

Blades Bow Out In Blazing Form

Lose Semi-Final On Thomas' Tally With 8 Seconds Left

KELOWNA 7, VERNON 6

Vernon Blades made their exit off the Okanagan Junior Hockey League stage in a blaze of glory Tuesday night.

They left it reluctantly and disappointedly, but to the testimony of 1200 spectators packed into Kelowna Memorial Arena, fighting all the way.

Fighting all the way until time, and another OJHL season ran out for them at 9:52 of a 10-minute overtime period. That's when Fred Thomas, Kelowna Buckaroos' shifty centerman, got a breakaway and blasted their hopes of extending the semi-final playoffs to a sixth game.

He beat Gary Holland with a high shot to the upper left hand corner of the net with eight seconds left to give the Bucks their seventh goal of the night and the right to meet Kamloops Rockets in the OJHL finals.

That goal hushed a crowd of more than 100 visiting Vernon fans howling with delirious joy. For only 20 seconds before, winger Corky Agar had brought the Blades from a near 6-5 defeat with a clutch goal, his second of the night, to what looked to be new life for them in the series.

Stir Memories

A bitter and disappointing loss, yet, but not a disheartening one. They gave the crowd a game which will stir memories for some time to come for truly it was one of the most exciting junior hockey spectacles playoff or otherwise seen in the valley so far this year.

The player who kept the Blades in the game right to the end, as he has in every game of the series, was again Gary Holland, their goaltender, who seems to get better and better as the action gets hotter and heavier.

During the night he brick-ed up the door of his cage to 64 shots, some of which looked completely unstoppable. He seemed to anticipate scoring plays split seconds before they occurred and spiked the guns of Gruber and Co. on more than one occasion. 36 shots were fired at Kelowna's Sid Shussel.

Corky Agar continued his good form of Saturday night, scoring two goals, one the last gasp equalizer in over-



CORKY AGAR

... not enough

time. Also in on scoring with deadly consistency were Gordie Nuyens (1 goal, 3 assists), Howie McNeil (1 goal, 1 assist), Bobby Stein (1 goal, 2 assists) and Buck Sherk (1 goal, 1 assist).

Kelowna as usual, had captain Bob Gruber leading scoring with a hat trick and two assists with Thomas collecting a brace. Ralph Kirschner and rookie John Strong garnered singles and Wayne Horning set up two goals.

Nine minor penalties were levied by referee Al Swain, five going to Kelowna. Although there was plenty of solid and sometimes savage checking, tempers on both clubs held very well, the tempo of the game dominating everything.

From the opening faceoff, Vernon set this tempo and forced the Buckaroos to keep pace or lose distance. Nuyens, on their first sally into enemy territory, sent a low, hard slapshot through Shussel's pads with 46 seconds reading on the clock.

Less than two minutes later Kirschner replied, catching the puck on its third rebound when Vernon failed to clear it. Thomas made it 2-1 with one of his savage liners, then McNeil closed out the period with a shot in close.

Stein got the only goal of the second period to give Vernon a 3-2 lead, snatching a loose puck at the blue line and going in on Shussel with

a blazer at ice level.

Then came a wild and wooly third period that had the large crowd on their feet most of the time as goals were traded from end to end with lighting rapidity.

Four of the five goals scored in the period were within the first three and a half minutes. Gruber tied the score at 3-3 on a neat deflection right from the point only to have Agar push the Blades ahead again on a two-man break.

Only 23 seconds elapsed and Strong connected with Harvey Stolz' rebound but back came Sherk with the lead tally again, digging the puck from under Shussel blasting it through an open corner.

The Blades closed up shop for about 10 minutes, fighting valiantly to hold their slim margin, then suddenly Gruber tore past two defence-men at 13:05 to get away a short snapper that Holland hold.

It was Gruber who did the damage to break open overtime scoring, sending a screen shot past the scrambling Holland to roars from the large partisan crowd.

Into the final minute of overtime Coach Hap Schaefer elected to pull his goalie for an extra attacker with a faceoff impending in the

two in a row.

The Canadians now meet Kamloops Chiefs in a best-of-five series starting next Thursday, February 28 in the Hub City to decide the league champion. The second game is here in Vernon probably on the following Saturday.

Though winning conclusively Tuesday night, Odie Lowe's menagerie had to fight from behind to do it, scoring three unanswered goals in the third period after the Packers had taken a 2-1 lead in the preceding frame.

Complementing Harms' two goals were Lowe and ex-Nelson Maple Leaf Jim Pilla with one apiece. Trentini was credited with an assist on Lowe's tally.

Rookie George Boychuk, who just returned from a try-out with the Calgary Stampeters of the Western International Hockey League, scored once for Kelowna as did veteran senior Mike Durban.

The game was fast and

Bucks' zone. The strategy worked as Stein got the draw-flicked the puck to Nuyens who passed to Agar on the point. He made no mistake, backhanding it on contact right under Shussel.

Then came the heartbreaker with Gruber again a principal participant. The burly team captain fought a puck off the boards near center ice, flipped it to Thomas through an open hole in the defence and he was gone. So was the game, 7-6.

First game of the scheduled series between Kelowna and Kamloops takes place in the Orchard City this Saturday night. Winner of the finals then advances to a playoff with the Pacific Coast champion.

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Blades Host Quesnel Jrs. In Exhibition Tilt Here

Vernon Blades, eliminated from further Okanagan Junior Hockey League competition, host a Quesnel junior team for an exhibition game at the Civic Arena Saturday night at 9:00 p.m.

Blade manager Bill Brown received definite word today that Quesnel is coming. He arranged the game following the Blades' loss to Kelowna Buckaroos Tuesday night.

With the departure of Gary Holland for his home in Fernie, coach Hap Schaefer is stuck with no goaltender but hopes to get juvenile Norm Schiman or midget Dennis Taylor to fill the nets.
