Revived Blues Stir Up Rockets

Chase League Winners For 50 Minutes—Then Roof Falls In

KAMLOOPS 6, VERNON 3

Vernon Blades are unalterably and undeniably in last place in the Okanagan Junior "A" Hockey League. They're so far behind there's been talk of sending out a search party to look for them.

But that won't be necessary. You can call off the bloodhounds and the jungle beaters. Those Blades, though you might not see them straggling way back there in the boondocks, are still around.

Still around, still alive, and very much a part of the OJHL.

Also very much tougher than their current ruinous record would tend to indicate. Why? Because they've shucked off all ridiculous pretensions at finishing in first and swung their focus on a far more glittery goal—the OJHL playoffs, set to start in less than two weeks.

And, if past history holds true again, when the Blades get all feverish with the playoff virus it takes a considerable team to hold them down to the level befitting their lowly station in the league.

Got The Message

Kamloops Rockets have what could be called a "considerable" team and they got the ominous message Saturday night they hosted the league paupers in a regular OJHL fixture. For almost two periods and a half the revved-up Blades matched them stride for stride and goal for goal and threatened to attain the ultimate in presumptuousness—a victory in Kamloops Memorial Arena.

However, what has become almost inevitable, occurred again in Kamloops' spacious icehouse. The Rockets, sounding the alarm before it was too late, shook loose for three goals in the final twelve minutes of the third period to crack a 3-3 tie, win 6-3 and protect their lengthy home unbeaten streak which has stood the test of almost a full season.

Murray Owen, an accomplished craftsman who can kill you at either centre or left wing, combined with capable linemate Rick McShane and a slap-shooting terror on defence called Ken Rinaldi to despoil the upstart Vernonites.

Owen scored three goals, including an insurance tally, and assisted on another to contribute considerably to the Rockets' firepower; McShane also picked up an insurance goal in the third and set up two more. And Rinaldi? He took care of the winner, blistering in a two-way pass at 8:35 of the closing canto to write the Blades' obituary for the umpteenth time.

The Rockets' sixth goal was triggered by newly acquired Cariboo product going by the handle, Paul Levens. Levens, who saw limited action in a Kelowna Buckaroo uniform last season, also teamed up with fellow Caribooer Glen "Cowboy" Richards to assist Rinaldi on the clinching counter. Larry Roberge, switched to a line with Owen and McShane, picked up three assists to maintain his ever consistent scoring pace.

Sherk Put Up Fuss

Putting up most of the fuss for the fiery Blades was hard-working leftwinger Buck Sherk. The hustling Lavingtonian scored two goals, his 15th and 16th of the season, and annoyed opposing wingers all night with his unrelenting checking.

Spitfire defenceman Gordie Nuyens accounted for the third Vernon goal, unassisted. Centre Bobby Stein, although failing to add to his goal collection, boosted his point total up two notches with a pair of assists and is now three short of the 50-point plateau, never before reached by a Vernon Blade in the three-year history of the league.

Others worthy of honorable mention Saturday were Ralph Litzenberger who killed penalties with his usual matchless efficiency and assisted on one of Sherk's goals, Jim Stephen who toiled almost all night on defence, Dennis Taylor who performed net-minding duties creditably, putting the blocks to 39 of 45 Rockets shots.

Referee Dale Cassell waved 11 to the penalty box, seven of them Kamloops miscreants. Stephen, the Blades' captain, sat out a 10-minute misconduct levied on him in the first period.

Served Notice

The volatile Vernonites, 11 strong, served notice from the opening buzzer Saturday that they wouldn't cotton to any clean-up job by their league-winning hosts. The game was scoreless for a hard-fought first ten minutes but then at 10:10 Levens scored unassisted to put Kamloops one up.

Quick to dispel any Rocket hopes of a runaway the Blades replied in less than a minute, Sherk clicking from Stein and Litzenberger.

With the score 1-1 Owen finished off a play from Roberge and McShane to start off second period fireworks but the Blues were even faster on the uptake this time around, Nuyens hitting paydirt 20 seconds after Owen.

Another goal by Owen late in the period gave Kamloops a 3-2 edge going into the final frame. Sherk, three minutes into the period, tied it on a power play from Stein and things looked rosy again.

Alas, Rinaldi, and Blade returnee Wilf Tantrum in the sin bin, sizzled in the winner at the eight-minute mark and McShane and Owen followed up in that order.

Game Summary

First Period: 1. Kamloops, Levens (unassisted) 10:10. 2. Vernon, Sherk (Stein, Litzenberger) 11:00. Penalties—T. Shishido (charging) 7:05 Fourt (high sticking) 11:50; Rinaldi (slashing) 13:25; Rogan (holding) 14:15; Stephen (misconduct) 17:10; Roberge (charging) 19:30.

Second Period: 3. Kamloops, Owen (Roberge, McShane) 5:30. 4. Vernon, Nuyens (unassisted) 5:50. 5. Kamloops, Owen (McShane, Roberge). Penalty — Rinaldi (elbowing) 16:20.

Third Period: 6. Vernon, Sherk (Stein) 3:50. 7. Kamloops, Rinaldi (Levens, Richards) 8:35. 8. Kamloops, McShane (Owen) 11:20. 9. Kamloops, Owen (Roberge) 16:48. Penalties—Nuyens (butt-ending) 2:20; Roberge (hooking) 3:25; Tantrum (elbowing) 7:25; Levens (interference) 16:36.