Blades, Rockets In Tete-A-Tete

Series Could Decide How Blues Finish In League

Starting Saturday night Vernon Blades must start facing the cruel facts of life as it is led in the cut-throat world of the Okanagan Junior "A" Hockey League.

The Blades, in case you've just tuned in, are right on the bottom of the snarling, dog-eat-dog heap that goes by the name of the OJHL and they're going to stay there unless they do something instanter.

With only four games left in regular season play the Blues are all but forced to win every single one (even three will do, thank you) if they have any hopes of regaining that cozy third place niche wrested so rudely from their possession by Penticton-Summerland Broncos last weekend.

The Broncos are currently two points up on the Blades and if the Fates should continue to lean in their favor this weekend like having the Blues drop two games to Kamloops Rockets while they sweep a pair from Kelowna Buckaroos, the jig would be up.

Not that ending up last would be utterly disastrous. The Blades would still make the playoffs, sort of a booby prize but nevertheless highly attractive.

But "only nice guys finish last," to flog a tired epigram, and the Blades are anything but "nice." No, they are a stubborn, scrambling, scrapping team and they're hardly ready to resign themselves to the league dungeon without a stiff battle.

Short-handed though the Blades are there's a good chance they'll come away from this weekend's wars with at least a split and possibly even a two-game sweep.

Their opponents are the Rockets who, on the record, have been their easiest marks this season, inconceivable as it may seem. Each club has won four and lost four so this weekend series represents the rubber match.

The Rockets could be tougher than usual though, because they're locked in a neck-and-neck battle with Kelowna for first place.

The Blades host the Rockets Saturday night at the Civic Arena starting at 8:30 p.m. and this is the game they are favored to win, if they win at all this weekend.

Sunday afternoon the Blues reciprocate by travelling to Kamloops for a 2 p.m. bout. They've won a game there once this season and they could do it again.

All of course will depend on the available manpower and the amount of desire that goes with it.

The Blades shouldn't be too bad off as far as personnel is concerned. Bobby Stein, absent in the Kelowna series last weekend, will be in action again and defenceman Gary Koski is back in stride after a long layoff over Christmas.

Kamloops Rockets' ace centre Eric Shishido sat out most of last week's action with a leg injury and he was sorely missed as the Misslemen fell twice to the rampaging Broncos. He is reported to be in fine fettle for the series with Vernon.

Shishido still leads the OJHL scoring race by a goodly margin, 17 points. Dale Sandyke, his able wingmate, now has 50 points and third is Kelowna's Marcello Verna with 45.

Complete OJHL statistics are as follows:

League Standings:

	W	L	T	GF	GA	P
Kam.	15	10	1	132	127	31
Kel.	14	9	3	123	83	31
P-S.	10	14	2	94	104	22
Ver.	8	14	4	83	118	20

League Scoring:

	G	A	P
Shishido, Kam. .	24	43	67
Sandyke, Kam. .	33	17	50
Verna, Kel.	21	24	45
Strong, Kel.	17	18	35
Begg, Kam.	19	12	31
Sorochuk, Ver. .	17	14	31
Meridew, Kam. .	15	16	31
MacInnes, P-S. .	11	20	31
Rodgers, Kam. .	4	24	28
Kasubuchi, Kel. .	16	10	26
Stein, Ver.	11	15	26
Palanio, P-S. ...	17	6	23
Swanson, Kel. ..	9	14	23
Biagioni, P-S. ..	14	8	22
Picco, P-S.	14	8	22
Sherk, Ver.	11	11	22
Rizzuto, Kel. ...	11	11	22
Evans, Kel.	10	12	22

Goalkeepers Averages:

	GP	GA	Ave
Gaal, Kel. .	26	83	5.19
Pushkarenko, P-S.	19.6	79	4.03
Schiman, Ver.	24	110	4.58
Budarick, Kam.	23.3	109	4.67