

Blades Still Winless... Fans Still A'waiting

Local Jrs. Suddenly Fold After Bright Beginning

KELOWNA 5, 5; VERNON 1, 3

This was the season the Vernon Blades were supposed to burn up the Okanagan Junior "A" Hockey League. Or so hometown fans thought last Tuesday night after watching Vernon lose that thrilling opener, 2-1.

Today is Monday, the Blades have lost three more games since then, and the question in the minds of their fans now is: Where's the fire?

The Blades, after showing promise in that Tuesday spinetinger with Kamloops Rockets, got bombed 9-4 in the return engagement Wednesday night, then followed up this floppo with a pair of losses to Kelowna Buckaroos: 5-1 in Kelowna Friday and 5-3 here in Vernon Saturday.

Which prompts another question: Are the Blades improved at all over last season? They're supposed to be on paper, having lost only two players. But after the sorry dish of hockey they served up in their past three games the fans are wondering—and waiting again.

The danger signals were apparent Wednesday night in Kamloops when they blew a 3-0 lead in the first period, then allowed Kenny Stewart's Rocketeers to have their way the remaining 40 minutes.

Never Looked Worse

In Kelowna Friday night they never looked worse, and this against a team lacking eight of last year's faithful, missing regulars Roy Ueda and Gord Odegard and half-stocked with midget and juvenile tryouts.

From the opening faceoff the Blues "just weren't there" in either strength or spirit. The Buckaroos scored after 27 seconds of the whistle and never paused for a backward glance, racking up a 3-0 lead in the first period and firing in another brace in the second before the Blades finally replied on Gordie Nuyens's screen shot.

The locals were lacking in just about every department. Passing and shooting was

aimless and ineffectual, there was little or no checking either way and goaltender Brian Woodward had scant protection from the hard-shooting Bucks, especially on rebounds. And Kelowna only outshot Vernon 39-38.

Team captain and centre Harvey Stolz was the sharpest thorn in the side of the Blades with two big goals and an assist. Wingmen John Strong and Terry Kasubuchi and Prince George import Gordon Schnepf scored singles.

Saturday night, before their home audience, the Blades looked slightly improved and held the Buckaroos down for two periods. But there's a third period in the game of hockey and the Kelowna Cowboys used the 20-minute time still available to pump in three unanswered goals and take a 5-3 comeback.

Twice the Blades enjoyed leads in the game and twice they blew them, the second time for keeps. Ralph Litzenberger put Vernon ahead in the first period on a pass play from Allan Rogan and Ike Coulter but the Buckaroos recouped with goals by Terry Strong and brother John Strong, both set up by Stolz.

Late in the second period the Blues came alive again when Frank Harrison batted in a short rebound past Richard Robinson and defence-man Wilf Tantrum unleashed a slap shot from 30 feet.

Then came the debacle. Marcello Verna tied the score at the 3:47 mark of the third on a power play with Vernon short a man, John Strong collected his second

goal of the night, beating the helpless Woodward on a rebound for the winner and then Schnepf added insurance with a 15-foot screen shot with Vernon again short-handed.

Shots on goal were an equal 28-28 but this meant little. The Buckaroos had the edge in just about everything else, save penalties of which the Blades collected nine. Kelowna got eight.

Missing Three

The Blues were missing three of their front line, Buck Sherk, Bobby Stein and Ed Spelay for this game but this was small excuse for losing. The Bucks were short valuable forwards Ueda and Odegard, defencemen Ken Kitsch (suspended indefinitely on a match penalty incurred Friday night) and Craig Anderson.

Vernon blueliner Gordie Nuyens worked only at half speed Saturday as he was nursing a bruised hip sustained the previous night.

Whatever the Blades' trouble is it can't be lack of ability. They showed in that first game Tuesday they are capable of playing hockey—and good hockey.

Co-coaches Jim Moro and Hap Schaefer are presently looking for the answers and they hope they'll have arrived at or be close to a satisfactory solution by Tuesday night when the Blades go into action against the Rockets at the Civic Arena for the second time.

Friday Game Summary

First Period: 1. Kelowna, Stolz (Chisholm, J. Strong) 0:27. 2. Kelowna, J. Strong (Kasubuchi) 6:35. 3. Kelowna, Schnepf (Wildemann) 18:07. Penalties — Kitsch (0:55); Verna (3:30); Stephen (6:20); J. Strong (11:58); Kineshanko (14:07).

Second Period: 4. Kelowna, Stolz (J. Strong) 2:09. 5. Kelowna, Kasubuchi (J. Strong, Stolz) 17:20. 6. Vernon, Nuyens (Agar) 17:58. Penalties — J. Strong (14:48); Kitsch, Sorochnik (16:10).

Third Period: No scoring. Penalties—T. Strong, Sorochnik (12:22); Kitsch (match penalty), Kineshanko (13:39); Chisholm (14:33); Stephen (19:24).

Saves: Woodward 10, 15, 14—39; Robinson 12, 14, 12—38.

Saturday Game Summary

First Period: 1. Vernon, Litzenberger (Rogan, Coulter) 8:21. 2. Kelowna, T. Strong (Stolz) 19:36. Penalties —J. Strong, Agar (1:32); Cousins, MacKay (12:07); MacKay (18:19).

Second Period: 3. Kelowna, J. Strong (Stolz, T. Strong) 3:34. 4. Vernon, Harrison (Sorochnik, Agar) 11:07. 5. Vernon, Tantrum (Agar) 16:12. Penalties — Mildenberg (5:31); Stolz (5:53); Tantrum (12:07); Chisholm, Nuyens (12:51); J. Strong, MacKay, Stephen (15:50); T. Strong (16:01).

Third Period: 6. Kelowna, Verna (Cousins, Mildenberg) 3:47. 7. Kelowna, J. Strong (Schnepf) 10:47. 8. Kelowna, Schnepf (Kivisto) 15:45. Penalties—Sorochnik (3:01); Stolz, Nuyens (19:59).

Saves: Woodward 8, 9, 11—28; Robinson 11, 9, 8—28.

Rocketmen Here Again Tuesday

Vernon Blades, winless in four starts, will try and change the script Tuesday night at the Civic Arena when they meet the so far undefeated Kamloops Rockets for the third time.

Last week the Blades were handed a 2-1 loss by the Rockets in their home opener and since then they have become progressively worse, suffering 9-4, 5-1 and 5-3 setbacks.

The last pair was dropped to the Kelowna Buckaroos and it leaves the local Blues firmly in the cellar two games off the pace.

The Rockets are riding high on a three-game win streak and the Blades will have to look sharp if they wish to halt Kenny Stewart's crew before they disappear any higher into the upper firmament of the Okanagan Junior "A" Hockey League.

Programs will be on sale as usual at Tuesday's game which starts at 8 p.m.

b Higher From Balcos

PENTICTON 2

tes extended their lead atop the league to six points over the week-ousness and luck on their partance from cellar-dwelling Kam-

OVSL STANDINGS

W L T G F G A P

Vernon	6	0	1	30	8	13
Kelowna	3	3	1	27	17	7
Penticton	3	4	1	23	20	7
Kamloops	1	6	1	9	44	3

ball into an empty net.

After 32 minutes the IWA's tied it up when center forward Helmut Gedig exploited a piece of indecision on the part of Vernon right full-back Heinz Held, slipping a four-yarder low into the corner.

Six minutes later Gedig put the Pentictonites ahead when he hoisted the ball over Werner Schurack's head as the goalie tried to grab an upfield punt.