KENDALL'S KORNER

Lakers have a lot to learn about playing defensive hockey



by Don Kendall

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Vernon Lakers lost two crucial B.C. Junior Hockey League games last weekend. After dropping a 6-4 decision Friday night, in Penticton, Lakers lost 5-2 to Kelowna Packers, Saturday, at home.

Losing two games isn't the end of the world and it certainly doesn't force General manager Mel Lis to press the panic button. However, unless a serious problem is rectified within the next month, Lakers are destined to make an early exit from the Interior Division playoffs. The problem . . . Vernon can't play defensive hockey!

Lakers have one of the highest scoring teams in BCJHL history. Packers lead the league with 296 goals, seven more than Vernon. No other team is within 30 goals of them.

But, when it comes to keeping the puck out of their net, it is an entirely different story. Kelowna also leads the league in goals against with 130. The Packers are followed by Richmond Sockeyes, Penticton, and Langley Eagles in goals-against average. Vernon ranks fifth in the loop and is only marginally better than one other team.

Many of the goals scored against Vernon, and some of the early season losses, were blamed on poor goaltending. By the time the club had compiled a mediocre 11-11-1 record in early-December, goaltenders Ryan Dennis and Pete Repole were gone. Then, shortly after Jason Palmer was acquired from Langley and proved he could carry the load, veteran Darryl Dickens quit rather than be relegated to the bench.

In the 17 games since Palmer's arrival, Lakers have compiled an impressive 12-4-1 record. Palmer has always been good, often great, and sometimes brilliant between the pipes. Despite his heroics, Palmer's goals against average rose about five last weekend . . . to 5.04.

An average of 5.04 isn't going to win a BCJHL championship. By comparison, Dusty Imoo and Lucien Carignan, of Kelowna, along with Penticton's Jamie Loewen, all boast averages under 4.00. Palmer is making as many big saves as Carignan or Loewen, so we have to believe the reason so many pucks wind up in Vernon's net is a lack of defence. Anyone who watched last Saturday's loss to Kelowna will agree with that assessment.

Packers fired 18 shots at Palmer during the second period. In one stretch, midway through the period, Kelowna had two breakaways and a two-on-one break within 90 seconds. After that barrage, Packers took a 4-0 lead and Palmer showed his frustration by taking two needless penalties.

Lakers woke up in the final minute of the second period to narrow the gap to 4-2. But, just 20 seconds after Vernon's second goal, as the buzzer sounded to end the period, Packers scored again. Fortunately for Lakers, referee Dave McClelland ruled the buzzer had sounded before the puck went into the net. A contending hockey team isn't supposed to let that type of thing happen.

The BCJHL virtually handed second place to Vernon last week when it took 10 points away from the Knights for using ineligible players in September and October. But, the home-ice advantage in the playoffs isn't going to do Lakers any good if they don't learn to play defence. Defencemen who are consistently caught up ice and forwards who glide back to their end of the rink might not cost their team goals against Merritt Warriors or Summerland Buckaroos, but they cost their team games against good clubs like Penticton and Kelowna.

The Vernon coaching staff has 12 league games remaining to teach their players how to play defensive hockey. If they don't succeed, Kelowna and Penticton are going to battle for the division title . . . again.

BCJHL

Coastal Division

	G	W	L	T	F	A	P
Richmond	39	27	12	0	255	156	54
Langley	39	25	13	1	212	192	51
Nanaimo	39	20	18	1	216	224	41
Delta	38	20	18	0	227	203	40
Juan De Fuca	42	16	26	0	191	222	32
Abbotsford	41	13	28	0	180	256	26

Interior Division

	G	W	L	T	F	A	P
Kelowna	39	34	3	2	296	130	70
Vernon	40	24	14	2	289	194	50
Penticton	44	23	18	3	226	183	49
Merritt	41	8	32	1	146	297	17
Summerland	40	4	34	2	143	322	10

SCORING

Coastal

	G	A	Pts	Pim
Momotani, Del	49	46	95	20
Clarke, Rich	46	31	77	141
Zulinick, JDF	25	52	77	22
Tomlinson, Rich	29	47	76	67
Holmes, Del	30	43	73	20
Smiley, Abb	30	42	72	66
Eisenhut, Lan	38	33	71	22
Moller, Rich	27	44	71	20
Stotts, Nan	23	36	59	106
K. Nohr, JDF	20	38	58	169

Interior

	G	A	Pts	Pim
Taillefer, Kel	32	59	91	155
Blair, Ver	31	60	91	137
Mowery, Kel	33	56	89	87
Bedard, Ver	40	44	84	87
DePourcq, Pen	40	44	84	8
Scott, Ver	32	49	81	76
Mangold, Kel	37	38	75	83
S. Hartnell, Pen	29	45	74	90
Russell, Kel	28	44	72	57
Tuckwood, Ver	28	43	71	262

GOALTENDING

Coastal

	MP	GA	Avg
Stewart, Lan	1217	80	3.94
Pencer, Rich	1060	75	4.24
Dickson, Del	1803	143	4.75
Renton, JDF	1243	103	4.97
Dafoe, JDF	821	71	5.18

Interior

	MP	GA	Avg
Imoo, Kel	914	48	3.15
Carignan, Kel	1331	75	3.38
Loewen, Pen	1910	127	3.99
Dickins, Ver	734	59	4.82
Palmer, Ver	1308	110	5.04