

Lakers drop to third place

Vernon Lakers lost a game they could have won, and should have won, Saturday night in Summerland. It is a loss that may come back to haunt the club in its final push for supremacy in the B.C. Junior Hockey League's Interior Division, according to Head Coach Don Moores.

Lakers lost 8-7 in overtime to the red-hot Buckaroos who followed up their home-ice victory Saturday with an impressive 11-3 romp over home-town Merritt Warriors Sunday night and are now poised to take over fourth spot in the tough Interior loop of the BCJHL.

"If you look at the nine games we've lost, at least five of them will come back to haunt us," suggested Moores.

Buckaroos, in fact, have taken three of four possible points from Lakers in their past two meetings and were responsible for snapping Vernon's unbeaten streak two weeks ago.

"We have a lot of problems against weaker teams," explained the Vernon coach whose club continues to struggle with an attitude problem. "But they (Summerland) deserved to win the game . . . if you take them lightly they'll get the best of you. We took them lightly and it cost us two points."

The loss, coupled with Penticton Knights' 9-2 win over Shuswap Blazers Saturday night, leaves Lakers in third place in their division.

However, that position could change without Vernon having to play another game, pending the outcome of a league meeting Sunday, in Princeton. The gist of that meeting was to make a decision on rescinding points accumulated by Knights while using illegal players earlier in the season. If, as anticipated, Knights lose between 15 and 20 points, Lakers would move back into second place by a comfortable margin.

One of the positive notes in Saturday's game was the re-emergence of star centre Dennis Holland as the club's leading goal scorer. Holland had been in a mini scoring slump in his last five games but managed to hit the net three times in a losing cause, Saturday.

Meanwhile, brothers Sean and Stacey Hartnell, along with Al Young and Trevor Pohl, accounted for the balance of Vernon's scoring. The club did manage to overcome a 5-3 second period deficit to force the game into overtime but Craig Bedard, with his second goal of the game, at 1:30 of sudden death overtime, gave his club the victory.

Dave Tomlinson also scored a pair while singles came off the sticks of Andy Pokupec, Ed Tuckwood, Jackson Penny, and Kirk Fynn.

In other BCJHL action on the weekend, Kelowna Packers kept hold of first place in the Interior Division with an easy 13-2 win over Shuswap Blazers while Summerland was bombing Merritt Warriors 11-3.

Pat Mangold scored six goals and Kerry Fisher added two for Packers.

In action Saturday night, Nanaimo Clippers skated to an 11-4 win over Langley Eagles while Richmond Sockeyes crushed Abbotsford 9-3.

Lakers have an opportunity to make amends Tuesday night when they host Summerland. It will be their last game before a lengthy Christmas break. The local club won't play again until Jan. 4 when it hosts Shuswap Blazers at the Civic Arena.

League delays decision

It was to be the biggest and most important item on the agenda at the B.C. Junior Hockey League executive meeting Sunday in Princeton, but Penticton Knights, with a bid for a court hearing, managed to elude a ruling on action to be taken against the team for using ineligible players earlier this season.

"They (league) are not dealing on it until after court action tomorrow (Tuesday)," explained Vernon Lakers' General Manager Vern Dye who attended the Sunday meeting. "But I'm sure they'll rule on it."

The meeting was supposed to include a ruling on whether or not Knights would have points rescinded for games won while using ineligible players. However, Knights' Head Coach Rick Kozuback, who had drawn a stiff suspension from the league for the part he played in using the players, managed to elude the ruling temporarily with the aid of team lawyers who have taken the issue to the courts. That hearing is to take place Tuesday, in Penticton.

"We didn't want to do anything until after this hearing is cleared," Dye explained. "He (Kozuback) knows the rules though and we all abide by those rules . . . he's just trying to go over everyone's head."

Meanwhile, the league ruled that the BCJHL will impose a mandatory facemask ruling for all players. This will bring the league in line with other junior leagues in the country which have already adopted the rule, or will do so soon. Dye mentioned that the Western Hockey League will adopt the policy in the new year.

Also of interest is the fact that both the Coastal Division and Interior Division will choose their all-stars for the annual BCJHL All-Star game, to be played in Nanaimo, Jan. 15.