

Happy ending for everybody



Local hockey fans had something other than the Stanley Cup finals to talk about this week.

Ray Williment, who purchased Vernon Lakers Junior Hockey Team last April, sold the team, Tuesday. The new owners are businessmen Carl Enemark, of Penticton, and Bud Russell, of Vernon.

Williment stated in April that the team wasn't for sale, but this week's announcement wasn't really a surprise. Ray has taken a lot of flack from the public, media and players since he fired coach Murray Lawrence, April 18.

SECOND PLACE

Lawrence took over Lakers last spring after the club finished last in the B.C. Junior Hockey League's Interior Division. He guided the club to a second place finish in 1982-83, just one point behind Kelowna Buckaroos.

During the season, there were some differences of opinion between Lawrence, Williment, and General Manager Vern Dye. Those problems did not surface until after Lakers lost to Penticton Knights in the division semi-finals. Williment

fired Lawrence stating he could no longer work with him and felt it was a move that had to be made for the betterment of the hockey club.

Whatever the reasons, Silliment, as owner of the team, had the right to fire Lawrence. However, most people didn't see it that way.

At one point, a group of 13 players, in an act of loyalty to their coach, said they would not return to Lakers next season unless Lawrence was reinstated.

ENTERTAINING

Many fans expressed disbelief that the man who they felt had been instrumental in providing them with their first winter of entertaining hockey, in recent memory, had been axed.

Despite the pressure, Williment stuck to his guns and refused to rehire Lawrence. On Tuesday, he did the next best thing . . . sold the team. Although he said the sale was made so he can pursue other business interests, the Lawrence controversy probably affected his decision to some degree.

Dick was upset at the criticism he didn't feel he deserved. He put his money on the line to purchase the

club and he made a decision that he felt would help the Lakers. Unfortunately for him, most people sided with Lawrence.

NICE GUY

Williment is too nice a guy to tell people to mind their own business . . . so he took the heat for almost a month. Now, he has the monkey off his back . . . and was able to get a good price for the team.

Enemark and Russell, who have an extensive hockey background at the management level, have said they were impressed with the job Lawrence did last season. In fact, Enemark's son, Mike, was one of the players who demanded Lawrence be rehired.

So, when the BCJHL governors formally approve the team's sale in about three weeks, it is expected Lawrence will be named as the coach.

This story could have a happy ending. Once the sale is finalized, Enemark and Russell will have the team they want, Lawrence will get his job back, the players and fans will have Lawrence back, and Williment will have a tidy profit.

Maybe for a change, everyone will live happily ever after.