

Vernon gets taste of game conditions

Vernon Lakers get their first taste of game experience when they travel to Revelstoke to take on the Rockets in a B.C. Junior Hockey League exhibition encounter, Thursday.

Rockets already have two games under their belt, a 7-2 win and 4-3 loss to Shuswap Totems.

Revelstoke finished third in the Interior Division last season while Lakers placed last with a dismal nine wins and ended the season on a 23-game winless streak. Rockets, on the other hand, made it to the first round of the playoffs, only to lose four straight to eventual champion, Penticton Knights.

25 PLAYERS

Rockets haven't exactly enjoyed a great training camp with only 40 players showing up for the first day of camp. Their roster has since been trimmed to 25, but Coach Gaston Picard is hoping for a few more players to make an appearance in camp.

"I'm still looking for a few more players on defence and a couple more forwards," said Picard. "If I can get the players I want, we might be able to challenge for first."

But if Picard doesn't get the players he wants, he said he expects Penticton and Kelowna Buckaroos to battle for first and second position.

"We'll be alright for the playoffs, it might be kind of tight, but we'll be there," he said.

As for taking Lakers lightly because of their last place finish last year, Picard said there's no chance of that.

"We've heard they've got some pretty good players from Kamloops and still have a few veterans in camp," said Picard. "As for their losing attitude, I'm sure that's gone, they're in the league to play hockey. I expect them to be a lot stronger than last year."

OLD DEFENCE

On defence, Rockets average 19-20-years-old, while up front the team is relatively young, carrying seven 16-year-olds.

"We might be young up front, but we've got the wheels, there's a couple guys who can really fly," said Picard.

Picard said none of the players in camp have been signed yet, but hopes to use the exhibition game with Lakers to make a few decisions.

"Exhibition games are the only time when the coach doesn't have to worry," said Picard. "These games are

for the coaches only, but it still gives the fans a good idea about their team."

New to the Rockets are Randy Swanson and Allan McDonald, both 18, and both from Stonewall, Man. Swanson was originally scouted by Rockets' General Manager Harry Burgart, so when Swanson came to camp he figured he'd bring McDonald with him.

"They're both a couple of quality hockey players," said Burgart. "McDonald can play either wing or defence so he gives us some flexibility."

Rockets have three goaltenders remaining in camp, one of them veteran netminder Randy Kirby.

Revelstoke also has 10 local boys on the roster, five of which Burgart said he feels have a good chance of making the club.

"We're just about set, we have a few adjustments to make, but we're pretty well ready to go," said Burgart.

Rockets will make a return trip to Vernon, Saturday, then on Sunday, Lakers will play host to the Buckaroos from Kelowna.

Lakers lose a defenceman

Vernon Lakers' Head Coach Murray Lawrence received some bad news Wednesday.

Defenceman Regan Desroches walked out of camp and returned home to Nanaimo. Desroches was cut last weekend by Victoria Cougars, of the Western Hockey League.

Lawrence said, "Regan couldn't get the high school courses here that he needs to graduate this year. He may not be able to get those courses in Nanaimo, either, so there is a possibility he'll come back to us."

Lakers have 38 players on the camp roster and Lawrence wants that figure reduced to 25 by Sunday.

"We'll be cutting a few players after tonight's game and a few more after practice Thursday," he said. "We have to get down to a workable size before next week."