

Packers flex their muscles

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

They're the new kid on the block and they're flexing their muscles for all to see. They're the Kelowna Packers, the latest addition to the B.C. Junior Hockey League Interior Division.

Kelowna re-instituted a junior A franchise in their community following the loss of Kelowna Wings, last spring of Western Hockey League. Kelowna was without a BCJHL hockey club in the city for a two-year period after Buckaroos moved lock, stock and barrel to Summerland where they still reside.

Kelowna is a brand new franchise and though one would assume a new club would suffer growing pains and lack of experience, nothing could be further from the matter with this group. In their first five outings this season, Packers have won four and lost just one leaving them in second place thus far, trailing only the undefeated Penticton Knights, defending BCJHL champs.

The victories haven't been the valiant come-from-behind variety, nor the last minute cliff-hangers. All four of Packers' wins to date have been convincing and, in the case of the last three, total blowouts of the opposing clubs.

At the same time, Packers have

allowed few goals to be scored against them. In fact, in five games they've outscored the opposition 56-18.

The impressive statistics compiled by Packers in the early going would astonish most hockey fans, but the few who know Head Coach Wayne Naka will be somewhat less astonished and more inclined to feel it's just all in a day's work for the talented junior hockey messiah.

Naka led Kelowna Buckaroos to the BCJHL final three years ago and guided his miss-matched group to the Interior Division final two years ago after knocking off powerful Vernon Lakers in the semi-final round.

Naka took a one-year hiatus from coaching during the 1984-85 campaign but he didn't disappear from hockey, he simply took a less assuming role. During last season Naka was employed as a talent assessor for the B.C. Under 17 program which produced the current Pacific Region Team, which is to compete in the Quebec Cup International Tournament in that province at Christmas.

Having spent so much time assessing talent, it's not hard to imagine the ease with which he could spot the right junior A players to assemble a formidable team this season.

His impressive track record in the BCJHL is already beginning to show



by
Jim Judd

Daily News
Sports Writer

through in the early going with Packers. Always known for his defensive approach to the game, Naka's guidance is clearly responsible for the few goals Packers have allowed thus far. In light of the current trend toward penalty assessment in the BCJHL under the new stick infraction rules, allowing so few goals in five games is quite remarkable.

In addition to Naka's trained eye and strict scrutinization, Packers were also blessed with a good number of quality, experienced players in training camp from which they've constructed their club. Among these are four former Western Hockey League players around which Naka has fashioned a team.

The four include Ward Carlson, a left winger formerly with New Westminster Bruins; Rick Viens,

right winger formerly with Saskatoon Blades; Mike Wegleitner, defenceman, formerly with Kelowna Wings; and Pat Mangold who patrolled left wing last year with Kamloops Blazers.

In addition, Packers have a number of players with junior A hockey experience including Shawn Harrison who's seen action with Langley Eagles, Summerland and Kelowna in the past three years. Others include Cary Fisher, who played centre with Summerland last season, Greg Moberg, a defenceman with Burnaby Blue Hawks last year, and Shawn Swail who was a winger with the Alberta Junior Hockey League champion St. Albert Saints in 1984-85.

If there is one area the fledgling Packers are weak in it's goaltending as they are going with 16-year old Ryan Dennis in net. Dennis toiled with Kamloops Midget Reps last season and was obviously under the watchful eye of Naka.

On paper they appear formidable. On ice they're proven in the early going that they're capable of challenging for all the marbles. Coaching-wise they are as solid as the rock of Gibraltar.

Packers only defeat this season was a 5-3 home-ice loss to Vernon Lakers, whom they meet Thursday night in Vernon.