

The SPORTS

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KENDALL'S KORNER

Several reasons



Hockey season is finally over in Vernon.

Bantam reps was the last team still playing, and they were eliminated from the Kamloops International Tournament on Monday.

It was a rather frustrating year for some teams, particularly the Vernon Vikings.

After smashing numerous records during the regular season, Vikings were knocked out by Penticton Vees in the B.C. Junior Hockey League semi-finals.

There are probably several reasons why Vikings folded in the playoffs. But, no one can say, "this is the reason," including Coach Joe Tennant. Tennant says it could be one or two of many things.

First, Vernon had a relatively easy quarter-final series against Chilliwack. That series didn't really cause Vikings to get prepared mentally. Meanwhile, Penticton was riding high after knocking off Kelowna Buckaroos.

PEAKED EARLY

Another theory is that Vikings peaked too early in the season. During December and January, most hockey observers were calling this year's club, "the best in BCJHL history." In February the team slumped, and maybe never really snapped out of it.

Tennant says he did not get the performance he needed from his veterans in post-season play. He said, "they just didn't provide enough leadership for the younger players."

Another reason was the excellent goaltending by Vees' two netminders, Dennis Ewanchuk and Pat Murphy. They played well, but Vikings' shooting left much to be desired.

There are dozens of ifs, ands, or buts that could have made the difference. But, one thing Tennant failed to mention sticks out in this writer's mind.

Throughout the season, Vikings employed four forward lines with a great deal of success. All four units performed admirably and deserved equal ice time. However, very few, if any, teams have ever won a championship with four lines.

THREE LINES

Montreal Canadiens, Philadelphia Flyers, and many other top pro teams use four lines for most of the season. But, when it gets down to playoffs, several players do nothing more than warm the bench.

If Tennant had condensed his four good lines, into three great lines, it might have done the trick. Not only would the lines have been stronger, the players would have become more involved in the game with added ice time.

Looking over the scores during the Vernon-Penticton series, it was not Vikings' defence or goaltending that let them down, it was the inability of the forwards to score goals.

There were two or three Vernon players who had no business on the ice during the semi-finals, but Tennant wanted to go with the system that got him to first-place. Unfortunately, playoff hockey is a whole new game. And no one knows it better than Joe.

No doubt, everyone has their own opinion why Vikings lost. But, all we can do now is wait until next year.