KENDALL'S KORNER

Lakers can't hold a lead



by
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Vernon Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare probably isn't getting much sleep these days.

There is nothing that will give coaches insomnia faster than discovering that their team cannot hold a lead. And for Vernon Lakers, blowing a lead has become a familiar occurence.

In their last four games, Lakers have held comfortable leads. But, in each case, the other team has battled back. The result: two wins and two losses.

On Oct. 11, at home, Lakers led 8-4 before dropping an 11-9 decision to Kelowna Packers. In that game, Packers scored three goals in the final four minutes of the second period. And they blinked the red light four times in the third period before the onslaught ended.

Last Friday night, Lakers held 3-1 and 4-2 leads against the lowly Merritt Warriors. Merritt fought back to tie the game in the third period. Luckily for Vernon, Craig Bedard ended his five game scoring drought and gave Lakers a 5-4 victory.

On Saturday, again at home, the local squad led Penticton Knights 5-1. But the defending Canadian champions scored three goals, in the final nine minutes, before running out of time.

The following night, in Rutland, Lakers jumped to a 4-0 lead against Kelowna Packers (remember them?). Vernon ran into a series of penalties, then ran out of gas. At the final buzzer, Kelowna led 5-4.

After Sunday's game, Gare said his club has to learn to play with a lead. That should be easy. I was always of the opinion it was tougher to come-from-behind than hold a lead.

The problem may be a little more complicated, and serious, than Gare stated. After the win over Merritt, last Friday, Bedard made an interesting observation. Bedard said that Lakers have so much talent, and the players know it, that they weren't working hard enough.

I know in that regard, at least, Gare agrees with Bedard. He gave his club a tongue lashing after Friday's game for not coming to the rink with their minds on hockey.

General Manager Mel Lis, Gare, Bedard, and everyone else knows Vernon has a lot of talent on its roster. And Lis predicts one of these days, "we're going to put it all together and blow somebody out of the rink." But, it hasn't happened yet.

Lakers are not playing smart hockey. They are taking stupid penalties at crucial times, their defencemen are continuing to gamble in the offensive zone when they are leading, and their forwards are not thinking about where to shoot when left alone with an opposing goalie.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for a team to overcome a lack of talent. Hard work will only go so far. But, that isn't Vernon's problem. They have a mental attitude problem . . . they aren't concentrating on playing hockey for 60 minutes. That problem can be overcome. And when it is, they will have learned how to hold a lead.

BCJHL

Coastal Division

	G	W	L	T	F	A	P
Richmond	11	9	2	0	76	35	18
Nanaimo	13	8	5	0	69	65	16
Langley	10	7	3	0	54	52	14
Abbotsford	9	4	5	0	48	59	8
Delta	10	4	6	0	46	53	8
Juan De Fuca	10	2	8	0	34	54	4

Interior Division

Kelowna	12	11	1	0	103	44	22
Penticton	11	8	3	0	61	40	16
Vernon	11	6	5	0	68	53	12
Merritt	12	1	11	0	39	79	2
Summerland	13	1	12	0	47	111	2