Lakers host Merritt tonight

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

The lowly Warriors, who have managed only three victories this season, were dumped 10-5 by the Lakers, last Saturday, in Merritt. However, according to Vernon Head Coach Ernie Gare, the Warriors are improving.

"The score (in Merritt) wasn't really indicative of the play," Gare said. "We scored four goals in the last 10 minutes."

The Warriors will face one of the most prolific scoring machines in BC-JHL history tonight. Statistics released today by the league show Lakers have five of the top eight scorers in the Interior Division.

After 28 games, Vernon has six, 20-goal scorers and a total of nine players with 12, or more, goals.

Defenceman Campbell Blair is the leading scorer in the division with 68 points. Blair also has the most assists in the loop with 43, one more than Kevin Taillefer, of Kelowna Packers.

Penticton's John DePourcq is the leading goal scorer with 33, three more than Vernon's Craig Bedard.

The league record for most 20-goal scorers on a team is 12, set by Bellingham Blazers in 1978-79. Blazers and the 1984-85 Penticton Knights share the record for most 30-goal scorers with eight.

While the records for most 20 and 30-goal scorers may be out of reach for Lakers, another mark is within their grasp. Kelowna had five, 40-goal scorers in the 1976-77 season.

With 24 games remaining, up to six Lakers could reach the 40-goal plateau. They include Bedard (30), Blair (25), Ed Tuckwood (25), Kevin Scott (20), Stacey Hartnell (20), and Doug Spooner (20).

The Interior Division's leading scorers are:

PLAYER, TEAM	G	A	PTS.
Blair, Vernon	25	43	68
DePourcq, Pent.	33	33	66
Taillefer, Kel.	24	42	66
Bedard, Vernon	30	33	63
Mowery, Kel.	23	37	60
Tuckwood, Vernon	25	34	59
Scott, Vernon.	20	33	53
Young, Vernon	14	39	53
Mangold, Kel.	25	27	52
Russell, Kel.	21	31	52

OTHER VERNON SCORERS PLAYER	G	A	PTS.
Hartnell	20	30	50
Spooner	20	22	42
Greyeyes	15	19	34
Alger	12	19	31
Olson	4	11	15
Elliott	2	12	14
Biafore	4	10	14
Fox	2	10	12
Demchuk	3	5	8
Chase	1	3	4

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Editor—DON KENDALL

KENDALL'S KORNER

Lis is a shrewd trader



by Don Kendall

Daily News Sports Editor

When Mel Lis purchased the Vernon Lakers last summer, he admitted he had no experience running a junior 'A' hockey team. However, he felt the knowledge he had gained as a businessman and owner of the Kamloops Cowboys Senior Hockey Team would be an asset.

Lis surprised some hockey followers when he appointed himself as general manager of the Lakers. The consensus was he would name Head Coach Ernie Gare (who was later named assistant GM) or someone else with junior experience as the general manager. But, Lis wanted hands-on control of his team. It appears he was right.

In the four months he has been general manager of his B.C. Junior Hockey League team, Lis has taught some more experienced executives a thing, or two, about building a good club.

Several veterans came to training camp in September, but Lis knew he had to find some experienced players because most of the key personnel from last year's team weren't returning.

Dennis Holland, Troy and Trevor Pohl went to Portland Winter Hawks of the WHL; Murray Baron (North Dakota), Shawn Lafroth (Alaska) and goalie Scott King (Maine) accepted scholarships; Greg Guest moved to Langley; and Mark McCleary and Shannon Pohl were overage.

To fill some of the holes, Lis acquired goalie Ryan Dennis and slick centre Kevin Scott from the now-defunct Salmon Arm Totems; forwards Craig Bedard and Ed Tuckwood from Summerland Buckaroos; and centre Mark Greyeyes and defenceman Keith Chase from Merritt Warriors.

Scott, Tuckwood, and Bedard are currently among the Interior Division's top 10 scorers: Greyeyes has played well as the club's third line centre; and Chase was a regular on the blue line corps until he caught pneumonia last month. Only Dennis was a disappointment and was traded to Prince George Spruce Kings.

Lakers got off to a great start, in September, with four consecutive victories. But, in the next six weeks, the team struggled to play .500 hockey. Even with the offensive talent they had picked up in the off-season, Lakers were no match for Kelowna Packers or Richmond Sockeyes, and had trouble with Penticton Knights. So, Mel the Trader went to work again.

Lis acquired rugged winger Todd Demchuk from Nanaimo Clippers as compensation for Greg Leaky, who was sent to the Clippers in October. Demchuk's hard work and ability in the corners has been an asset since his arrival in Vernon.

The next requirement was a goalie. Goaltending had been inconsistent all season.. In one stretch, Lakers outshot their opponents in three games . . . and lost all three. To lure netminder Jason Palmer from Langley Eagles, Lis surrendered veteran winger Wes Gentles.

Gentles is a hard worker. However, Lis wanted more leadership and offensive production from a 20-year-old. Gentles scored only 13 goals during the 1985-86 season.

Palmer, on the other hand, had the best save percentage in the BCJHL's Coastal Division last year. Vernon's current five-game win streak started the game after he arrived.

"We didn't like giving up Gentles because he was a popular player," Lis said. "But, he felt he should be getting more ice time and we disagreed. We weren't using him in clutch situations because he wasn't producing."

Then last week, Lis made probably his best deal to date. He sent seldom-used forward Jeff Kental and veteran defenceman Sean Hartnell to Abbotsford Falcons in exchange for winger Ian Alger and defenceman Wes Elliott.

Hartnell refused to report to Abbotsford and subsequently ended up in Penticton so Lakers also dispatched forward Lonnie Ferguson, who had been acquired from Prince George for Dennis, to the Falcons. Lakers stole two players who can help them.

Elliott, a graduate of the Vernon minor system, is a steady, stay-at-home defenceman. And at 6'3", he can clear the front of his net.

"Elliott plays within his limitations," Lis said. "For a big guy, he is fairly mobile."

Alger has been inserted on the team's checking unit, which has been nicknamed the Scooter Line, along with Greyeyes and Demchuk. In two games with Lakers, Alger has two goals.

"Those guys (Scooter Line) are really bouncing people around," Lis said. "Alger is really going to help us. He wants to play hockey."

The acquisition of Alger, Elliott, and Demchuk has made the Lakers tougher. When Richmond visited Vernon last month, they defeated Lakers 9-7 . . .and physically punished the local squad. That won't happen again.

Lis said, "I knew we had to get tougher and the last couple trades have helped. And I'm still looking."

The Vernon GM admits he is shopping for talent. "I'm happy with the 18 players we have on our roster," he said, "but you can always improve. I'm hoping to add one or two good hockey players before we get ready for playoffs. And if they are the right guys, this team could go a long way."

Other BCJHL general managers should be cautious when dealing with Lis. He has proven himself to be not only a good businessman, but also a shrewd hockey executive. And like his team, he is going to get even better.