(Daily News Photo)

THE LOUIS CLAN is probably Canada's largest rodeo family. Fourteen family members compete on the WIREA circuit. Ben Louis, right, and his rodeo relatives include, from left: sons Oliver, Robert, and Charlie Louis; grandsons Faron Tonasket and Leo Louis; son Frank Louis, nephew Gordon Louis; son Blane Louis; grandson Darrell Eustache; nephew Willie Wilson; sons Mike and Cecil Louis. Another son, Vaughn, is Ben's team roping partner. They are the driving force behind Vernon's annual Head of the Lake Rodeo.

THREE GENERATIONS

Louis clan dominates Indian rodeo circuit

Canada has many famous rodeo families including the Hylands, Daines, and Butterfields.

However, there is no clan in the country with more family members actively competing in rodeo than the Louis congregation, of Vernon. Fourteen family members ride on the Western Indian Rodeo and Exhibition Association (WIREA) circuit.

Head of the family is Ben, 73, one of the top team ropers in the province. Ben and his youngest son, Vaughn, won the WIREA team roping championship last year. For his performance, Ben was named the WIREA 'Cowboy of the Year.' This season, Ben is roping with both Vaughn and his nephew, Willie Wilson.

ALL-AROUND

Two other sons, Oliver and Cecil, rank one-two in all-around cowboy standings. Oliver, the 1977 World All-Indian Saddle Bronc Champion, has earned $2,400 and Cecil has picked up $1,800.

In saddle bronc riding, Oliver and Cecil are second and third respectively, behind Guy Gottfrieson, of Kamloops.

Oliver also ranks third in calf-roping, right behind another brother, Robert.

In team roping, the son and father combination of Leo and Charlie (Ben's son) are currently first and third in the standings.

Cecil said, "Of my dad's nine sons, eight of us compete regularly. Harold is the only one who isn't active and even he has roped at one rodeo this year."

The next generation is also making its mark in rodeo. Leo, the leading roper, was the WIREA's rookie of the year in 1979. His cousin, Darrell Eustache, won the rookie award last year. And another cousin, Faron Tonasket, currently leads boys' steer riding standings.

Cecil said, "When we got to a rodeo, you can't miss us. At Chetwynd this weekend, we've entered 14 teams of ropers."

The WIREA finals are scheduled Sept. 25-27, at the KXA Grounds, in Kamloops.

KENDALL'S KORNER

Junior owners doing their best

Like most local hockey fans, I was pessimistic when it was announced two months ago that Vernon Lakers would remain in the B.C. Junior Hockey League.

The team had been a financial disaster since 1972. The 1980-81 campaign was a waste of time, for both the fans and players. The club went through four coaches more than 40 players, and finished last in the BCJHL's Interior Division.

There was speculation the owners would just eat their losses and call it quits. One shareholder who wasn't ready to do that was Al Thomas, now the team's president.

Thomas was the driving force behind the assembly of an ownership group, comprised of local businessmen. At a press conference last month, the owners asked us to let them start with a clean slate and they would give it their best shot. In this case, their best shot looks like it was good enough.

OILERS IMPRESSED

Kamloops Oilers were impressed enough with the new executive and Coach Gord MacBeth that they signed an affiliation agreement with the Lakers this week. That agreement should ensure Vernon will be competitive with the other four members of the division.

There are only two ways to build a solid tier two junior club: offer players a good scholarship program or, affiliate with a tier one club.

It takes years to build a good working relationship with colleges and teams can't lure academically-inclined players until that relationship is reached.

Time is something Lakers don't have. . .fans want a competitive team now!

So, affiliation was the route to go. Merritt Centennials and Langley Lords were also considered by Kamloops. After Langley was eliminated, the choice was narrowed to Merritt and Vernon.

Joe Arling, director of hockey operations for Oilers, admitted Lakers' dismal 80-81 record was considered. "But," he said, "we were very impressed with their new organization. I'm lokking forward to a solid parnership."

TOP PROSPECTS

The agreement means eight-to-10 of Oilers' top prospects will serve a season of apprenticeship with Lakers.

Vernon had a previous affiliation with a Western Hockey League team, Medicine Hat Tigers. However, when Vernon Coach Joe Tennant left the club, in 1976, the relationship faded; and the following year it died.

About 20 players graduated from Vernon, to the Tigers, during the 1970s.

Most notable of those are right wingers Ed Johnstone and Don Murdoch. Johnstone led New York Rangers in scoring last season. Murdoch will get another chance in the NHL this year, with Pittsburgh Penquins, after setting a playoff record of 17 goals for Wichita Wind, of the Central League.

Another player who took the Vernon-Medicine Hat-NHL route was defenceman Bob Gassoff, who was killed in a motorcycle accident in 1979. Gassoff was a member of St. Louis Blues.

Others went on to pro include goalie Ken Holland, Tim Sanche, Owen Lloyd, and Ron Areshenkoff.

IN EUROPE

Calvin Halasz will play semi-pro hockey in Europe this winter and Mike Winther, who was sent to New Westminster Bruins by Tigers, will get a tryout with Edmonton Oilers, of the NHL, after scoring 85 points last season.

Vernon also sent Ken Oulton, Darren Halasz, Gary Gilchrist, Cliff Lane, Darrell Furmanek, Jim Scammel, John Scammel (who was traded to Lethbridge), and Rick Simpson onto the Hat.

Oilers, like Lakers, are in a rebuilding year. Kamloops took over the New Westminster franchise that won only 17 games last season. To expect the Kamloops cuts to turn Vernon into a provincial champion is ridiculous. But, we can expect those players to help make Lakers a respectable hockey club.

Daily News **SPORTS PAGE**

DON KENDALL — Sports Editor
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Forward joins Vernon juniors

Forward Jeff Armitage, who spent the 1980-81 B.C. Junior Hockey League season with Revelstoke Rockets, has joined Vernon Lakers.

Lakers' Coach Gord MacBeth told the Daily News he is happy to get Armitage. "He is a hard worker," MacBeth said. "I'm sure he'll help our club."

42 POINTS

Armitage, 18, collected 21 goals and 21 assists with the Rockets last year. He said MacBeth is one of the main reasons he decided to come to Vernon. "Gord coached my brother (Brad) when he was with the Kelowna midget reps," Armitage said. "Brad told me he is a really good coach."

Some type of compensation must be given to Revelstoke, however; MacBeth doesn't anticipate any problem finalizing Armitage's move.

ROOKIE HURT

Meanwhile, rookie defenceman Tom Roy will be sidelined about two weeks with a chest injury. He may be ready for Vernon's league opener Sept. 20.

MacBeth has reduced Lakers' goaltending prospects from 10 to three, but plans to look at several more before the season starts. "I'd like to get a goalie with junior experience," he said. "It is tough to expect a rookie to handle the load."

Anyone interested in billeting players during the season is asked to phone Connie Johnson at 545-3880.

Four teams eliminated in men's slowpitch action

The Molson Men's Slowpitch League playoffs continue with the quarter finals being played Thursday.

The Muntz Old Styler eliminated Thorne Riddell Falcons 6-5 in eight innings, the Arrowhead Breakers routed Jean Jungle 19-2, Team Yamaha squashed the Screaming Lizards 13-4, while Toro's Hooligans knocked out Molson's 15-4.

The Four victorious teams will return to Kin Race Track Park Thursday, Sept. 10 when they meet in semi-final action.

Team Yamaha will meet Muntz Old Styler on diamond one while Arrowhead Breakers and Toro's Hooligans slug it out on diamond two.

Both games go at 6 p.m. sharp.

LOOK BACK FIVE YEARS

SEPTEMBER, 1976

Fourteen pre-assembled towers that will hold the cable for the new Blue Chairlift on Silver Star Mountain, were flown into position Saturday by a huge Bell 212 Twin helicopter.

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