FORMER KNIGHTS EXCITED

Lakers need a victory in Penticton



VERNON LAKERS' Head Coach Ernie Gare talks over defensive strategy with his two newest players, Jan Zeidel, left, and Shawn Howard.
(Daily News Photo)

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The home ice advantage in the B.C. Junior Hockey League playoffs will be at stake Friday night when Penticton Knights host Vernon Lakers.

Lakers currently trail Knights by seven points in the battle for second place in the Interior Division. However, Vernon has four games-in-hand and has been the hottest team in the BCJHL during the past month with a 12-2-1 record.

On Saturday, Lakers host first place Kelowna Packers.

Vernon General Manager Mel Lis said his club must win in Penticton. "Our teams are very even so the extra playoff game on home ice could make the difference," Lis said. "If we want to catch Penticton, we have to narrow the gap this weekend."

For the two newest Lakers, more than second place is at stake Friday night. Shawn Howard and Jan Zeidel want to prove the Knights made a mistake trading them last week. The two forwards were dealt to Lakers in exchange for winger Stacey Hartnell.

Both players are somewhat upset and confused by the treatment they received in Penticton.

Howard, 18, has been among the Knights' leading scorers since the 1986-87 season got under way. But, in the past month, he has been used sparingly by Penticton Head Coach Wayne Pentland.

"I haven't played much since early-December," Howard said. "I don't know why they didn't like me . . . they never told me anything."

After the initial shock of being traded, Howard now feels the move 70 miles north is a good break for him. "I'm excited about playing in Vernon," he said. "I'm really looking forward to playing in Penticton on Friday. I want to get a few points . . . and beat them."

Howard joined the Knights last summer after a great midget season in Anchorage, Alaska. The rugged winger had 41 points, in 34 games, with the Knights.

Despite his inactivity in Penticton during recent weeks, Lakers' General Manager Mel Lis and several college scouts have been impressed with his performance.

"I think Shawn will really help us," Lis said. "He doesn't mind the rough going and he can put the puck in the net."

Howard has received scholarship offers from the University of Minnesota-Duluth and North Dakota, but has not yet decided on his future.

Zeidel, like Howard, is in his first BCJHL season. The 19-year-old winger played juvenile rep hockey in Vancouver last season.

Zeidel admits he was a little surprised, but not disappointed, he was dealt to the Lakers.

"The whole time I was there (Penticton), it was a roller coaster," Zeidel said. "They didn't seem to care how hard I worked. I'd get lots of ice time one game and play really well. Then the next game, I'd be back riding the bench. It didn't make any sense to me."

Zeidel scored six goals, in 20 games, with the Knights.

"I'm happy to be here . . . and excited about Friday night," he said. "Penticton has excellent goaltending, but I don't think they have as many scorers as Vernon. I want to play well . . . and beat Penticton."

The two newcomers played their first game in Vernon uniforms last Saturday, in Summerland, when Lakers defeated the Buckaroos 5-2. After that game, Lis said he was surprised by Zeidel's speed.

"We knew he (Zeidel) was a hard worker, but we didn't realize he was such a good skater," Lis said. "He just glides along the ice."

Zeidel added that in addition to being a hard worker, "I usually capitalize on my scoring opportunities."