



VERNON LAKERS hopeful Brent Gilchrist, left, is attempting to make the jump to junior hockey this year after spending last

season with Vernon bantam reps. Gilchrist is among 80 players trying to earn a spot on

this year's roster and is into his second day of training camp with the team. Daily News Photo

Lawrence surprised by quality of players

If Murray Lawrence can tell anything from the first practice, Vernon Lakers of the B.C. junior Hockey League could be a contender this season.

Lawrence, coach of the Lakers replaces Gord MacBeth who guided the team to a nine win, last place finish in the Interior division last year. It was the second time in two years the team finished in last spot.

However, this year the team has made changes. Ray (Dick) Williment purchased the team from its 12 directors, then proceeded to hire Lawrence to coach the team and Vern Dye as general manager. Since then the team has hired three assistant coaches; Chuck Tapp, Bob Gregorash and Kim Weberg.

Lakers held their first day of training camp, Wednesday, at the Priest Valley Arena where 80 hopefuls laced on their skates in hopes of earning a spot on this year's team.

"I think the first workout went pretty good," said Lawrence. "The

boys showed lots of enthusiasm and a desire to work."

The first on-ice session was broken down into two groups, the first group consisting mostly of bantams and midgets, while the second group was made up of older players.

Of the younger players Lawrence said he was impressed with Brent Gilchrist, Chris Saunders and Keith Chase, all local products, plus John Maley of Surrey and Gordon Hahn.

"Hahn was a nice pleasant surprise, Saunders impressed me and so did Chase," said Lawrence. "We also have a good crop of goaltenders in the younger group."

Among the older group to catch Lawrence's eye was Nick Kapicki who toiled last year for Vernon Juveniles.

"He attended the Kamloops Oilers camp and I thought he looked pretty good there," said Lawrence. "Cary Fisher was a pleasant surprise and so was Kéven Weremy."

As far as the overall look of the

team, Lawrence said the final product should have good size and mobility.

"Actually I'm overwhelmed by the quality of player we have in the camp," said Lawrence. "Vern (Dye) and the scouting staff did an excellent job in finding good hockey players."

Lawrence will start cutting down after Friday's practice trying to mold his finished product.

"Right now we're just skating, shooting and scrimmaging," said Lawrence. "We'll make most of the cuts Friday and then we'll get into the more advanced stuff."

The team took to the ice this morning then will do dryland training this afternoon. From there, the team will again be on the ice tonight.

Lakers first game of the year is Sept. 18 when the team plays host to Revelstoke at 8:30 p.m. at the Civic Arena in an exhibition contest. The following night the Kelowna Buckaroos will be in town for an 8 p.m. start.