Blades Bring Up Rear As OJHL Season Closes

Rockets Clinch First Place With Twin Killing Over Bucks

VERNON 3,3 PENTICTON-SUMMERLAND 4,1

Vernon Blades gave it the old college try on the weekend but unfortunately not enough to lift them out of the Okanagan Junior "A" Hockey League cellar.

The Blades, faced with winning two games over the weekend, to escape last place, had to settle for a split with scrappy Penticton - Summerland Broncos and a tail-end finish to the regular OJHL season.

The key game was Friday night's clash down in Penticton. The Broncos, in third place but only two points up on the Blades, edged the Blues 4-3 to clinch the coveted spot.

All of which made Saturday's return bout at the Civic Arena strictly an academic run - around. However, the Blades, their pride undoubtedly hurt, came on strong to down the Broncos 3-1 in the final league game of the season.

In another crucial weekend series Kamloops Rockets quashed any doubts about who is the best team in the OJHL by clipping their closest challengers, Kelowna Buckaroos, twice to nail down first place good and proper. They clinched first Friday in Kelowna with a 4-3 win and edged the Buckaroos 7-6 in Kamloops Saturday night.

The two series not only decided final standings in the OJHL but also established who meets who in the up-and-coming semi-final playoffs.

The Blades, by virtue of their tail-end finish, will once again face their old familiar rivals the second place Buckaroos, in one best of seven semi-final while the league champion Rockets lock horns with third place Penticton-Summerland in the other.

The Blade - Buckaroo series will open Friday, Jan. 29 in Kelowna with the second game set for Vernon Civic Arena Sunday afternoon, Jan. 31. The third game is tentatively scheduled for Kelowna Friday, Feb. 5, and the fourth for Vernon, Sunday, Feb. 7.

The other semi-final will face off up in Kamloops Wednesday, Jan. 27. The Broncos will open their home stand Friday, Jan. 29.

At the moment there is no set deadline for declaring a winner in the OJHL. The final date for deciding a provincial champion for entry into the Memorial Cup playoffs is March 7.

The Blades played fair to middling hockey down in Penticton Friday night but there was no holding down the fired up Broncos who were determined to filch third place all to themselves.

After a scoreless first period the Broncos edged into a 2-1 lead in the sandwich session and broke the game wide open with two more goals early in the final frame. The Blades, down 4-1, recouped with two rapid counters of their own later in the period but, try as they might, they couldn't come up with that all important equalizer.

Larry Palanio, Ray Picco, Moe Hays and Dwayne Biagioni scored for Penticton - Summerland in that order while replying for the Blades were Allan Rogan, Marvin Maier and Bobby Stein.

Penalties hurt Vernon's cause somewhat, particularly in the third period when they needed all the firepower they could get. All told the Blades were hit for nine of 15 sin bin sentences including 10-minute misconducts to Rogan and Maier.

OJHL Standings

	W	L	T	GF	GA	P
Kam.	18	11	1	154	146	37
Kel.	14	11	5	137	99	33
P.-S.	11	15	4	104	115	26
Ver.	10	16	4	99	134	24

Ernie Pushkarenko was back in the Broncos' nets Friday after sitting out almost a month with a serious eye injury suffered in a New Year's Day game in Vernon. Up until game time coach Jack Taggart was in a real tizzy wondering whether Pushkarenko would get medical permission to play because he was their last hope. Terry Lawrenson, their standin goalie for the past month, had to be called up by his hometown Buckaroos for action against Kamloops when regular Mike Gaal took sick.

Pushkarenko did a fair job Friday, blocking 18 shots but it paled into insignificance when compared to the task he performed Saturday here in Vernon.

"Pushie" was practically the sum total of the Broncos' defence which was sketchy to begin with. Blaine Pollock was the only regular blueliner in action for the shortstaffed Combines who had to make their forwards do double duty.

Altogether Pushkarenko stopped 39 shots, 31 of them in the first two periods, to prevent what could have been an utter rout. Norm Schiman at the other end handled only 16.

Dale Sorochuk paced Vernon with two goals, both scored in the third period to crack a 1-1 tie. Buck Sherk assisted on both markers. Defenceman Gary Koski tipped in a goal-mouth roller to put the Blues up 1-0 early in the second but Larry Dent deflected a hard slapshot by Biagioni less than a minute later to knot the count.

There were 10 penalties called in the game, six to Vernon including two more misconducts, one to Maier and another to defenceman Jim Stephen.

New Series Opens Tuesday

Juveniles Tuck Away First Round Playoff

VERNON 7 KELOWNA 3

Winning hockey games is a regular habit with Vernon Juvenile All-Stars. They've had the habit all season and they show no signs of "kicking" it in the playoffs.

Thursday night the All-Stars continued to indulge in their favorite pastime, bombing Kelowna 7-3 in a Valley juvenile hockey playoff game played in the Orchard City.

The victory, coupled with an earlier 8-3 triumph here in Vernon the previous week, gave the local All-Stars a sweep of their best of three series with the Kelownians.

The All-Stars now face either Penticton or Summerland in another best of three series to decide the southern division finalist in the Okanagan-Mainline zone juvenile hockey championships.

First game of the playoff is set for Vernon Civic Arena Tuesday night at 7:30 p.m. regardless of what team the All-Stars meet. Summerland and Penticton are currently tied one game apiece in their series.

Vernon showed too much power and finesse in crushing Kelowna Thursday. They led 3-1 after the first period and were up 5-2 going into the final 20 minutes when they added another pair to one reply by Kelowna.

George Watson was their big gunner with three goals and one assist. Rick Reilly hit for two, Mike Clerke tallied a goal and three assists and Bill Nixon was also good for a single and two helpers.

The defence got into the scoring act too as rearguards Scott Smith and Graham Elliott counted two assists apiece.

For Kelowna it was Rick Schmidt, Bill Schmidt and Larry McKenzie with one goal each. Renny Rantucci set up two of them.

Shots on goal read 27-22 in Vernon's favor. The locals also had the edge in total penalties, serving six of eleven.

Mayor Rice C Minor Hocke

Mayor Ellwood Rice today called upon all citizens of Vernon to support Minor Hockey Week in Canada which commenced last Saturday.

In voicing his support of young Canada's most publicized week, Mayor Rice said: "It is not only my pleasure, but my duty to suggest that every citizen should visit the arena this week and in this way demonstrate his or her support of the wonderful minor