COY CUP PLAYOFFS

Smoke Eaters grab early lead and hang on to earn 4-2 win

Vernon Cougars are just one game away from being eliminated from Coy Cup playoff contention following a 4-2 loss at the hands of Trail Smoke Eaters Friday night at Civic arena.

The victory gives Smoke Eaters a 1-0 lead in the best-of-three quarter-final series between the two clubs.

As far as coach George Fargher is concerned, however, the series is about to turn around following the second game of the series which takes place tonight at 8 p.m. The third game, if necessary, will take place Sunday in Vernon.

"We're definitely going to win tonight," suggested Fargher although Cougars' seasonal record against the Trail squad is no indication of better things to come.

"We just couldn't get on track in the first period and we got into a hole we couldn't get out of."

Cougars trailed 3-0 at the end of the first period and were still trailing by a three-goal margin after 40 minutes with Smoke Eaters enjoying a 4-1 lead.

Les Creelman's single in the third period accounted for the only scoring but it was too little, too late to save the game for Vernon.

Veteran winger Gary Gilchrist accounted for the other Cougars' goal.

"I didn't think the forwards back-checked enough in the first half of the game," Fargher explained. "We gave up a lot of three-on-one and three-on-two situations in the first half and it made it kind of tough on our defense."

Defensively, Cougars turned in one of their best performances of the season with Oliver native Pat Murphy backstopping the local squad and veteran blueliner Lyle Brewer playing a very steady game.

Ken Kinley, in net for Trail, also turned in an outstanding performance and was the major reason Cougars' comeback bid fell short.

"We out-played them but we just couldn't get the goals when we needed them," added Fargher.

Vernon Cougars' netminder Pat Murphy and defenceman Jim Stanley (17) combine to halt a scoring attack by Trail Smoke Eaters during action Friday night at Vernon Civic arena. The Smoke Eaters doubled Cougars 4-2 to take a 1-0 lead in this best-of-three Coy Cup playoff series with the second game and third, if necessary, also scheduled to be played this weekend in Vernon. (Daily News Photo)

HIGH SCHOOL "AA" CHAMPIONSHIP

Panthers hold lead to earn narrow victory

It was no laughing matter for John Oliver Jokers of Vancouver Friday in the Boys High School "AA" Basketball Championship as Vernon panthers defeated them 82-79.

Panthers enjoyed a 13-point lead heading into the final 10 minutes of play but barely hung on to earn the victory over the Vancouver hoop squad.

With their two top players Brian Kruger and Rob Zimmerman on the bench because of foul trouble, Panthers had to stave off the late rally by the Jokers which saw they erase a 65-52 lead Panthers held after three quarters of play. In the dying seconds of the game Jokers hit one of two foul shots to close the score to 80-79 but J.D. Jackson, of Panthers, hit two-for-two from the foul line to end the game on a winning note.

Meanwhile, a young Phillipine player was making life miserable for the Vernon team. Este Epondulan, a 5'11" guard with Jokers, scored 35 points in a losing cause but really impressed Panthers' coach Dave Jackson in the process.

"He's probably the best offensive guard in the province," suggested Jackson. "He's only 5'11" but he slam-dunks the ball."

The 35 points Epondulan had Friday against Panthers gave the talented guard 93 points for the tournament.

Meanwhile, Jackson was top point-getter in a winning cause for Panthers with a 22-point performance. Kruger added 16, Tim Tollestrup 15, and Ted Vanderwal had 11.

"It was a pretty well-balanced scoring attack," said Jackson.

In other action at the "AA" championship, Penticton Lakers bombed Oak Bay Bays 76-58 thanks to the 39-point performance of Geoff McKay for Lakers. Lakers will now meet North Surrey for fourth and seventh spots.

Al Church scored 27 points as D. W. Poppy Pioneers of Langley edged Correlieu Clansmen of Quesnel 60-59 and North Surrey Spartans defeated Windsor Dukes of North Vancouver 89-68 as Kerry Rokosh and Simon Dykstra each scored 28 points.

Panthers face D. W. Poppy Pioneers this afternoon in a battle that will determine fifth and eighth positions. Although Panthers are confident they can pull out a victory they will be cautious of three big men for Pioneers.

Although they would like to finish no lower than fifth place in this prestigeous championship, Panthers are feeling no pressure because they are guaranteed to place in the tournament now.

"The worst we can do is place," explained jackson. "They place the winners down to eighth position and after that it's just participant."

In tonight's championship final, Centennial Centaurs will have their hands full going up against Richmond Colts.

"Richmond has to be favored," Jackson said. "They have clobbered everybody . . . I think it would be a very big upset if Centennial won."

Vikings post comeback

HALIFAX (CP) — Coach Ken Shields was still shaking his head Friday about the way his Victoria Vikings pulled off a comeback worthy of a team that has won five straight national university basketball titles.

"Things were looking very bleak," Shields said of Thursday's game. "No phases of our game were in shape. We regrouped and came out with a new approach. The difference was night and day."

In their Thursday night semifinal, the Vikings rallied from an 18-point halftime deficit to beat Manitoba Bisons 79-70 in overtime. Victoria moves on to the final today against the Waterloo Warriors in Halifax.

The Warriors, meanwhile, started slowly against St. Francis Xavier X-men in the other semifinal but came on strong at the end for a 87-79 win.

Manitoba and St. FX meet in a consolation game today before the national final.

Shields insists the Victoria legacy was not the motivation for this year's team.

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JUDD'S JOURNAL

Perhaps next year?

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Thursday night's final encounter between Lakers and Centennials had all the earmarks of a classic confrontation but it fell just a bit short. However, it wasn't just on the ice that the game was lacking from a Vernon point of view.

With a crowd of more than 1500 on hand one would tend to think the roof might come off the place with enthusiastic support but in truth just the opposite was the case. The 100 or so Merritt fans who turned out to support their club virtually owned the building with their vocal outbursts.

What was particularly distressing was that there was little or no response from Vernon people even as Merritt fans chanted "Vernon sucks" in unison. There were certainly enough people on hand to drown out the few Merritt voices but nothing happened.

It must have been particularly disappointing to the Lakers to think that a few people from the opposing club's home town could make life miserable for them even in their own rink. If you pay your admission you might as well cheer.

In retrospect it was a hell of a series between these two clubs. Although Centennials will certainly earn the title of most improved club in the league this season they had some help along the way, especially in the form of injury to Vernon players.

Watching from the sidelines Thursday night were the top four defencemen from the Vernon squad along with their two top centremen. Blueliner **Shawn Lofroth** who impressed everyone this season with his speed, finesse and pack sense would have been at least one single major improvement to the effort by Lakers Thursday night.

Unfortunately Lofroth was on crutches, nursing a swollen knee that he couldn't bend, nor even see for the swelling. Like a quarterback, Lofroth was a principal man on the Lakers' offensive attack, particularly during power-play situations.

Also missed, though he sat out almost the entire season, was **Chris Saunders**. Saunders saw very limited action this season though the few games he did play he added speed and mobility to the Vernon defensive corps. It's the second consecutive season that Saunders has watched from the sidelines but you can bet he'll turn in a full season next year and Vernon fans will have an opportunity to witness his gracefully fluid yet powerful skating and incredible puck control. He and Lofroth will anchor next year's blueline squad.

STEADY

Missing also from the backline corps was sturdy **Jim Scott**. Scott is the kind of player who turns in a steady game each time out . . . nothing fancy, but he's always back where he belongs and deals out punishing checks as a way of life.

Freshman defenceman **Stacy Hartnell** was also conspicuously absent from Thursday's game. hartnell, just 17, is good with the puck and likes to lay on the body in his own end.

Scott was also on crutches while Hartnell narrowly avoided more serious injury when he ran headlong into the boards in game five of the series.

The most noteworthy absences, however, were those of **Nick Kapicki** and **Gord Simpson**. Both 20-year old veterans in the BCJHL, the two have tremendous speed and puck control up the centre. Inevitably, it seems, the team with the strongest skaters up the centre win the crucial games.

Kapicki has turned in three outstanding seasons with the local club while Simpson was in his fourth year in the BCJHL and his third season with Vernon.

Both players accel at play around the front of the net and that ingredient alone could have been a major difference in game seven when there were many rebounds available but nobody around to capitalize on them.

Looking back on their season, Lakers turned in a stellar performance from start to finish. With only a handful of veteran players Lakers were originally tagged as one of the weaker teams in the Interior Division. They clearly established themselves as a force to be reckoned with early in the year, however.

In view of the constant disruptions in the team's coaching personal you have to give these guys a lot of credit for going as far as they did.

Over the course of the 1984-85 season Lakers went throuh two head coaches before settling down with **Don Moores**, and five assistant coaches along with two trainers and a number of changes in the General manager position.

The season has finally come to an end for Lakers. But there's always next year.