# Vernon players shine in all-star games



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The B.C. Junior Hockey League takes a brief hiatus from the regular season schedule this week for the annual All-star Game between the Interior and Coastal Divisions.

Since Vernon players have established themselves over the past years as one of the more dynamic forces at the annual match, one can expect more of the same this year . . . especially since the club is sending more players this time around than on any previous occasion.

Originally six of the local squad were chosen to suit up for the Interior Division All-strs, but that number was reduced to five with the move by winger Stacey Hartnell to Penticton. Hartnell will still appear in the game but will represent Knights, instead of Lakers, giving the Peach City crew five representatives as well.

There's a slight possibility that Lakers will still ice six all-stars since Kevin Scott, the flashy forward who is currently moving up the scoring ladder by leaps and bounds, is a first alternate. If any othe other players on the Interior team go down sick or with injuries, Scott will be called upon to make an appearance. It's kind of a kick in the face for Scott who was chosen the Interior Division MVP last year in Nanaimo after a 15-7 victory by the Interior team.

However, with less than 24 hours remaining until the game is under way, it looks a bit doubtful that Scott will have an opportunity to duplicate his feats of one year ago.

Veterans are rare in a junior A all-star game, but if Scott were to get the call to play, Lakers would be icing a pair of veteran all-stars for the game in Merritt, Thursday night.

Spooner, in keeping with the tradition Lakers seem to have for dominating these all-star games, ran roughshod over the Coastal Division players last year, dealing some of the most punishing checks Nanaimo fans are ever likely to see regardless of the nature of the game. Spooner, now 19, is hoping for a college scholarship and the annual all-star matchup is one way to improve his chances at latching onto a free ride through a U.S. university.

Each year, more and more college, WHL, and professional hockey scouts converge on the BCJHL event, relishing the opportunity to see so many key players on the same field of conflict. Many of the players in the all-star game have been on scouting reports, of one form or another, and sometimes those who have been overlooked get a golden opportunity to show these guys just what they're made of.

Last year, Lakers sent Spooner along with defencemen Murray Baron and Shawn Lafroth as well as scoring sensation Dennis Holland. Of those four, only Spooner is back with the local club while Baron and Lafroth went on to play in American universities, on full scholarship programs, and Holland was wooed into joining Portland Winter Hawks, of the WHL, and is almost certain to be selected in one of the first three rounds of the NHL draft this June.

This season Lakers are once again placing a pair of rearguards on the Interior Division team in Campbell Blair and Greg Olson while forwards Craig Bedard and Ed Tuckwood will join Spooner. The occassion presents a golden opportunity for a guy like Blair, who is fast running out of time in his personal bid for a future in the sport, either at the college level or in the professional ranks. Naturally, as one of the top scorers in the entire lineup Blair, will be the subject of scrutinization. The fact that he has caught and surpassed one BCJHL scoring record, and is chasing five others in the final leg of the regular season schedule, means he will likely draw even more attention.

As a result, Blair can expect to have a lot of pressure heaped on his shoulders to do well Thursday night. Something tells me that he's not about to let anybody down.

It's very seldom that someone who is pegged as an all-star doesn't perform up to their capabilities at one of these events. Brett Hull certainly didn't disappoint anyone nor did Joe Murphy nor Dwight Mathiason nor Ralph Vos nor Bill Shibicky nor Cliff Ronning nor dozens of others for that matter.

And, while those ones didn't disappoint, neither did a lot of less starry players who showed up for these contests with the thought of playing good solid hockey in their minds. Most of these players were from Vernon Lakers as it turns out.

In Kelowna in 1983, when most turned out to watch Mathiason, Vos, Shibicky and Ronning, a diminutive centre from Lakers stole the show. His name was Gord Simpson and he was chosen the MVP of the game.

A year later, in Richmond, while Hull and the Wensley brothers were impressing the crowd with their dazzling stick work and stylish play, another little digger was quietly going about his job with the third line and ended up with a four-point night and the MVP award for the Interior team.

His name was Nick Kapicki. In Civic Arena, in 1985, it was Greg Kowal, of the Lakers, who showed up to play and made a much stronger showing for himself and Lakers than anyone would have imagined.

Last year, it was the Dennis Holland show though Scott, with one more point on the night, was chosen the MVP.

With five good prospects on the ice Thursday night, it looks like the Lakers' tradition is in no danger of being halted.