

Pentland faces challenge

It comes as something of a surprise that Penticton Knights would throw their hopes and faith for the future of their hockey club behind a rookie coach, but that's exactly what they did earlier this week when they announced the appointment of Dwayne Pentland as head coach.

Not that Pentland comes without a suitable background in the sport . . . he spent his junior career with Penticton and Brandon Wheat Kings before an abbreviated pro career with Houston Aeros and finally a stint as a senior player in the WIHL.

That playing experience in the WIHL also served as his only coaching experience, having served as a player-coach.

Not exactly prize-winning stuff for a coaching resume, however, especially when the job you're applying for is the mentor of the national champions. Last year, there was no better junior A hockey club in Canada, the year before that there

was just one. Knights are expecting to be in the thick of things again this season.

Pretty hefty shoes to fill if you ask me. Not exactly ones I'd like to lace up around an untried hockey coach, especially when just about the entire team, to a man, will be playing in the B.C. Junior Hockey League for the first time. It'll be unfamiliar territory for certain. What's more, in view of the relationship that has developed between Knights and the other teams in the Interior over the past years, it's going to be a hostile initiation as well.

For instance, in Vernon, just as an example, there are 12-14 players who have built up a certain hostility towards Knights over the past two, three, or four seasons. All of them are aware that the local club hasn't won a regular season game in Penticton's Memorial Arena for the last four seasons and they all want that to change as soon as possible.



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They've suffered the anxiety and humiliation of being beaten, on the scoreboard and on the ice, by big strong junior players in Penticton for years and they'd like to return the favor for a change.

Ditto the teams in the other Interior division locations.

Fortunately, just about all the other coaches are in the same boat as Pentland in that they are getting their feet wet in the BCJHL for the

first time. There are no coaches in the Interior Division with experience in the BCJHL. None of them have watched their team play in the other arenas.

Again, in spite of this disadvantage, Vernon Coach Ernie Gare at least has a dozen or so experienced players to help him over the tough spots. Bill Hogaboam, in Kelowna, has the same advantage, with a half dozen or more experienced players coming back to the Packers.

To say the least, Pentland is going to get his coaching ability as well as his adaptability put to an immediate test . . . a baptism by fire in the BCJHL Interior Division.

Whether Pentland can duplicate Rick Kozuback's impressive feats of the last two years remains to be seen.

All I know is that there are some old scores waiting to be settled and he had better prepare himself for this fact.