

Lakers goals are reachable



By GORD SMILEY Daily News Sports

Earlier this year Murray Lawrence set two goals for his hockey team, to be competitive and make the playoffs.

Lawrence, coach of the Vernon Lakers of the B.C. Junior Hockey League, already appears to have achieved one of his goals, the competitive part at least. As for making the playoffs, there's no reason why Lakers can't finish third, even though all they have to do is finish fourth.

Lakers are a tremendously improved club from last season, the year in which Lakers dazzled sporting fans by winning nine games. Of course they were even more impressive the previous year by winning eight.

Lawrence took a chance when he took over the worst team in the BCJHL, but so far the risk is starting to pay off.

This year Lakers are 2-3, but could have easily been 4-1, if not for an overtime loss to Shuswap Totems and a 4-3 squeaker to the favored team to win the BCJHL, Kelowna Buckaroos.

Some people are surprised by the fast start Shuswap Totems have gotten off to, especially since they're a BCJHL expansion team. However, even though Lakers have been in the league for several years, this team could almost be considered expansion. Lakers have only three returning players, plus several without junior experience. Lawrence and General Manager Vern Dye did a good job scouting the back woods for hockey players and just may have scouted themselves right into respectability.

Heading the list of new players is diminutive Nick Kapicki, who toiled last year for Vernon Juvenile Reps. For some reason, Kapicki wasn't good enough to play junior hockey last season, an obvious error in judgment on someone's part, but this year,

Kapicki has battled and skated his way to become an integral part of Lakers' lineup.

Then there's the line of Peter Oliphant, Rob Kossan and Todd Ewen.

This line has already proven they can become one of the top lines in the Interior Division. Kossan has all the skills while Oliphant and Ewen never stop working.

On defence, the team is led by Mike Enemark who came to Lakers from Quesnel, of the Peace Cariboo League. Last season in Quesnel, Enemark scored 40 times and added 70 assists and was voted the league's top offensive defenceman. Already in just three games with Lakers, Enemark has connected three times and gives the team the maturity it needs on the blue line and in front of the net clearing enemy goal scorers out of harms way.

While Enemark can't keep everyone away from in front of the net, the goaltending duo of Bob Moll and Rob Imbeau, could be one of the best one-two combinations in the league. In three games, Moll has allowed 10 goals while Imbeau in two games has let in 11 goals.

Lakers have a good balanced attack, complete with speed and adequate muscle.

Lakers get another test this Friday when they travel to Penticton to take on defending BCJHL champion, Knights. So far, Knights have been keeping a low profile, having lost to both Kelowna and Shuswap. On Sunday, the locals are back home to take on the Buckaroos. If Lakers can emerge from this weekend unscathed, there's no telling what could happen this year.

Whatever happens, Lakers are a brand new organization with fresh blood and a winning attitude.