

CRUCIAL COAST TRIP

Lakers hit the road

It has boiled down to the final stretch for Vernon Lakers as they prepare for a string of five regular season games that could spell a first place finish in the BCJHL Interior Division.

Unfortunately, the first two of those five games are on the road, at the Coast to be precise. Lakers depart Thursday morning for Richmond where they will play the Sockeyes, then Friday they face the Bluehawks, in Burnaby.

If that were not enough, Lakers have to scurry home Saturday to entertain Langley Eagles, of the Coastal Division.

With Lakers currently sitting one point behind Penticton Knights in the

battle for first place, and having one game in hand on the Knights, each of the remaining five games has become a must-win situation.

"We'll have to be at the top of our game to make it through this weekend," said Lakers' Coach Murray Lawrence.

FINAL GAMES

Next week the local junior club will host New Westminster, the second place club on the Coast, and Kelowna Buckaroos in the final home game of the regular season.

"I think our chances with New Westminster are as good as anybody has," said Lawrence.

With Lawrence's optimism and barring any losses along the way, Lakers would be set up

for a match with Kelowna that could easily be the deciding game for first place.

"It will probably come down to a final with the Bucks ... it should be a barn-burner," added the Vernon coach.

There's no mistaking Lawrence's expectations at this point, finishing first would mean an opening round series with Shuswap Totems in the playoffs leaving Kelowna and Penticton to battle it out.

"I'd love to see Penticton and Kelowna go at it," said Lawrence. "If we play Shuswap in the opening round, it will be a hell of a series."

"When it comes right down to it, we don't care

who we play in the playoffs, we should be healthy and at full strength by then so it doesn't matter."

WALKING WOUNDED

Lakers are slowly nursing their walking wounded back into the ranks, but it will take a little more time.

Centre Ron Berezowski, recovering from a near-disastrous knee injury, is now skating with the club during practice with careful taping of the injured joint. He'll be fitted with a special brace later so that the danger of the injury reoccurring will be minimized.

Nick Kapicki, though still in a cast due to a broken foot, remains in condition and Lawrence is optimistic that he may be able to compete in a second playoff round.

Aside from Todd Ewen, who is not fully recovered from his shoulder separation, and Ken McKenzie, who has a sore knee as well, the only other doubtful starter this weekend will be Lakers' Captain Gord Simpson. Simpson's chances of playing on the Coast hinge on whether he can be fitted with a playing cast instead of the large splint he now has on his broken finger.

BCJHL SUSPENDS ROCKETS

VERNON, B.C. (CP) — Six players and the coach of Revelstoke Rockets of the B.C. Junior Hockey League have been suspended by the B.C. Amateur Hockey Association.

The Revelstoke team also was fined \$1,000 Tuesday following a game Feb. 1 in Kelowna against the Buckaroos in which a referee was threatened.

Brian DeLeeuw was given a one-year suspension and won't be eligible to play next season after threatening the referee.

Three other players — Dan DeJaeger, Lee Humphreys and Gordon Young — have been suspended for the remainder of the current season.

Terry Heddle was suspended for seven games and has already served six games, while Vern Cota was suspended for six games and has completed his suspension.

Coach Vic Hodgins won't be allowed to rejoin the Rockets until the start of the 1983-1984 season.

The Rockets said the team will appeal all the suspensions and the fine.

Royals and Flyers engage in donnybrook

About a dozen players face suspension after two brawls in the last minute of a 7-3 Abbotsford Flyer home-ice victory over New Westminster Royals in one of three B.C. Junior Hockey League games Tuesday night.

In another fight-filled game, eight players were ejected for fighting as Nanaimo Clippers defeated Richmond Sockeyes 5-3. Langley Eagles stopped

Burnaby Bluehawks 9-3 in a more peaceful contest.

In Abbotsford, the Coast Division-leading Flyers had come back from a 3-2 deficit with five unanswered goals in the third period.

The first brawl followed a major penalty at 19:10 to Len Meyers of the Royals for applying his stick to an Abbotsford player's head.