everybody we're here to play," said Rowe, who will play in college at North Dakota. "I don't think that is going to be our first

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priority. Our first priority is to go out there and try to win games right from the start.”

Gareau is back for his third season in Cedar Rapids. He has committed to play collegiately at Clarkson University.

“I’ve gotten used to the community, everybody around,” he said. “I’ve enjoyed it every second I have been here and I couldn’t ask for anything better.”

When asked if the Riders are a championship-caliber team, Carlson gave a not-so-surprising answer.

“We’ll find out,” he said. “The one thing that I do know is that we play Friday night in Lincoln.”