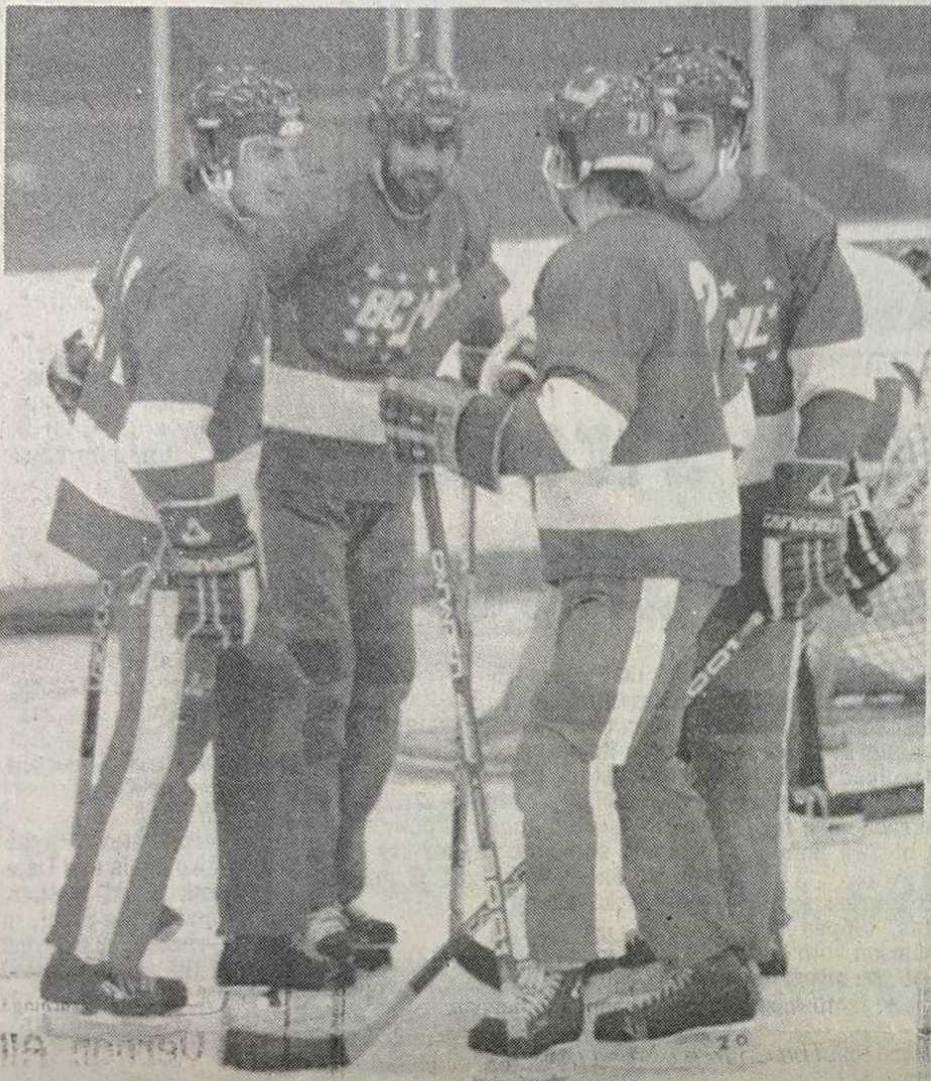


Lakers' season-long battle can change momentum Sunday



VERNON'S ROB KOSSAN, left, and other members of the Interior Division Team congratulate each other after a goal during Thursday's BCJHL all-star game in Richmond. Players from Vernon Lakers and

Penticton Knights led the Interior to an 8-6 win over the Coast Division. On Sunday, Lakers and Knights will be foes, battling for first place, in the Civic Arena.

(Daily News Photo)

The season long battle for first place in the B.C. Junior Hockey League's Interior Division resumes Sunday night when Vernon Lakers host Penticton Knights, at 7 p.m.

A percentage of each ticket sold for Sunday's game will be pledged on Daily News Sports Editor Don Kendall in Snowarama '84, in aid of this province's crippled children, scheduled Jan. 29 on Silver Star Mountain.

Knights have 66 points, two more than Lakers. However, Vernon has one game-in-hand.

The main reason the race for top spot has remained so tight is Lakers' dismal record against Penticton. While Knights have experienced difficulty beating teams far lower in the standings, such as Salmon Arm Totems and Revelstoke Rangers, they have an impressive 6-2 record against Vernon.

Lakers are at full-strength for this encounter with the exception of first-year defenceman Chris Saunders who is still nursing a nagging head injury. Other injured players including Tony Christie, Gavin Shuya and leading scorer Dave Wensley are back at full playing capacity.

Lakers will also have the benefit of team captain and leader Bob Wensley who is itching for a shot at Penticton following his five-week long view from the sidelines during a suspension. Wensley's suspension occurred against Knights.

Meanwhile Lakers' coach Mike Enemark isn't worried about man-power now, just the team's lack of playing time in the past week during the all-star break.

"The only thing that worries me is the lack of ice-time we've had this week," said Enemark, who recently coached the Interior League all-stars to an 8-6 victory over the Coastal Division. "The guys in the all-star game had some ice time but the rest we'll just have to wait and see about."

Knights, on the other hand, suffer the same problem with practice times last week but are also lacking a key man in their defensive corps. Tony Savarin will be lost to Penticton for the duration of this season after suffering torn knee ligaments recently in a game against Revelstoke.

However, besides the Penticton defence, Lakers have the Knights' power-play to worry about as well. Enemark plans on experimenting a little on defending against Penticton's man-advantage situations.

"We have to take the middle away from them," said Enemark. "They use the high slo very well. We may try some new defensive strategy against their power-play ... better now than in the playoffs."