

Lakers strengthen grip on first place

Vernon Lakers drew on their reserve energy to come back from a 2-0 deficit and earn a 6-2 victory over the visiting Langley Eagles, Saturday night.

The win, Lakers' third in four days, gives the local club a five-point lead on both Kelowna Buckaroos and Penticton Knights in the battle for first place in the BCJHL Interior Division. Bucks have four games remaining while the Knights have three and Lakers two. A win by

Lakers in either of their last two games against New Westminster Royals and Kelowna, coupled with a loss by Kelowna would guarantee Vernon its first, first-place finish since 1976.

The three games in four days saw Vernon defeat Richmond and Burnaby on the Coast before returning Saturday to down Langley. Coach Murray Lawrence was extremely happy with his team's performance.

"The boys played reasonably well against

Langley considering the tough schedule," he said. "To tell you the truth, I was a little worried about Langley since you're more susceptible to injuries when you're tired."

In addition to his skaters' efforts, Lawrence had praise for his goaltending duo of Matt Sekela and Rex Grant. Lakers were outshot in all three games.

"They both played very, very well," said Lawrence. "We probably have the best goaltending tandem in the league."

Saturday night, Lakers got four of six goals from their defence to win the game after falling behind. Mike Enemark scored twice while Gavin Shuya and Rudy Poescheck added singles. Kevin Thorlakson and Glen Doucette rounded out the Laker's scoring while Lorne Gavinchuk and Darcy Ellison replied for Langley.

HOME GAMES

Lakers' last two games of the regular season are both on home turf with New Westminster playing here Friday, and Kelowna closing out the season schedule, Saturday night.

Of particular importance to Lawrence is gaining revenge on New Westminster Royals.

"We have a score to settle with New Westminster, they caught us at a bad time back in November so we want to make amends."

In that game on the Coast, Lakers lost a 13-4 decision to the Royals.

In other BCJHL action Sunday, Kelowna edged the hometown Merritt Centennials 3-2, Nanaimo Clippers won their fifth straight with a 7-6 victory over New Westminster, and Langley defeated hometown Salmon Arm Shuswap Totems 6-4.

In games Saturday, Abbotsford Flyers defeated Burnaby Bluehawks 9-4, New Westminster downed Cowichan Valley Capitals 11-7 and Shuswap blasted Revelstoke Rockets 11-4.

Cougars whip Bighorns 9-3

Vernon Cougars took a commanding 3-1 lead in the North Okanagan Hockey League championship series with a 9-3 victory over Oliver Bighorns, Sunday, in Oliver.

The previous night, Bighorns edged Cougars 7-6, also in Oliver.

On Sunday, Mike Burns, Dave Caldow and Gary Gilchrist scored two goals apiece for Vernon while Ernie Gare, George Fargher, and Bruce Green added singles.

Cougars' Coach Gary Swanson said the reason for his club's quick turnaround was its change back to aggressive hockey. "Saturday was just one of those nights when we were flat," Swanson said. "Sunday, we got back to playing aggressive hockey and Oliver skated away with their heads tucked under their shoulders."

Vernon was without high-scoring centre Terry Lowe, who was serving a two-game suspension. Gare came back from a one-game suspension Sunday to take Lowe's spot between Gilchrist and Caldow.

Swanson said, "Obviously, Ernie fit right in with those guys. That line scored five times."

Vernon will host the fifth, and possibly final, game in the best-of-seven series, Thursday night.

"We want to wrap it up Thursday," Swanson said. "There is no way we want to go back to Oliver again. Besides, the more games we play now, the better chance we have of getting injuries or suspensions prior to the Coy Cup playoffs."

LOOK BACK FIVE YEARS

FEBRUARY, 1978

Vernon scored four times in the first 10 minutes of play and coasted to a 10-5 victory over Salmon Arm in the opening game of the best of three Okanagan-Mainline Juvenile Hockey finals at the Civic Arena.

FEBRUARY, 1978

The Vernon Vikings are officially for sale. President Vern Dye said the lack of fan support plus the state of the Vernon Civic Arena make it impossible for the club to operate. The club's deficit is estimated at \$65,000.