

LAKERS AXE COACH

Lawrence fired

By DON KENDALL
Sports Editor
Vernon Daily News

Vernon Lakers, of the B.C. Junior Hockey League, have fired Coach Murray Lawrence.

In a reversal of usual practice, Lawrence, not the team owners, told the Daily News about the firing.

"I met with (team owner and president) Dick Williment, Monday," Lawrence said, "and he suggested I look (for a coaching job) somewhere else."

Lakers' General Manager Vern Dye, speaking on behalf of Williment, confirmed the dismissal.

TOUGH DECISION

Dye said, "It wasn't an easy decision for Dick, but he felt it was something that had to be done for the betterment of the hockey club. Dick has done a lot to keep junior hockey alive in Vernon and as the owner, it was his decision."

Lawrence expressed disappointment, but admitted he was not surprised by the decision.

"Dick had not been communicating with me in the past couple weeks so I felt something was up," he said. "Right now, I don't know what



MURRAY LAWRENCE
... disappointed

I'm going to do."

Lawrence took over the club last summer after Lakers finished in the BCJHL cellar during the 1981-82 season. Under Lawrence, Vernon finished second in the BCJHL's Interior Division, just one point behind first-place Kelowna Buckaroos.

Lakers were eliminated by Penticton Knights, in the seventh game, of the Interior Division semi-finals.

Dye said the loss to Penticton was one of the reasons for Lawrence's departure.

"Dick and I both felt we should have beat Penticton," Dye said, "particularly after taking a 3-2 lead in the series."

"We've been told the relationship between Murray and some of the players wasn't good. Also, Kamloops Oilers indicated they were not interested in working with us again if Murray was involved with our club."

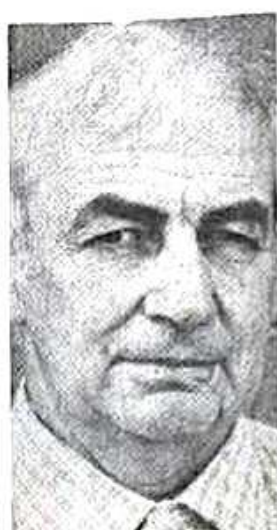
Lakers and Oilers had an unofficial working agreement during the 1982-83 season. Ten players were sent to Vernon, from Kamloops, of the Western Hockey League.

"The lack of communication with players is news to me," Lawrence said.

"I felt we had an excellent relationship between myself and the players."

IN KAMLOOPS

"As for the situation with the Oilers, I was in Kamloops last week and met with (general manager and coach) Bill Laforge and (scout) Ed Ferner. They indicated to me they were happy with what happened in Vernon this year. In fact, Ferner said he would be in contact with me during the summer to discuss scouting."



VERN DYE
... tough decision

"I also had discussions with (general manager) Joe Arling and (coach) Mark Pezzins, of Kelowna Wings, about affiliating," Lawrence said. "They also gave me a positive reaction."

"It is hard to leave a team after you've worked hard to build it, but I guess that is part of hockey. I've got more than 30 players committed to come to training camp in Vernon next September."

Dye said he expects Lakers to continue their on-ice improvement,

despite Lawrence's departure.

"We're expecting about 10 returnees and with six or seven new prospects, I think we'll be better next year. I feel Murray did a good job with the club off the ice, but I don't feel he did the job on-ice."

"We lost money this season and losing to Penticton was the turning point... it probably cost us \$10,000."

Lawrence said he feels the real reason for the firing was a conflict between himself and Dye.

"I told Dick I wasn't willing to work another season with Vern because I don't feel he did his job as general manager," Lawrence said. "I offered to take over as coach and general manager. Obviously, Dick decided he wanted to keep Vern more than me."

Revelstoke Rockets and Shuswap Totems are among the BCJHL teams looking for coaches, however, Lawrence said he has not yet decided if he will remain involved with junior hockey.

Dye said, "We've got two or three good candidates for the coaching position. I hope to make an announcement next week."

KENDALL'S KORNER

Coach built a contender



An era of junior hockey in Vernon ended Monday!

Vernon Lakers, of the B.C. Junior Hockey League, fired Coach Murray Lawrence.

Lawrence had been with the team less than a year. However, in that time, he constructed one of the greatest turnarounds in BCJHL history.

For several seasons, Lakers were an embarrassment to Vernon. The team was constantly at, or near, the bottom of the Interior Division. It was not uncommon for Vernon to be beat by five or 10 goals by the powerful Kelowna Buckaroos and Penticton Knights.

SOME SKEPTICS

Then, like a gladiator on his white steed, Lawrence arrived in town from Vancouver Island. There were some skeptics, including yours truly, when Lakers' President Dick Williment named Lawrence as coach of the club last summer.

Lawrence was a virtual unknown in this area, with no previous coaching experience at the junior 'A' level. Just what we needed to save a sinking ship... a rookie coach.

He ran a good training camp and with some talent sent here by Kamloops Oilers, assembled a respectable club. By the time the season started, he had about 10 players who belonged in the BCJHL.

By picking up cuts from other clubs, he increased that number to 12 or 13, by Christmas. The fringe players, who made up the balance of the roster, soon believed in their team... and themselves.

CROWDS GREW

For the first time in almost a decade, Vernon hockey fans had something to talk about. Their team was a contender... and playing exciting hockey. Fans started comparing Lakers to European

clubs because of their fast-skating style and infrequent fighting.

As the season progressed, the crowds grew. For the final regular game of the season, against Kelowna, and the final playoff game, against Penticton, the Civic Arena was filled to capacity... the first time the rink has been full for junior hockey since 1972.

Lakers finished one point behind first-place Buckaroos and lost in the seventh game of the Interior Division semi-finals to Knights. But, it was an enjoyable season.

The man who received, and perhaps deserved, most of the credit was Lawrence. He built the club from scratch with only two returnees from the 1981-82 campaign.

PROBLEMS

Now, a month after the season ended, we are told everything was not great between the scenes. We hear Kamloops Oilers weren't happy with Lawrence's coaching (which the Oilers' president has denied); we hear some of the players didn't get along with Lawrence (which did not surface during the season); and he didn't go a good job with the club on-ice (how did Lakers get to within one point of first place?).

Dick Williment is the owner and president of the Lakers. It is his right to have the coach of his choice behind the bench. He made his decision, but in this case, I think the decision may prove to be wrong.

It is doubtful Lakers will ever have a coach more dedicated to the team than Murray Lawrence. He quit his job as a salesman in December to devote more time to coaching... and he received no money for coaching.

Most of the reasons for firing him seem petty, certainly within the realm of negotiation. I'm afraid the loss of Lawrence is a loss for Vernon hockey fans.

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sports

Editor — DON KENDALL

Players voice their opinions

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Reactions of surprise, and in some cases shock, registered with members of Vernon Lakers upon learning that former coach Murray Lawrence had been let go by team management Monday.

With one exception, Gavin Shuya, players contacted expressed neither ill-feelings toward Lawrence nor any reluctance to return next season if Lawrence was coaching. Though Shuya's opinion was based on a personal feeling he, too, was satisfied with Lawrence's coaching ability.

ROB KOSSAN
Kossan was one of two veteran Lakers on last year's squad played for the Vernon club during the 1981-82 season when they won just 10 games.

"I guess I was a little surprised... mostly because of the turnaround from last year (1981-82). He (Lawrence) did such a good job."

"I never really heard anything between the players, I know the guys were all happy and I never heard any negative thoughts about Murray at all... I felt this coming year was going to be better than ever with the experience and all... we could handle the playoffs better."

"It was more of a letdown by the guys than coaching... like in the sixth game we had Penticton on the ropes but we had a temporary lapse on the ice and it killed us."

"Still, I think we went farther than anyone expected us to."

For Kossan the bottom line was one of disappointment.

"I think the decision was a little bit fast but I don't know what's happened between management."

MATT SEKELA

"It's unbelievable that he got fired because we went so far this year and it's all because of Murray."

"I know a lot of guys won't show up next year if Murray's not around... Ken (MacKenzie) and I phoned a lot of the guys today (Monday) and they all said they'll have to think a lot before they make any decisions."

"I can't think of anybody that didn't like him as a coach."

NICK KAPICKI

"I was surprised... I think he (Lawrence) did a good job and each year as you coach you learn more and more. Firstly, you need discipline and that's what he got out of us."

"The players and Murray got along just great. The way I saw it everyone got along just great and Murray was on the same level as us so there was no problem there."

"If they think they're going to go out and get just any guy to replace him they won't be able to do it... I want to see just how smart they are."

RON BEREZOWSKI

"I think he (Lawrence) shouldn't have been fired because he did a good job. Everything he did for us was great. He kept his cool and if something went wrong he talked it out with us... that's why the team went so far this year."

"As far as I'm concerned, if the management had kept their noses out we'd have done a lot better... they never should have fired him."

GAVIN SHUYA

"I was a little bit surprised... Murray did a good job of getting us playing as a team and bringing us out of the cellar."

However, the Interior League's most valuable player was somewhat bitter towards Lawrence over a matter that may have decided his future fate. According to Shuya, Lawrence made false promises to him about obtaining a scholarship for the young defenceman if he remained in tier two hockey with the Lakers.

Shuya had an opportunity to play tier one with Kamloops Oilers but chose to stay with the Lakers on Lawrence's promise of a scholarship. Shuya felt that Lawrence, knowing he had already played tier one in 1981-82, was deliberately misleading him to keep him on the Lakers' lineup.

"I probably wouldn't have come back next year if Lawrence was still coaching." His decision was based on the above information, however, and not on Lawrence's coaching ability.

"As far as practices at the end of the year, Murray worked us as hard as he could have and it was just the circumstances that caused our injuries."

GORD SIMPSON

Simpson, who along with Kossan were the only returning players from last year's squad had this to say, "I'm really quite surprised... I thought he was doing a hell of a job."

"We went from a last place club to a first place club and he (Lawrence) was doing it all by himself... I think they're being a little too hasty if anything."

WHL officials deny statements

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Contrary to a statement made by Vernon Lakers' General Manager Vern Dye, both Kamloops Oilers and Kelowna Wings, of the Western Hockey League, have denied reports that they were unhappy with the coaching of former Lakers' Coach Murray Lawrence.

"That's a surprise to me," said Harvey Roy,

president of the Oilers. "I'm sure that statement never came from our organization," referring to a report that Oilers planned to cease their unofficial affiliation with the Lakers if Lawrence continued as coach.

General Manager of Kelowna Wings, Joe Arling, was even more adamant about the accusations. "It appears we're being used as a scapegoat," he said in

an interview with the Daily News.

"We've never talked to anyone in that organization (Vernon Lakers) about such a subject, said Arling. "It's surprising that that sort of a comment was made."

"The only conversation we entertained with Vernon was Murray Lawrence, but we never talked to anyone about not affiliating with the Lakers because of a dispute with Lawrence."

Petersen and Kowal react to announcement

Reactions expressed by associates of former Vernon Lakers' Coach Murray Lawrence in regards to his recent firing as head coach of the club seem to be "why" for the most part.

Hubert Petersen, coach of the Vernon Midget Rep Team, was one of the persons who was in direct contact with Lawrence throughout last season as the two coaches went through the rigors of sending midget players up to the junior ranks.

"I would like to know why," was

Petersen's first reaction to the news that Lawrence had been relieved of his position Monday. "I think the public deserves to know why he (Lawrence) was fired."

Another local coach who was in close contact with Lawrence throughout last hockey season was Ernie Kowal of the Coca-Cola Juvenile Reps.

"It's gotta be a financial rumble... I would think Lawrence needs to be paid and (team owner Dick) Williment doesn't have the money to pay him."