

ONE WIN AWAY FROM FIRST

Lakers brilliant in overtime victory

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Stacey Wakabayashi's power-play goal, his second of the night, at 2:19 of overtime, gave Vernon Lakers a 7-6 victory over visiting New Westminster Royals Friday night at the Civic arena.

The win, perhaps the

most important and brilliant for the local club this season, keeps them three points ahead of Kelowna Buckaroos for first place in the BCJHL Interior division. Either a loss by Kelowna tonight, or a victory over the Buckaroos on Sunday, would give Lakers first

place and an easy road through the first playoff round.

"That's probably the biggest, most important win for us this season," said Lakers' coach Murray Lawrence. "We knew we were in a pressure cooker tonight and the guys came through."

"It doesn't matter whether Kelowna wins, loses, or draws Saturday night, they're going down on Sunday," he added.

Lakers jumped out front of the Royals with three unanswered goals in the first period, and led 5-3 after 40 minutes.

However, a defensive

lapse in the third enabled Royals to come back with three goals, including a give-away that resulted in the tying goal, at 17:30, by Trevor Koenig.

"I wasn't expecting it (giveaway), said Lakers' goaltender Matt Sekela, who turned aside 47 shots to earn the narrow victory.

"He (Koenig) caught me out of position with that quick release."

Wakabayashi's winning marker came on a goal-mouth scramble and was set up by Glen Doucette. Doucette hit the post with his first shot then fed a pass to Wakabayashi who was in the open at the side of the net.

"I couldn't believe it when that red light came on," said Lawrence.

Lakers opened the scoring at 9:23 of the first period on one of eight power-play goals scored by the two teams.

Gord Simpson, who picked up four points on the night, moved in from the corner, took one shot, picked up his rebound, went to his backhand and lifted the puck over Dave Roach's pad.

Todd Ewen gave Lakers a 2-0 lead at 14:54 when he put in his own rebound. Moving up from the blueline, Ewen took up a loose puck in the slot, walked in unmolested and took the first shot. With lots of time on the rebound, the big winger made no mistake with his next shot.

Wakabayashi scored his first of the night, on another man-advantage situation. After putting a perfect breaking pass on Simpson's stick, Wakabayashi moved up to bang in a rebound off the Laker captain's shot.

Cliff Ronning, Royals' sensation in the scoring department, put New Westminster on the scoreboard on a power play situation just 40 seconds into the second frame.

Glen Doucette gave

Lakers a three goal lead once again at 3:47. Standing in the slot, Doucette picked off a top corner with Mike Enemark's rebound.

Royals got back into the game with a pair of quick goals at 12:25 and 13:43. Stu Orpen, with his first of two on the night, and Len Meyer, with his first of two also, took advantage of Vernon defensive lapses.

Ron Berezowski closed out the scoring in the second frame and gave Lakers a two-goal edge after 40 minutes of exhaustive play.

Royals outscored Lakers 3-1 in the third stanza using a pair of power-play tallies and the give-away marker.

Lakers got a goal from defenceman Ken MacKenzie at 3:11.

Royals' goaltender Dave Roach faced a barrage of 62 shots from Lakers' offensive thrust.

"Roach probably had more shots on him tonight than he's had in any other game this season... that's gotta say something about our offense," said Lawrence.

In other games in the BCJHL Friday night Penticton Knights trounced Revelstoke Rockets 11-2, Richmond Sockeyes downed Langley Eagles 6-4 and Abbotsford Flyers defeated Burnaby Bluehawks 6-5 in overtime.

The big game in the league takes place tonight, when Penticton visits Kelowna.

The Knights can only take second place at this point while Kelowna must win both tonight's game and the one with Lakers Sunday in order to take the top spot.



LAKERS' Bob Wensley (20) moves in to take a shot on Royals' goaltender Dave Roach during third period action at Civic arena Friday night. Roach faced a barrage

of 62 Lakers' drives as Vernon skated a 7-6 overtime victory. The win, Lakers fourth straight in their push for first place

in the BCJHL Interior division, leaves them in an enviable position as far as second place Kelowna is concerned.