BAD WEEKEND FOR LAKERS

Whalers end slump in Vernon



VERNON LAKERS' forward Craig Bedard moves into the slot area for a shot during Saturday night's B.C. Junior Hockey League game at the Civic Arena. Bedard, one of several Vernon forwards who has been battling the puck lately, was held scoreless as Lakers dropped a 6-5 decision to Juan de Fuca Whalers. (Daily News Photo)

By DON KENDALL
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It is back to the chalk board for Vernon Lakers.

After winning their first four games of the B.C. Junior Hockey League season, Lakers suffered back-to-back losses over the weekend. Vernon dropped a 5-3 decision, Friday, to Penticton Knights and lost 6-5 to the lowly Juan de Fuca Whalers, Saturday night.

Before visiting Vernon Civic Arena, Whalers had lost six consecutive outings, including a 10-2 thrashing Friday night, in Kelowna.

"We came out flat and got ourselves into a hole early," said Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare. "Maybe we weren't thinking about Juan de Fuca . . . we were still upset about losing to Penticton."

Despite outshooting the Whalers 44-24, Lakers looked listless and lacked intensity.

Whalers, who never trailed in the game, held period leads of 2-1 and 5-3.

Slick Randy Zulinick scored the opening goal, at 6:33, while Whalers enjoyed a two-man advantage. Zulinick, who later added three assists, blasted a slapshot off the post, into the net.

At the 9:58, Ron Bhala made the score 2-0 when he deflected Zulinick's centering pass past Vernon netminder Darryl Dickens.

Sean Hartnell, with a powerplay goal, narrowed the gap to 2-1 before the period ended. But, instead of that goal inspiring Lakers, it seemed to spark the Whalers.

Ian Doak and Dale Gans scored within the first five minutes of the second period to give Juan de Fuca a 4-1 bulge.

Lakers battled back with Doug Spooner scoring on a powerplay, at 9:09, and Frank Biller blasting a high wrist shot, at 9:45. Biller was set up by Al Young, after some great work along the boards by the veteran winger, at 9:45.

But, Whalers restored their two-goal lead at 13:03 when Rob Coultish scored while killing a penalty. Coultish stole the puck from Mark Greyeyes at the Juan de Fuca blue line and went in alone on Dickens.

In the third period, Kevin Scott, who has been plagued by bad luck around the net, narrowed the gap to 5-4 after only 22 seconds.

Bhala's second marker of the night, at 8:02, again put Whalers in front by two goals, 6-4.

Lakers pressed and hard-working Wes Gentles was rewarded for his efforts, at 12:36, when he was left alone in front of Whalers' netminder Bryon Dafoe. Gentles, who lived up to his reputation as a tireless worker, was among the best Lakers during the disappointing weekend.

Vernon had several scoring opportunities in the final seven minutes, but nobody came closer to scoring the equalizer than Biller, who had two whacks at the puck, with eight seconds remaining.

Gare said, "We're not finishing around the net. Our guys aren't thinking when they get a shot. We're passing when we should be shooting and shooting when we should be passing."

In the two weekend games, Lakers outshot their opponents 97-58.

Lakers are idle until Friday night when they meet the Knights, in Penticton. On Saturday, Vernon hosts the unbeaten Kelowna Packers. And Gare issued a warning for Penticton.

"We have something to prove against the Knights," he said. "We'll be ready to play in Penticton."

In the lone BCJHL game Sunday, Summerland Buckaroos overcame a 3-0 deficit to beat the Merritt Warriors 7-5. The victory ended a six-game losing streak for the Bucks.

Red Sox and Angels ready for playoffs