

Penticton victory is good for BCJHL

Vernon Lakers and Kelowna Packers can hold their heads a little higher right now as a result of Penticton Knights winning the Centennial Cup, last Sunday, in Cole Harbor, N.S.

After all, both teams did manage to beat the team that won it all. For that matter, we'd better include Richmond Sockeyes in the above category since they did manage to steal a game from Knights in the BCJHL championship series way back when.

As it turns out, BCJHL teams fared as well, or better, against the invincible Penticton horde than did most every other junior A club in the country.

Prior to Sunday's game between Cole Harbor and Knights for the Canadian Junior A hockey supremacy, Knights had played a total of 30 playoff games since the regular season ended. Of those 30 games, the Peach City crew lost just five . . . once in each series with the exception of the Interior Division semi-final round against Merritt Warriors, which resulted in a four-game sweep by Knights, and a two-game sweep of Prince George Spruce Kings in the B.C. final.

Against Kelowna in the Interior Division final, Penticton lost only a single game. Ditto the BCJHL final series with Sockeyes.

Against Red Deer Rustlers in the Alberta-B.C. championship, Knights again lost just once in the best-of-seven affair while the Western Canadian final against South Winnipeg Blues lasted just five games, out of a possible seven.

Somehow, Knights lost the opening game of the round-robin series during the Centennial Cup playoffs. Another loss in their second outing would have spelled disaster for the Penticton squad but as it turns out, it



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would be the only time they would taste defeat at the national championships. In game two of the round-robin Knights trimmed Moncton, N.B. while in game three they easily defeated Orillia, Ont., the defending Centennial Cup champs. Knights duplicated this feat in the semi-final round before overcoming a 2-0 first period deficit to defeat Cole Harbor in the championship game.

Five losses in 31 playoff games! That figure is fairly consistent with their regular season record of 47 wins and five losses. What's more, Knights saved themselves the additional aggravation of having to play 12 more playoff games by eliminating their opponents so quickly in each series.

Although hockey fans in the area would likely be more excited if it were Vernon Lakers who had gone the distance, there is still every reason to be proud. Also, having the national champs in the BCJHL will do much towards attracting other talented young players to this part of the country to play out their junior careers.

BCJHL teams who played against Knights in regular season will benefit from the experience now since they will know what it takes to become champions.

The unfortunate aspect of Knights' success, as far as their own club is concerned, is that it will surely lead

to a further rape of their players. Those who haven't already been offered scholarships, or who haven't been rated for the upcoming amateur draft, will almost surely get a second look now.

According to Ron Taylor, public relations manager for Knights, the team will lose as many as 17 of its players before next season begins and that means starting over from square one and rebuilding their dynasty.

It will also mean changing the team's style of play. Knights had no qualms about taking penalties throughout the playoffs. With the most potent penalty-killing team in junior A hockey this season, the club thought nothing of taking penalties anywhere on the ice. This sort of thing goes a long way when you're trying to demoralize another team through intimidation.

Penticton scored more than 40 short-handed goals during the playoffs this season, bettering their record-setting mark of just one year ago when they were runners-up in the Centennial Cup championship. Of course the appearance of the multi-talented Kevin Melrose on defence, late in the season, did wonders for the club as did the leadership and scoring ability of centre David Shields. Shields amassed 76 points in 31 playoff games.

More than anything else, though, Knights' success is a tribute to discipline, intensity and dedication (the players buy their own sticks) in a junior hockey club . . . and good coaching doesn't hurt any either. Couple it with an aggressive attitude and a killer instinct and the result is pretty tough to defend against.

In these days of monumental upsets in the hockey world, it's a relief to know at least one team can perform to its capabilities.