PENTICTON 5, VERNON 3

Knights rally to edge Lakers

By DON KENDALL
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The more things change, the more they stay the same!

Vernon Lakers are battling for first place in the B.C. Junior Hockey's Interior Division. Lakers won their first four games, but then ran into the Penticton Knights. In a scene that has become all too familiar over the years, Knights slowed down the high-flying Lakers 5-3, Friday, at the Civic Arena.

Penticton, with only four players back from the team that won the national championship last season, was not expected to be a contender for the league title this year. But, you'd have trouble convincing the 1,100 fans who were on hand Friday night.

Knights overcame a 2-0 deficit to move into a second place tie with Lakers, four points behind the unbeaten Kelowna Packers.

Vernon General Manager Mel Lis said he was disappointed by the loss. "I really wanted to defeat Penticton," Lis said. "We outshot them and outplayed them, but that doesn't matter if you can't put the puck in the net."

Wes Gentles gave Vernon a 2-0 lead in the first period. After Lakers' netminder Ryan Dennis made two sparkling saves in the opening minute, Gentles scored on a backhander, while killing a penalty, at 1:56.

Then at 12:23, centre Doug Spooner split the Knights' defence, the puck went to Gentles, and the veteran winger made no mistake only seconds after leaving the penalty box.

Penticton narrowed the gap to 2-1 less than a minute later when Mark Sorenson fired a slapshot from the slot area while the teams were playing four-on-four.

Jackson Penny got the equalizer at 15:29, on a powerplay, after some hard work by Penticton veteran John Deporque. Deporque carried the puck up ice and controlled it in Vernon's end before setting up Penny.

Dennis could have sued his defence for non-support on the only goal of the second period. The Vernon netminder stopped a shot directly off a face-off in the Vernon end, then dove to the ice to block the rebound by Dave McComb. McComb was left standing in front on the Lakers' net and finally put the second rebound past Dennis with the goalie lying helplessly on the ice.

Vernon squandered numerous opportunities to tie the game. On three consecutive two-on-one breaks, the puck carrier shot from a bad angle. And on a three-on-one break, Chad Biafore couldn't handle Craig Bedard's flip pass.



WES GENTLES MARK GREYEYES

Mark Greyeyes finally evened the score at 3-3, midway through the third period, on a powerplay.

Lakers continued to press, but had no luck around the Penticton net. Lowen was particularly sharp on two point-blank shots by slick centre Kevin Scott. Then, as often happens, Knights scored the winning goal against the flow of the play. McComb blasted a shot from left wing, that went into the net off Dennis' glove, at 14:59.

Bedard appeared to tie the game again, at 16:48, but the goal was disallowed when referee Dave McClelland ruled he had hit the puck with a high stick.

Just 14 seconds after Bedard's shot, Shawn Howard scored on a breakaway to give Knights a two-goal cushion. Howard picked up a pass at centre ice, deked Dennis, and flipped a shot into the top corner.

Lis said, "We're getting greedy. Our guys have to learn to pass the puck. Too many guys are worrying about how many goals they have scored. When we learn to pass and put the puck in the net, we're going to blow somebody out of the rink."

On a positive note, the Vernon GM was extremely pleased with the attendance. "What a great crowd," he said. "For this early in the season, that is fantastic."

Lowen finished the night with 50 saves, including 19 in the second period when he blanked Lakers. Dennis turned aside 29 shots.

Vernon was assessed 11 of 21 minor penalties, one 10-minute, and one game misconduct. Veteran defenceman Campbell Blair was ejected at the start of the third period after arguing about a minor penalty handed to him.

Lakers return to the ice tonight when they host Juan de Fuca Whalers, at 8 p.m.

Whalers received an unfriendly welcome to the Okanagan, Friday night. Packers trounced Juan de Fuca 10-2, in Kelowna.

Jay Luknowsky scored three times for the Packers while Kevin Taiffefer added a pair.

In the lone game on the Coast, Nanaimo Clippers won their fifth outing of the season by downing Langley Eagles 5-2.

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