

Lakers survive tough season start



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Vernon Lakers closed out the month of October with a four-game losing streak, but at the same time the local club has managed to maintain second place in the BCJHL Interior Division.

However, the position isn't quite as lofty as it was prior to the current loss streak.

Before local hockey fans start going off half-cocked about how they could see the fall coming and all that, just pause a minute or two to reflect upon some interesting facts.

Of the 15 games Lakers have played to date, 10 of those have been on the road. One road swing saw them travel to the Coast where they played four games, in as many nights, earning two victories.

During the month of October, the club has played 12 games, nine of them on the road.

WORST OVER

Computed into worksable figures, Lakers have got 40 per cent of the travelling season behind them. You might say the worst is already over.

Through it all, Vernon has managed to hammer out a respectable standing in the overall BCJHL picture. They are playing .500 hockey after almost one third of the regular season.

In view of these facts, it's difficult to condemn the Vernon club for a recent string of losses, three of which were on the road.

Penticton Knights, who lead the Interior with a record of 11 wins and three losses, have earned just two victories on the road in five starts. During their recent Coast swing, playing four games in four nights, Penticton earned just one victory in four attempts. Knights lost 3-2 to Abbotsford Flyers, whom they had humiliated 15-1 just a week earlier in Penticton.

Likewise, Summerland Buckaroos have enjoyed the majority of their games at home to this point.

It will be interesting to see how those clubs stack up to Lakers' record after they have played 10 road games.

Another reason why fans should show a little respect for the Vernon club during this period of futility is that the club has gone through an incredible number of personnel changes since they opened the regular season.

Last week they added goaltender Darrel Dickens, centres Dave Milan and Camille Savard, wingers Stacey Hartnell and Shannon Pohl, as well as defenceman Darrel Weinburger.

As coach Mike Enemark is quick to point out, with all the recent roster changes, it's going to take a few more practices and a couple of game situations before the lines become familiar with one another.

A problem area that has been directly responsible for several of the club's losses is the back-up goaltending position which has been, and remains, suspect at this time. Although number one starter Jim Young is a standout and provides some of the most exciting goaltender action local fans are likely to see this season, he can't be expected to play every regular season game, at least not if Enemark wants to keep him healthy. It means he will have to keep looking for a suitable backup and that means trial by error until the position is filled.

TURNING POINT

November could prove to be a major turning point in the early going for Vernon. With nine games scheduled for the coming month, Lakers will enjoy the home-ice advantage on six occasions.

With three of those nine match-ups against Penticton, once on the road and twice at home, it will be a golden opportunity to gain some valuable ground on the Knights who lately have shown signs of inconsistency.

During December, Lakers will play five more times at home and just twice on the road.

To sum things up, the next two months will see them at home 11 times and on the road for just five games.

Considering their .800 home average at this point in the season, Lakers could be making a serious bid for the brass ring by Christmas.

Like they say, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.