

Improvement needed soon



This month's most asked question in local coffee shops, pool halls, and hotel beverage rooms is — What is the matter with the Vikings?

Everyone has their own theory as to why, the club which at one time looked like they were going to be serious contenders for first-place, has sunk into the depths of third place in the four-team Interior Division of the B.C. Junior Hockey League.

It is possible that if the club hits a bad slump in the next two weeks, and Merritt Centennials get extremely hot, Vernon could end up in last-place. Possible, but not probable.

NO EASY ANSWER

There is no simple reason why the Vikings have hit the skids. It cannot be summed up in one word, one sentence, or even in this column. There are a combination of reasons.

One of the major reasons has been the sudden failure of the defence.

No defenceman has been playing consistently well during the past six weeks.

While the forwards are scoring enough goals to win hockey games, they are forgetting about the other half of their job, back-checking.

For most of the season, goaltending has been one of the Vikings' strong points. But, on occasion, the goaltending too has fallen down.

In short, it boils down to the entire team hitting a slump. Vikings aren't the only team having trouble these days. Kelowna Buckaroos have lost more games in the past four weeks than they did during the first three months of the season.

But, Bucks are so far in first-place, a few losses don't really matter. However, for Vikings, wins are important.

It is no secret the Vikings' owners lost a bundle of loot in the 1973-74 season. While they were not hoping to make all their money back this year, it was hoped they could at least break even.

No such luck, Again this year, the club is financially in a hole. And the only way they are going to get their head back above water is to do well in the playoffs.

So, the immediate task is to get ready for the post-season games which start in about three weeks.

COACH HOPING

One man who is hoping the Vikings snap out of their slump, and get rolling in a hurry, is coach Joe Tennant.

Tennant was hired this year as a full-time coach-manager. As everyone knows, a hockey coach does not have the most security in the world.

Tennant's team is playing below .500 hockey and has drawn miserably at the gate this season.

So, unless the team responds tremendously in the playoffs, the writing could be on the wall.

Tennant insists his team will come around in the playoffs and feels the Vikings have as good a club as anyone in the BCJHL.

Barring an earthquake or tidal wave, Vernon will meet Penticton in the playoffs. By the way, Penticton has been the hottest team in the league during the last month.

Then if Vikings get past the Broncos, next in line will be the winner of the Merritt Centennials-Kelowna series. Bucks should win that series and Vernon has won only four of 13 outings against Kelowna this season.

So, Tennant and his troops have a big job ahead of them, and time is running out.