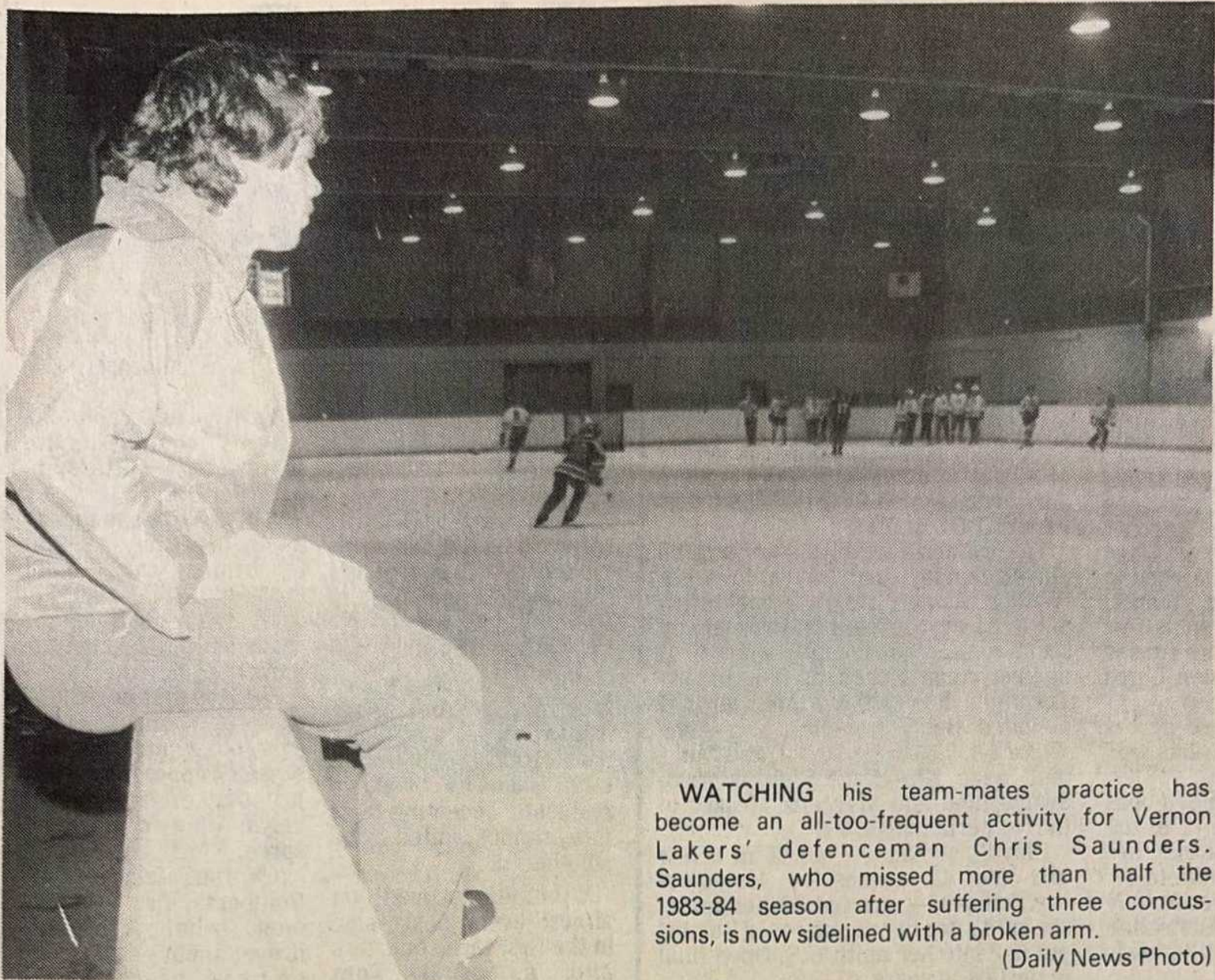




WATCHING his team-mates practice has become an all-too-frequent activity for Vernon Lakers' defenceman Chris Saunders. Saunders, who missed more than half the 1983-84 season after suffering three concussions, is now sidelined with a broken arm.

(Daily News Photo)

Broken arm sidelines Vernon defenceman

If it wasn't for bad luck, Vernon Lakers' defenceman Chris Saunders would have no luck at all.

Saunders will be in the stands tonight when Lakers play their first B.C. Junior Hockey League pre-season game, in Sicamous, against Salmon Arm Totems. The sophomore defenceman broke his hand in a freak accident during practice, Wednesday.

"I'm not sure what happened," he said. "I was hitting a guy and it broke."

Saunders, a graduate of Vernon Minor Hockey Association, managed to play 24 games last year before a series of concussions sidelined him for the remainder of the regular season and playoffs.

"The doctor told me I'll probably have to wear a cast for three to six months," Saunders said. "But, I could have a playing cast

as early as a month. I sure hope so."

This is a big season for the 18-year-old rearguard. He was expected to be one of the stalwarts on Vernon's blue line corps and hoped to land a U.S. college scholarship.

Lakers' Coach Mike Unemark said the temporary loss of Saunders leaves his club short of defenders. "We've only got six defencemen left," Unemark said. "So, they'll all get a pretty good look tonight."

The defensive sextet includes Tony Toth and Allan Tomiak, who both played with Vernon Midget Reps last season.

Unemark plans to share the net-minding duties between Mike McNelly, who played junior B last year in Grand Forks, and Lucien Carrigan, from Fernie.

Unemark and his father, Carl, who is general manager and presi-

dent, admit their team is younger and less experienced than last year. But, help could be on the way.

"We're supposed to be getting some help from Prince Albert (of the Western Hockey League)," Carl said. "We're expecting three forwards and two defencemen from Prince Albert, but, you can't count on those guys until they get here."

Mike said he plans to telephone several 19 and 20 year old players, within the next couple days, with the hope of luring them to Vernon. Among them is three-year veteran Rob Kossan, of Kamloops.

Kossan, 20, scored more than 100 points during the 1983-84 season.

"Rob told me last month that he planned to go to college in Kamloops," Mike said. "But, I'm hoping now that hockey season is here, he might have got the big to play again."