MAJOR ON FIRST LINE

Vernon stocks Black Bears

By DON KENDALL
Daily News Sports Editor

The University of Maine has one of the most improved college hockey programs in the United States. And three former Vernon players are counted on to lead the much-improved Maine Black Bears during the 1986-87 season.

Bears' Head Coach Shawn Walsh said forwards Dave Wensley and Bruce Major along with Goalie Scott King, will be key members of the Maine squad this season.

"They are great kids, both on and off the ice," Walsh said.

Maine had a dismal collegiate record until last season. Bears finished seventh in the seven-team Eastern Conference in 1985. Maine moved up to fifth place last season and is picked to finish third in the 1986-87 season.

Walsh said, "We're on the right track. It is too early to tell how we'll do this year, but I'm confident we'll have a good season. We have three NHL second round draft choices, a third rounder, and two fifth rounders (including Major) on our roster."

Major, who was selected by Quebec Nordiques in the 1985 amateur draft, has unlimited potential according to Walsh. "Bruce is a 6'3" forward who works as hard as a guy 5'11" or 6'," he said. "We moved him from centre to left wing last season and I expect him to be on the left side again this year."

Black Bears open training camp next week and when they do, Major will be on the first line with Dave Capuano and Mike Golden. Capuano was chosen by Pittsburgh Penguins in the second round of the 1986 amateur draft and Golden went to Edmonton Oilers in the second round a year earlier.



BRUCE MAJOR DAVE WENSLEY

Major was the top scoring rookie in the league during the 1985-86 campaign with 14 goals. "Fourteen goals may not seem like many, but college hockey is a lot different than junior," Walsh said. "We play fewer games and scores are generlly lower. Look at Scott Young for example."

Young, who was selected by Hartford Whalers in the first round of the '86 draft, scored 16 goals last season for Boston University.

Wensley, who was Maine's second highest scorer last year with 31 points, is expected to centre the club's second line.

"Dave is one of our key players," Walsh said. "We have a lot of rookies and sophomores so the older guys like Wensley (in his third year) have a lot of responsibility."

Wensley, who led Vernon Lakers in scoring during the 1983-84 season, has been ignored by NHL teams. But, Walsh thinks that might change.

"If Dave has a good season, I'd expect him to be picked in the NHL's supplemental draft next June," Walsh said. "He has a lot of talent."

King started the 1985-86 B.C. Junior Hockey League season with Richmond Sockeyes, but was traded to Lakers last January. After a sparkling performance with Lakers, particularly in the playoffs, King was picked by Detroit Red Wings in the 10th round of the NHL draft.

"With King and (Al) Loring, I feel we have the best one-two goaltending combination in the east," Walsh said. "What impressed me about Scott is that in his last two years of junior, he played better late in the season and in the playoffs. He is a real competitor."

Black Bears open their exhibition schedule Oct. 15 against the University of New Brunswick. League play starts Oct. 24-25 with a home series against rival Boston College.

One of the highlights of the Bears' season will be Dec. 13 when they host Spartak of the Soviet Union's first division.



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Lakers host Clippers tonight

Vernon Lakers hope to extend their win streak to three games tonight when they host Nanaimo Clippers in B.C. Junior Hockey League action, at 8 p.m., in the Civic Arena.

Strong Interior Division teams, including Lakers have traditionally feasted on their Coast Division rivals. However, Vernon Head Coach Ernie Gare expects Clippers to provide his club with a serious challenge.

"We haven't seen the Coast teams yet, but I understand there are some excellent teams down there," he said.

Langley Eagles won three consecutive games on an Interior Division swing last weekend.

Gare said, "We can't take anything for granted. We'll be working hard against Nanaimo."

Veteran netminder Darrell Dickens will be between the pipes for Lakers. However, Gare hasn't decided if Ryan Dennis or Pete Repole will dress as back-up goalie.

"We'll use three goalies for a while . . . until two emerge as the ones we want to keep," he said.

Lakers are still carrying 24 players on their roster, so Gare must rest five skaters tonight. Doug McIntyre, who is awaiting his release from Weyburn Red Wings, and veteran winger Wes Gentles, who has a shoulder injury, will be two of the players on the sidelines.

"I expect to but two or three players after this weekend," Gare said. "I want to take one more look at a few guys."

Vernon plays its first road game of the young season Sunday night, in Merritt, against the Warriors.

In BCJHL action Thursday night, Darren Schwartz jammed in a rebound at 15:23 of the third period to give the visiting Kelowna Packers a 5-4 win over the Richmond Sockeyes and Nanaimo defeated the Summerland Buckaroos 8-5.