

Lakers face red-hot Cents

The battle lines have been drawn up in the BCJHL Interior Division and the result is that Vernon Lakers will face Merritt Centennials in the semi-final round of playoffs.

Merritt finished the season in third place on the strength of an 11-2 romp over Revelstoke Rangers, Saturday night, and a 10-5 victory over Salmon Arm Totems, Sunday night.

Meanwhile, an upset loss to Salmon Arm, Saturday, left Summerland Buckaroos in fourth place, one point back of Centennials.

Buckaroos will face first-place Penticton Knights in the other semi-final match-up, which begins Tuesday night in Penticton.

Lakers, who finished in second place and have held that position since October, head into the playoffs on the shaky legs of a team that has lost three straight games, including a 12-1 loss to Centennials last Thursday night.

Merritt, on the other hand, enters the playoff picture on a four-game win streak. They outscored their opposition 33-8 in their final three games.

"They're playing great hockey, there's no doubt about that," said Lakers' coach Don Moores of Merritt. "I think they have one of the best winning percentages since Christmas."

Although it came as a surprise to almost everyone, Moores wasn't surprised by Merritt's drive into third place at the end of the season.

"I think it was in the cards," he said. "It doesn't surprise me . . . I think we're going to have a great series."

Hopefully, as Moores suggested, his club will be at full strength, or close to it, for the playoffs. Defenceman Murray Baron, with a knee injury, and Gord Simpson, with a leg injury, are questionable.

Other than that, and a little bruised pride and bodies, Lakers are healthy. The only thing that might be unhealthy is their attitude toward Merritt. Prior to their last meeting, the two clubs had a brawl which resulted in players being ejected and Cents coasting to an easy win. However, Moores feels it may result in a valuable lesson for his charges.

"It was a good lesson for us," said Moores. "They (Merritt) intimidated us pretty good . . . we'll have to overcome that for playoffs."

"Everyone starts from scratch for playoffs. For us it will be a tough, grinding series . . . if we play to the best of our ability it should be no problem."

While Interior Division playoff match-ups are now decided, the Coastal Division won't have their playoff picture clear for another couple of days.

Richmond plays Nanaimo and Abbotsford plays in Sidney on Tuesday night in a pair of make-up games.

In BCJHL Sunday night, Penticton finished its regular season by thumping fifth place Revelstoke Rangers 18-2 in a game played in Enderby. The win improved Knights' season record to 47-5.

In other games, Nanaimo edged Abbotsford 9-8 and Richmond beat Sidney 9-2.