

LOTS OF TALENT ON ICE

Nine veterans at training camp

BY JIM JUDD

Daily News Sports

Vernon Lakers officially opened their training camp in the frigid interior of Priest Valley Arena, Tuesday morning.

First impressions of those who wish to make Chuck Tapp's team went well with the spectators who were on hand for the occasion. Most remarked about the considerable size of many players while speed impressed others and nearly all were con-

vinced the talent displayed was far above any previous junior hockey camp they'd seen in this city.

But if the spectators were impressed, they weren't nearly as impressed as the returning veterans of last year's club. To a man they commented first on size and then added their own reflections on what it could mean to the club.

For defenceman Ken MacKenzie, it was the

first time he had had the opportunity to see the new stock of players.

"They're a lot bigger than they were last year... faster too," said MacKenzie.

"There's a lot more size... the guys are definitely bigger," said Greg Kowal when asked to compare this camp to the Lakers' camp of one year ago. "The bigger guys seem to be able to skate well though... they can hit pretty hard too!"

"The big guys will help a lot. We'll be able to stand up to the bigger clubs this year which we weren't able to do last year."

Bob Wensley, veteran of many other junior hockey camps had similar reflections.

"Seems like pretty good players out there and lots of size... some good skaters too. We could use some more weight being thrown around," said Wensley.

Wensley, more than any other returning veteran, probably knows what a good solid team looks like in the initial stages, having toiled among major junior clubs, as well as tier two teams in his career. The big winger was just as high on the number of veteran players in the crowd as the sizeable rookies.

"I'd say we've got a good jump on her (season) right now... if you've got half a team already it makes things a lot easier," said Wensley.

Wensley's comments referred to the nine returnees here now and the possible three or four more who may soon return. These include himself, Gavin Shuya, MacKenzie, Kowal, Nick Kapicki, Kevin Thorlakson, Gord Simpson, Brent and Glen Doucette.

In addition, Ron Berezowski and Todd Ewen are presently in training camp in New Westminster while Stacy Wakabayashi is in Kamloops Oilers' training camp along with Rudy Poesheck. All would be back here should they fail to make the grade in the major junior circuit.

Another player, Simpson, was impressed with what he's seen so far, but cautioned that good players are only part of the battle.

"Right now it's looking good... awful good," said

Simpson. "There's some big guys out there that's for sure."

"The big guys will help but it all depends on the kind of discipline we have... the three D's—desire, discipline and determination."

"Chuck's doing a good job. He's a hard worker and he's strict... if you don't measure up you won't last with him."

Simpson seems to be able to read Tapp like a book since the next

Lakers' coach insists there will be no such thing as a prima donna this season. He makes no bones about the fact that he'll cut any of the veteran players he feels isn't either working up to scratch, or could be replaced by someone better.

"Some of the vets are still feeling their way around," said Tapp.

"They haven't been on the ice as much as some of the others but they can all see

the calibre of hockey that's being played in this camp.

"From here on all the cuts are hard. All these guys have the ability to play in this league... whether or not they'll be playing on this team is another matter."

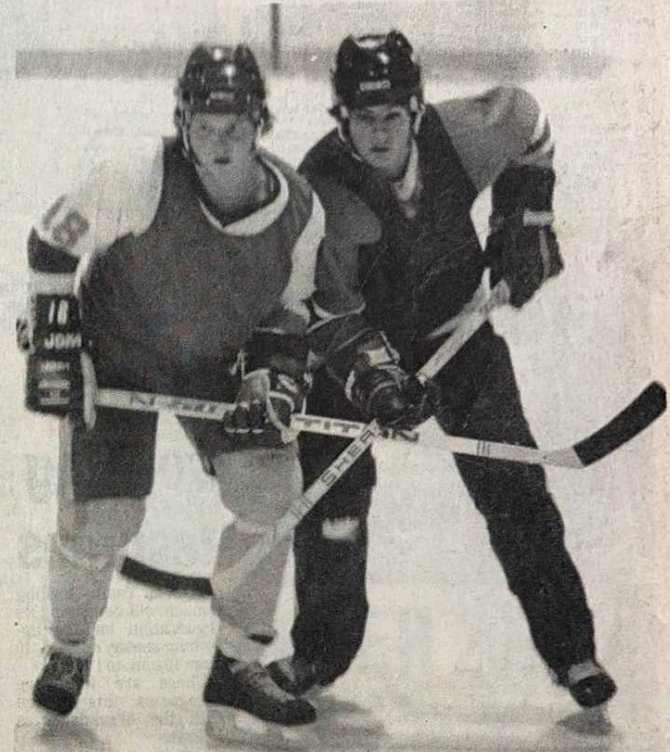
Lakers will play an inter-squad game tonight at 8 p.m., in Priest Valley Arena. The public is invited to come out and see the new wheels of progress in action.



GORD SIMPSON, above, gets the grab put on him by one of 10 defencemen trying for a spot on Vernon Lakers this season. Simpson is one of nine veteran players

presently in training camp and despite being snagged on this play, the speedy centre showed great promise of things to come this season.

(Daily News Photo)



IT'S A TOUGH battle right down the line for a position with Lakers this season and coach Chuck Tapp has mentioned that even veterans have to prove their worth to the

team during training camp. Above, Greg Kowal, left, jockey with a hopeful during a scrimmage held at Priest Valley Arena, Tuesday night.

(Daily News Photo)

Hockey camps make blood rush



By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Sure I like football . . . Monday Night Football, the CFL, and I love horse racing and boxing too. When it comes to pure pleasure give me beer and a ball game . . . preferably the World Series.

However, nothing makes the blood rush through my veins nor gives me the scintillation or satisfaction quite as much as junior hockey.

When those training camps open I'm as excited with nervous expectation as any of the rookies battling for a spot on the roster. It's in my blood and it's the thing I love most.

Of course there's always the anticipation of a great team and that's what makes the game the most exciting for me. You never really know who's going to show up or what veteran will suddenly blossom into a star. Sometimes a whiz kid may come and go and you're able to say you watched him perform before he was a household name in the professional ranks.

NO STARS

But as much as myself or anyone else likes a flashy player, it's the team as a whole that interests me most. Give me a good coach and a winning team with no stars and I'd be just as happy.

Now, I've seen a lot of junior hockey camps, been in a few myself. But it doesn't take a well-trained eye to see a potentially good team shaping up.

If you've had the opportunity to see Vernon Lakers training camp, you know what I mean.

The management is there, the coaching is there and the scouting has paid off because there's an abundance of good, solid, talented hockey players on the ice.

It could easily be an excellent year for junior hockey in Vernon and if it is, I'll be glad to say I was around for it.

On the other hand, there are factors that can alter a team's objective through no fault of their own.

A POWERHOUSE

I've seen a powerhouse get nowhere before and I've seen an average team go a long way.

Two years ago in Flin Flon, the team picked up a bonafide coach who sent scouts far and wide to attract players to that city to play junior hockey.

With big players and a good helping of talent the team got off to an excellent start in the exhibition season. Using his influence around the hockey scene, the coach was able to arrange exhibition games with major junior clubs, which drew excellent spectator support.

The local team went undefeated through exhibition, beating three major junior clubs and going on the road to defeat two other clubs in a rival Junior A league . . . including the Centennial Cup champions of the previous year.

Some players who went against the Flin Flon team were so impressed with their ability that they either quit their own team to join them or immediately went there when they were cut from

their major junior team.

Unfortunately for Flin Flon Bombers, it was a case of being all dressed up and nowhere to go.

WEAK LEAGUE

The NorMan Junior A hockey League they belonged to consisted of only three other teams, none of which had grown in proportion to the Flin Flon team.

Flin Flon went undefeated through the regular season, winning many games by as much as 20 goals!

As you may have already guessed, overconfidence took over where common sense once stood. As well, a lack of decent competition had made everyone on the team into an offensive daredevil instead of an industrious worker.

In the end, an equally, but no more talented team, went through them in short order when it came time to play for all the chips.

Fortunately for Vernon Lakers, the parable of the Flin Flon Bombers might never apply to them since the BCJHL is shaping up to be a hard-fought battle for supremacy.

WISE WORDS

Nevertheless, Lakers would do well to live by the words of wisdom veteran Gord Simpson carries with him.

Simpson feels that even with the addition of bigger and better players the team will only be as good as their own discipline will allow. His philosophy is simply the three D's . . . discipline, desire and determination.