

Knights ready for revenge

By GORD SMILEY
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Penticton Knights have a score to settle with Vernon Lakers.

Make that two scores to settle since the last two times Lakers and Knights did battle, Lakers were on the winning end of 6-3 decisions.

Knights currently sit atop the Interior Division of the B.C. Junior Hockey League with a 13-5 record, for 26 points, three points in front of second place Kelowna Buckaroos, with an 11-11-1 record.

In third position are Lakers with 22 points, owners of an 11-8 mark. A win by Vernon when Lakers host Knights, tonight at 8 p.m. in the Civic Arena, would put Vernon in sole possession of second place.

However, the defending B.C. champion, Knights aren't coming to Vernon looking for another loss.

"You have to believe we weren't

very thrilled losing to them twice," said Knights' Coach Rick Kozuback. "A lot of things led to us losing those games."

Kozuback stresses that too many penalties and lack of intensity hurt Knights against Lakers.

"We still intend to play aggressive hockey, which is why we built the team the way we did," said Kozuback. "But we're getting too many high sticking penalties plus a number of slashing and retaliatory penalties."

"Plus the guys were lacking some determination the last time we played Vernon, we'll definitely be up for this one."

Penticton is probably the biggest team physically, in the league, something Kozuback said he'd like to use to Knights' advantage.

"We'll be a little more aggressive than what we were, but hope to stay away from stupid penalties."

Lakers will counter Knights hard-hitting style with quickness.

"They're an excellent skating team, they forecheck really well and get back in their own end in a hurry," said Kozuback. "With that size of a team you have to play hard skating because they're not very physical."

Lakers' Coach Murray Lawrence is also using the defensive duo of Mike Enemark and Gavin Shuya to the maximum, each getting more than 40 minutes playing time per game.

"I don't think they'll get tired during the season, but in a seven-game series they might start hurting," said Kozuback.

Enemark was a late and somewhat controversial cut by Penticton while Shuya was a late cut of Kamloops Oilers, of the Western Hockey League.

GOOD PAIR

"They're a good pair, that Shuya could be the best in the league."

Kozuback said he was surprised by Lakers turnaround from last season, the year in which Lakers won nine games and ended the season on a 23-game winless streak.

"They have got a lot of help from Kamloops, I understand their relationship has been much better than last year."

Lakers were Oilers' tier two affiliate from last year and have an unofficial working agreement with the team this year.

"When they got Wakabayashi (Stacey) from Kamloops that was a real accomplishment," said Kozuback. "We had been trying to get him for a while, but he wanted to go to Kamloops and now they've sent him someplace where they can get their hands on him in a hurry."

HATES ARENA

Another plus on the Lakers side, for this game anyway, is the fact they're

playing in the Civic Arena.

"It's terrible to play there, I hate it," said Kozuback. "In my six years coaching in this league, I've never liked that arena."

"It's small and it's dark, it's not all that difficult to score from the blueline."

Despite being in first place in the Interior, Knights aren't enjoying the dominance they've had for the past two years.

"I don't think the quality of the league is any better, but everyone is closer, there's more in the way of balance," said Kozuback. "You can't go into Revelstoke and Merritt and take them lightly."

For the first time in years, Kozuback said he thinks the Coastal Division could have an edge on the Interior.

"Basically the Coast is stronger, but the Interior is better as far as the fans are concerned."