BLOW FOUR-GOAL LEAD

Lakers serve up Christmas turkey

By AL PATERSON
Daily News Sports

All that was missing was the cranberry sauce.

Vernon Lakers served up a real Christmas turkey Friday night before about 300 fans at Civic arena with Merritt Warriors escaping with a 7-6 win. It was Merritt's fourth win of the season.

"I don't know, our minds weren't in the game in the third period," said Lakers head coach Ernie Gare. "Maybe the guys were thinking about going home for the Christmas break. We just fell asleep in our own end in the third period."

Lakers, who were tied 1-1 after the first period and led 6-4 after 40 minutes, at one point in the second period led the contest 6-2.

The victory was especially sweet for Frank Biller who set up the game-winning goal.

"Yeah, it felt good to beat Vernon after I wasn't good enough to play here," Biller said. "I just saw Billy (Burke) in the open, threw it over to him and he put it in. That was the seventh straight game he's scored for us. Things are really starting to come together for us."

Gare refused to blame goaltender Randy Zemlak for the Vernon third-period that stunk the joint out.

"No, it wasn't Randy's fault," Gare said. "In fact, I thought he made some good saves in the first period and kept us in the game. When you give the other team three and four whacks at it you've got to expect some of them to go in."

Vernon was outshot on the game 53-46.

Merritt got on the scoreboard first when Rioux took advantage of a bad giveaway by Bob Dever at 6:58 of the first period.

Bedard pulled the Lakers even with the teams playing four aside when he made a nice backhanded deke on Merritt goalie Randy Beezhuiken before slipping it in the net.

Zemlak was especially sharp in the first period, stopping two breakaways.

Just 35 seconds into the middle frame Doug Spooner gave the home squad a lead when his wrist shot found the corner of the net.



CRAIG BEDARD



DOUG SPOONER

Kevin Scott had the puck deflect into his own net at the 4:08 mark of the second period. Steve Manuel was credited with the goal for Merritt.

Todd Demchuk finished off a nice three-way passing play with Spooner and Scott at 8:44.

Scott's unassisted goal at 9:04 and a deflection by Mark Greyeyes at 11:13 appeared to break the game open in Vernon's favor.

A powerplay tally by Bedard at 12:54 vaulted Vernon into a 6-2 lead and the local club appeared to have total control of the contest.

However, Cal McGowan picked a corner at 16:10 and Zemlak waved at a high shot from Lennard Joe at 16:31 to narrow Vernon's lead to 6-4 by the end of the second period.

A slapshot by Steve Miller at 12:49 beat Zemlak cleanly and Merritt really came to life. Manuel managed to poke in a rebound to knot the count before Bill Burke won it for Merritt at the 15:09 mark of the final period.

Tonight Vernon plays their last game before the Christmas break when they play in Kelowna's Memorial arena for the first time this season. All previous games between Vernon and Packers were played in Rutland because of the civic workers dispute in Kelowna.

If Vernon is in a snarly mood tonight following their loss Friday night, Kelowna might be, too. They dropped a 3-1 decision in the Peach City to the Penticton Knights. The Knights, who have never lost at home to the Packers, got two goals from Jackson Penney and the insurance marker from Steve Chelios while Doug Gardiner spoiled Jamie Loewen's bid for a shutout.

Both of Penney's goals came on special teams; one on a powerplay and the other shorthanded.

The win leaves Penticton four points behind the front-running Packers in the Interior Division. Vernon stands a solid third while Merritt and Summerland scrap for the final playoff berth. However, Lakers still have three games in hand on Knights.

The Coastal Division leading Richmond Sockeyes were kept busy killing penalties most of the night but they still managed to eek out a 7-6 win over Nanaimo Clippers. The other BCJHL game Friday night saw Langley Eagles double the count on Abbotsford Falcons 8-4.

In Nanaimo, Paul Rutherford's goal at 16:21 of the third period snapped a 6-6 tie and lifted Sockeyes past Clippers. Jason Phillips, who played for Vernon two seasons ago, and Rob Clarke each scored twice as Richmond grabbed a 5-0 first period lead.

Dave Tomlinson and Steve Jaques also scored for first-place Sockeyes who improved their record to 25-7.

Kent Cookman and Brett Mayor each scored twice for the Clippers who hold down fourth place in the BCJHL Coastal Division.

Rick Graham scored two goals and six teammates added singles as Eagles defeated Falcons in Langley. The win moves Langley into second place in the Coastal division, 13-points behind Richmond.

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