

PRESIDENT FRUSTRATED

Poor crowds worry Lakers

By DON KENDALL
Daily News Sports Editor

Vernon apparently doesn't care if it has a junior hockey team and that apathy has Vernon Lakers' President Carl Enemark disappointed and frustrated.

Lakers attracted only 410 fans for their home opener last Thursday, against Kelowna Packers. On Saturday, 370 spectators watched Vernon defeat Salmon Arm Blazers 7-6. On the same night, 1,260 fans turned out in Penticton to see the defending champion Knights dump Packers 5-1. The previous evening, Friday, 1,440 people were on hand at Kelowna Memorial Arena to witness Packers handing Knights a 5-3 setback.

"It's got me baffled," said Enemark. "Other teams are drawing more than 1,000 fans and we can't put 500 people in the building."

"I could understand it if we had a bad team or played goon hockey, but we've got one of the least penalized teams in the league and we're battling for first place."

Lakers have finished second in the B.C. Junior Hockey League's Interior Division for three consecutive seasons and are currently tied with Kelowna for second place with a record of five wins and two losses.

"We're getting lots of media coverage and we've got a good team on the ice," Enemark said. "I don't know what else we can do."

In the mid-1970's, Vernon was criticized for not having enough local players on its roster. But, that argument is no longer valid.

Enemark said, "We gave all the local kids the best shot we could. Last season we took a look at 14 local players in exhibition games. We lost all six exhibition games but I thought it was important to look at those kids."

"We used eight locals in our exhibition games this season and we've still got five on our roster. That is the most local players of any team in the league. Don't you think people would want to see these kids play?"

Vernon sent another Vernon minor hockey graduate, defenceman Al Tomiak, to Quesnel Millionaires, of the Peace Cariboo Junior League. "And I understand Al is playing well for them," Enemark said. "We hope he has a good season, gains some experience, and comes back to play with us next year."

Lakers appear to be a legitimate contender, along with Penticton and Kelowna. Veteran winger Al Young will return to the line-up next Saturday, after missing the first seven games with a broken thumb. And another veteran, centre Frank Dutoff, will rejoin the club next week after completing a job in the Alberta oil fields.

Enemark said, "There is no doubt in my mind our team is good . . . and going to get better. But, what difference does it make if nobody comes to watch?"

Vernon returns to the ice Saturday, at 8 p.m., against Kelowna. Lakers have defeated Packers twice in the young season, but Kelowna is the only team in the league that has downed Penticton.

"It should be a great game," Enemark said. "I hope we draw a

better crowd than we have been. If we don't start putting some people in the building, I don't know what we're going to do. It costs a lot of money to operate a junior 'A' hockey team and we can't operate with 300 or 400 fans per game."

In BCJHL action Tuesday, Lane Jeannott and John DePourcq had two goals each and six other players scored singles as Knights romped to an easy 10-2 win over Salmon Arm Blazers.

In Richmond, Sockeyes beat Abbotsford Falcons 7-2.

In Penticton, Cal Brown, Marc Rousseau, Peter DeGraff, Greg Guidinger, Chris Anderson and Aaron Scott scored for the Knights, who led 2-0 after the first period and 7-2 after 40 minutes.

Shuswap got both its goals from Kevin Scott.

Knights' goaltender Jeff Ssvitsky blocked 29 shots while Gene Patterson stopped 45 for the Blazers, who fell to a 3-6 record and fourth place in the six-team Interior Division.

The Knights' win was their eighth in nine starts and solidified their hold on first place in the division.

In Richmond, Pat Austin scored three goals to lead the Sockeyes and Bruce Kenward, Paul Bifano, David Holmes and Kevin Weremy added singles.

Darryl Regier and Joe Sabotin replied for Abbotsford, which trailed 2-0 and 4-2 by periods.

Abbotsford goaltender Darcy D'Amours stopped 45 shots while Scott King made 21 saves for Richmond.

BCJHL play resumes Thursday when Summerland visits Merritt.