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Lakers hovering in mediocrity



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Life for Vernon Lakers this season has meant hovering at the watermark. Their heads are above water so there's no danger of drowning, but then again, the view sure isn't too great.

Four games into the season the club looked as though it may have been earmarked for greatness. Now, reaching the mid-point of the B.C. Junior Hockey League season, the team has just two things going for it — Summerland and Merritt.

Luckily the above mentioned clubs are so hopelessly bad and so consistent in their personal pursuit of last place that if Lakers didn't win another game this season, they'd still make it into the BCJHL Interior Division playoffs.

However, it's unlikely Lakers will go the rest of the season without another win since both Summerland and Merritt are still playing in this division. It may only be a matter of time before one or the other catches them ona bad night and hands them a loss. . .hopefully, it won't be at the Civic Arena.

While the general rule of thumb in any sport is that the home team plays better on its home turf, that doesn't apply to the 1986-87 version of Vernon Lakers. Not only is the club playing under the break-even point so far this season in the Civic Arena, they've actually saved some of their worst hockey for just such occasions. It would be a nice switch for the 1,000 or so fans the club has averaged at home this year if they'd take it upon themselves to reverse their current trend, even if they odn't plan to get any better during the remainder of the season.

Being inconsistent is one thing, but Lakers' brand of inconsistency defies all logic. How could a club win 9-1 and 19-3 on successive nights then get shutout 9-0 by a visiting team, then win 4-2 inside one of the toughest hockey buildings this side of Upper Canada. They followed that up with yet another humiliating loss on home ice before blowing away Summerland Buckaroos once again. Mind you, their last win was by 10-goals less than their previous one — splitting hairs I suppose.

Now most everyone, including myself, could forgive the club for such performances if they were devoid of talent, were one of the youngest clubs in the league, or at least something along that line. But the truth is, the team has nearly as much talent as any of the teams in the BCJHL. Mind you, to my way of thinking, they've cut some players they could have used while keeping some others that are of no value to anyone.

One which comes to mind almost immediately is defenceman Tony Toth. Now here's a guy, if I can borrow a line from the irrepressible Al Paterson, who was heading into his third year with the club and still had two years of eligibility left in his junior hockey career. Couple this with the fact that he is bigger by far than all but one of the rearguards currently with the team, and it makes one wonder why he was sliced from the roster without being given the chance to play a regular season game.

To my way of thinking, Toth was steady, he stayed at home and he gave his everything to the game even if that meant taking a few punches on the nose (something which all but about three Lakers seem to be terrified of).

It also makes one wonder why a hockey club can be hovering around the .500 mark when they've got four of the top 10 scorers in the league and three or four more knocking at the door to get into the top 10. Unfortunately, it appears that collecting points is the only thing some of these individuals are concerned with while the fate of the team is farther down their own list of priorities.

Heaven help us all, let's hope we don't start hearing this story about waiting for the playoffs to arrive before the club turns it on. We got that routine last year when there were still 15 games to play in the regular season campaign.

There are 30 games remaining this season and if the club has any intention of making up for lost time, it had better start over at square one. Passing drills, positional play, discipline, intensity, and a willingness to do whatever they are doing for the good of the team would make some good homework.

With a little effort and a lot more thinking, Lakers could easily reroute themselves before Christmas and at least before the all-star break in January.