

Hard work pays off for Vernon juniors

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Hard work paid big dividends for Vernon Lakers Wednesday night as they doubled visiting Kelowna Packers 8-4 with a hard-hitting, relentless checking style of play in the Civic Arena.

The victory evens the best-of-seven Interior Division semi-final series at 1-1 with game three slated for Friday night in Kelowna Memorial Arena.

The score actually flattered Packers who reached a state of total bewilderment late in the third period when trailing 8-2. Lakers were still dishing out punishing bodychecks in the offensive, defensive, and neutral zones. A five-minute minor penalty assessed to Lakers' Mark McCleary with just slightly more than four minutes showing on the clock, allowed Kelowna to slip a couple of powerplay goals by Scott King and leave with their heads up.

However, it was all Lakers from start to finish as they held period leads of 2-1 and 5-2 while peppering Packers' goaltender Frank Romeo with 56 shots, 24 of them in the third period. Packers directed 30 shots at King.

"I have to give them (Lakers) credit, they played well when they had to," sighed Kelowna coach Wayne Naka. "We never have that kind of trouble moving the puck out of our zone and we won't have the same trouble again."

Meanwhile, Lakers' Coach Mike Enemark feels the pressure is back on Kelowna with the game in their rink Friday night and the momentum of the series suddenly shifted to Lakers' side.

"I think the big game will be Friday night," suggested Enemark. "We have a lot of momentum going into that game because we won all three periods tonight."

"We're going to maintain a hitting game and slow their guys down. We have to win one game in their rink and it doesn't matter which one."

Lakers put their first goal on the board just a minute and 50 seconds into the game and added a second goal minutes later, before Packers could get into the game. Greg Guest,

following up on Stacy Hartnell's boomer from the slot area, popped in a rebound for the first goal while Trevor Pohl scored his first of two for the night with a hard shot along the ice from the point to make it 2-0. Kevin Harder replied for Packers.

Vernon stretched its lead to 4-1 early in the second frame with goals by Dennis Holland and Shawn Lofroth. Holland's goal was a gift actually scored by a Packer defenceman trying to clear the puck from the side of the net. Lofroth put another slapshot, along the ice, past Romeo on the far side for his goal.

Shawn Harrison replied for Kelowna while Doug Spooner, with his first of two for the night, closed out the second period scoring with a power-play tally.

Spooner, Pohl, and Steve Humphrey each scored once in the third period. The first two were on man-advantage situations. Rick Viens and Darryl Schwartz tallied late in the period to close out the scoring.

Romeo took more than his share of the physical stuff from Lakers in addition to all the rubber he had coming at him. McCleary's hit in the final minutes was one of a half dozen or more that came his way. Enemark made no excuses for the conduct of his players toward Romeo.

"To win we have to stay on Frank (Romeo) and give him a little shot whenever we can," explained Enemark. "I wasn't impressed with that last call though."

If Packers had hoped for a quick series with Vernon, they may have to change their way of thinking as well as their style if they plan to be around for the division final series.

However, Naka insists it was never his or his team's intention of taking the series lightly.

"Going into this series we were looking at just taking it one game at a time," he said.

On the Coast, Delta Flyers nipped Nanaimo Clippers 6-5, Wednesday, to take a 2-0 lead in their series. And Richmond Sockeyes evened their series at 1-1 with a 7-1 win over Abbotsford Falcons.

Penticton Lakers meet Merritt Warriors tonight in Merritt. Lakers lead that series 1-0.