

Poor fan attendance raises many questions

By DOUG BULWER

Vernon Essos of the B.C. junior A hockey league have a busy weekend ahead of them as they travel to the Coast for a three game stint, taking on Vancouver, Chilliwack and Nanaimo in that order.

With no local junior games on tap here in Vernon until next Tuesday, when Penticton Broncos will be in town, several aspects of the local scene as far as the junior level of hockey is concerned come to mind.

At the present time, much concern is being voiced by many people, in particular directors of the Essos as to why so few people are attending home games of B.C. junior hockey here in Vernon.

While the problem is not confined specifically to junior hockey in this city, (even Ottawa Nationals of the World Hockey association are feeling the pinch of no fan support) the Essos are one of the major team sports being played in this area.

Many and varied are the reasons why fans do not come out to see hockey. Some say the rink is too cold and dirty to sit in over a period of several hours, others say the quality is not

good enough for the price one has to pay for admittance (\$1.75 for adults, \$1.25 students and 50 cents for children) yet they think nothing of paying \$5 to \$10 to go to a party plus the cost of drinks.

As mentioned, Essos management and directors are quite concerned and have gone on record to try and shed some light on the matter.

Club president, Nick Schuck, acting as spokesman for the Essos has related the following information;

"We are really concerned for the sake of what we think is good hockey being played here by the Essos and what we can't understand is why less than 300 fans per game are turning out here in Vernon, when cities like Kelowna and Kamloops are packing them in at 1,300 or better.

Amazing part of these out of town figures stems from the fact it is the Essos who are seemingly attracting most fans when they are on the road trips," said Mr. Schuck.

"There is no doubt, while the Essos are the youngest age club in the eight team league, which in turn reflects a certain

amount of inexperience, their particular brand of hockey is no less exciting when compared to the older clubs.

"It is a well known fact all teams play better when playing before a well filled arena and the Essos are certainly no exception to this.

"Another aspect most people over-look in these boys, is the fact they play the game because they love the sport. They are not paid monetarily except for their monthly living expenses and won't be until they are fortunate enough to be called up to professional ranks, which of course is uppermost in their personal outlook toward the game of ice hockey.

"They are anxious to prove themselves and it takes big crowds to most often bring out the best in their individual abilities.

"If local fans begin to show more interest, they will be rewarded with an exciting brand of hockey. This has been proven many times in the past.

Many comments have been heard, a hockey club of this calibre is a money making venture. This is not necessarily true but admittedly, it would be nice to see the years operation costs come out in the black, which in turn would assure a good start the following year, for such expenditures as training camp and the ever increasing cost of equipment.

"The eight directors of the Essos have individually financed the team operation and are prepared to back up this investment.

"To explain; prior to each

season start, various teams in the league set up an operational budget based on home town fan support, with their guide lines based on an average of 1,000 fans per home game. This figure is carried over to include expenses incurred while making road trips of which there is a heavy burden of transportation, accommodation and meal costs.

"These out of town expenses run on the average of \$1,000 for extended trips to the lower mainland for example.

"While it is only fair to assume there will always be pros and cons on the running of such a team, I would stress at this time, the directors and myself sincerely welcome any questions or comments about the Essos, and I personally can assure anyone writing or asking any queries, will get a straight and honest answer in full.

"All I ask is they send in a question or query and make themselves known by signing such a letter. They can mail such a question to my home address, 2602-44 Ave., Vernon, and an answer will be forthcoming," concluded Mr. Schuck.

The Vernon Essos are the defending B.C. Champions,

have won the coveted title twice in the past three years, yet the fans at this stage of the season are still lacking. Surely it isn't because they are only a fourth place club at this juncture?



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No home yet for Billingham boys

It seems the Vernon Essos won't have the pleasure of being the first visitors to the new million dollar rink at Billingham Washington as had previously been reported.

A revised schedule sent out last week to all teams and news media reported the new league entry, Bellingham Blazers were all set to go in their home town rink but a hurried telephone message sent out early this week says the floor still isn't ready and won't be until the end of the month.

At press time today, Blazers had only played a total of 13 games, losing 12 and with all games played so far in other rinks.

Meanwhile the seven remaining teams have been filling out their schedules with the Essos for example having played double the amount of the Blazers, as have all the rest of the teams.

Getting back to the new arena, while little is known of the new building or its location in the U.S. centre, a choice bit of information about it's new manager has been read in the Flin Flon Manitoba 'Daily Reminder' and is as follows, including the heading used in the Nov. 30 front page story;

Hec McCaig Takes Position in Washington
Community Club manager, Hec McCaig, has accepted a position as arena manager in

Billingham, Washington and will be leaving Flin Flon on December 11th.

The new million dollar arena complex at Billingham is located some 20 miles over the U.S. border and will open in the near future.

The McCaig family will reside in Whiterock B.C.

Ernie McLean, coach of the New Westminster Junior Hockey Club, made the arrangements for the move with McCaig to manage the arena on a year-round basis and also assist in organizing hockey for the youngsters in the area. The Bellingham Blazers will enter the B.C. Junior Hockey League.

The new arena will have a dining and beverage room and tennis courts as well as other facilities are planned. The arena will seat 2,700 when it opens and is planned for a possible expansion to over 5,000 seats.

Hec McCaig spent most of his young life in Flin Flon, leaving here in 1957 for Elliott Lake where he was the special activities supervisor. When the mines closed in the area he went to Prescott, Ontario as Legion sports officer. Later he accepted a position as storekeeper at McMaster University in Hamilton.

On December 4, 1967, he returned to Flin Flon as Community Club manager.

Edmonton Pee Wees will be here

The eight teams who will play in the 1973 Winter Carnival Pee Wee Hockey Tournament have been confirmed.

Representing the Vancouver Island will be the defending Tournament Champions — Saanich Braves.

From the lower mainland it will be Riley Park and from the North Coast, Quesnel who are the defending "B" Champions.

From the North, Fort St. John will come to town and from the Okanagan Mainline it will be Kelowna. East Kootenay reps will be Kimberley.

A team from Edmonton (this year's Honor City), and the host City — Vernon will fill out the remaining two club lists.

The tournament will be held this year on Feb. 2nd, 3rd and 4th, 1973 at the Vernon civic arena.

Two day passes this year remain at \$2 with one day tickets costing 25 cents for children, 50 cents for students and \$1 for adults.

Midget Reps looking for needed win

Vernon Midget Reps will be out looking for a very important victory this Sunday as they take on league leading Kelowna at Vernon civic arena.

A win in this particular game is considered a must following their 6-2 drubbing handed them by Enderby last Sunday here on home ice.

Vernon presently hold second place in the southern division of the Okanagan Mainline Midget league, just three points back of Kelowna and only three points ahead of third place Enderby so the upcoming game will be considered the key how they will fare after the new year.

Interesting aspect of last Sundays loss was brought home with force when the following night (Monday) a house league midget (Woolworths) team from Vernon travelled to Enderby and while they eventually lost to the same club, did give the host team a real run for their money by opening the scoring to lead after one period of play, came back to take the lead once more when Enderby tied it in the second period then ran out of steam to the much bigger team in the final period for a 5-2 difference on the score sheet.

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