

Vikings in trouble



Junior A hockey in Vernon has seen its good years, but more recently, it has seen bad years.

Despite winning the B.C. Junior Hockey League's regular season championship in 1975-76, Vikings were a dismal failure at the bank.

For the fourth consecutive season, Vikings lost a sizeable sum of cash. No exact figure has been released, but a good guess would be between \$10,000 and \$14,000. That doesn't compare with the two previous seasons when losses were estimated at more than \$30,000, but \$14,000 isn't exactly a drop in the bucket.

The club's major problem is drawing spectators on a continuous basis. Local hockey fans just couldn't get excited about going into the dingy civic arena to watch Merritt Centennials or Chilliwack Bruins.

It just goes to prove it is almost impossible to operate a tier two junior A team successfully on a \$100,000 annual budget. Every team in the BCJHL lost money last season, including the two playoff finalists, Penticton and Nanaimo.

BUDGET TOO HIGH

When a team cannot make money after three playoff series, the budget is too high.

Nanaimo drew the largest crowds in the eight-team league during the regular season, but because of the club's location on Vancouver Island, travel costs are much higher than the other teams.

If Vikings could find a way to trim the budget to about \$75,000 per year, it would keep the wolf away from the door. City council has already given notice that the club will get no ice time next winter until a \$5,597 debt from last season is cleared up.

To top things off, there is serious trouble within the Vikings' executive ranks.

It is no secret that club president Les York, general manager and coach Joe Tennant, and director Vern Dye do not see eye-to-eye on many subjects. Relations between the trio seem to be at an all-time low, so low in fact, they have not yet got together for their year-end meeting.

ANNUAL MEETING

With several questions unanswered in Vernon, including who is going to pay the bills? will there be an ownership change? and will Tennant be back? — Dye and Tennant must go to the BCJHL's annual meeting this weekend in Kelowna, and make decisions for next season.

There are several urgent league matters to be settled, but Vikings haven't even got their housecleaning finished yet.

The situation is causing some concern with Vernon's parent club, Medicine Hat Tigers of the Western Canada Hockey League. Rumor is Tigers own part of the Vikings, and with all their top-notch farmhands scheduled to be stationed in Vernon, the Medicine Hat owners want to be sure things run smoothly here.

Tigers' principle owners, Rod Carey and Joe Fisher, are expected to be in Vernon next week to discuss the relationship between the two teams.

It is a sad, and rather frightening, situation. There are going to be some changes. You can bet your bottom dollar that either Tennant, York, or Dye, or possibly two of them, won't be involved with Vikings next season.

Let us just hope things get sorted out and Vernon's junior hockey club is not placed in jeopardy.