GO LAKERS GO

The Vernon Lakers, for the first time in years, have survived the first round of the playoffs to qualify for the BCJHL Interior Division final and they did it in convincing style. Building on a revived defensive unit and making the most of their scoring chances, the local squad beat Penticton Knights four games straight and will meet Kelowna in a best-of-seven series, starting Friday in Kelowna. "The Lakers are a completely different team than they were in the regular season," said Daily News Sports Writer Jim Judd who covered Saturday's fourth and deciding game. Read his account of the victory on Page 7 of today's paper and check future issues as we follow the Lakers into the final series and perhaps on to the provincial title.



PLAYOFF JINX ENDS

Lakers advance to Interior final

Vernon Daily News | **sports** Editor — DON KENDALL

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Vernon Lakers ran up a 4-1 lead after two periods then staved off a third-period rally to defeat Penticton Knights 4-3, Saturday night, in Penticton.

The win gave Lakers a four-game sweep of their best-of-seven B.C. Junior Hockey League Interior Division semi-final playoff series against Knights. It is the first time in the history of the Lakers that they have advanced to the Interior Division playoff final, and the first time in more than a decade that a Vernon junior team has won a playoff series.

Lakers once again fashioned their success around a strong defensive style of hockey, completely taking away the middle of the ice from Knights, who didn't manage a single shot from the slot area during Saturday's contest.

Campbell Blair and Craig Bedard scored first period goals against a single from Jackson Penny. All three first period goals were scored on power-play situations.

Lakers totally dominated Knights in the second frame adding a pair of unanswered goals including the eventual game-winner by former Penticton player Shawn Howard. Howard, standing in the shallow slot area, deflected the game-winner past Knights' goaltender Jamie Loewen off Wes Elliot's blast from the point.

Al Young scored the other second period tally as each of Lakers' three lines came up with strong offensive and defensive games again.

Knights' Todd Hilditch scored a pair of third period goals including one at 19:04 of the stanza with Loewen in the players' box in favor of an extra attacker.

Knights pressed continually throughout the final seconds of the game, with six attackers, but couldn't penetrate Lakers' defensive shell.

Lakers' goaltender Jason Palmer, who made 30 saves on the night, said he was worried for a while in the late going.

"It was pretty tight but I knew when there was just two seconds left and one more faceoff that we had it," he said. "The series has been great for us, we've played so well defensively."

Meanwhile, Young, who had three goals and four assists in the four-game series, was one of the players who was especially relieved. He has been with the Vernon club for four seasons and saw his team defeated in the first round in each of the previous years.

"It feels especially good to beat Penticton because they were the defending national champions," he said. "Nobody was cocky but after we won the first two (games) we started to talk about sweeping four straight."

There had been some concern that the Knights might have lapsed into a goon show in desperation in game four, but those fears were unfounded according to Young.

"We knew they wouldn't goon us because they have to go down with class being the national champs," he suggested.

Knights' Head Coach Dwayne Pentland was emotionally drained after Saturday's contest, but was impressed with the Vernon team.

"I haven't seen them (Lakers) play this good all year," he explained. "They're playing with confidence . . . Ernie (Gare) has got some systems that he didn't show us all year long — if we would have adapted quicker it might have gone longer (the series)."

It was abundantly clear in the four games that Lakers' experience was a key factor in the team's success and Pentland's observations seemed to concur with that idea. Pentland also feels that the play of Palmer in the Vernon goal may help them in the next series with Kelowna.

"Jason Palmer could be the key for them," he said.

Young, however, has another idea about the series with Kelowna, suggesting that they use basically the same type of offensive game against Packers.

"I think the key to playing Kelowna is to dump it in the corner and force them — hard work," he said.

In other BCJH. playoff action on the weekend, Kelowna swept Merritt in four games as well with a narrow 5-4 decision over Warriors, Saturday night, in Merritt. Brent Mowery had two goals for Kelowna while singles came from Bruce Bianchini, Jay Luknowsky and Jamie Kurki.

Cal McGowan scored twice for Merritt while Steve Manuel and Paul Masson each had one.

In Delta, Flyers overcame an 8-2 deficit to win 10-8 against Langley Eagles while Richmond Sockeyes shutout Nanaimo Clippers 7-0. Flyers lead their series 2-1 while Richmond swept its series 4-0.

Lakers travel to Kelowna, Friday night, to open the best-of-seven division final. Game two takes place Saturday night, in Vernon.



VERNON LAKERS, including Head Coach Ernie Gare, far left, congratulate one another in rather bleary-eyed fashion following their 4-3 victory over the Knights, Saturday night, in Penticton. Lakers swept the best-of-seven series in four straight games and now advance to the BCJHL Interior Division final series against Kelowna Packers. (Daily News Photo)

Smith rink wins mixed title

NEW WESTMINSTER (Special) — Vernon's Doug Smith captured the British Columbia mixed curling championship Sunday.

Smith defeated Steve Williams of Duncan, twice, to earn the provincial title. The Vernon chiropractor downed Williams 6-3 in the 'B' final, then won the A-B final 7-6, in 11 ends.

Other members of the Smith rink are third Vicky Midtdal, second Rob Litster, and lead Denise Forsberg.

Smith lost his first game before winning five straight. Williams was undefeated until he faced the Vernon team, Sunday.

Another Vernon rink, skipped by Mark Longworth, won his first game before losing twice.

Smith travels to Summerside, P.E.I., for the Canadian Mixed Championships, March 22-28.

Meanwhile, a reception for the Smith foursome is scheduled tonight, at 7 p.m., in the Vernon Curling Club.

SPORTS BRIEFS

J.D. leads UBC attack

Vernon's J.D. Jackson scored 30 points to lead the University of British Columbia Thunderbirds to their first Canada West University Men's Basketball Championship in 12 years by defeating the Victoria Vikings 94-91, in overtime, Saturday night. UBC advances to the Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Junior championship, in Halifax, starting March 12. Victoria still has an outside shot at a wild card berth in the CIAU tournament. Another VSS graduate, Brian Kruger, plays for the Vikings.

Masters win

Vernon swimmers won nine events and placed second in three others during the recent Kelowna Masters Swim Meet. In the 35-40 division, Jim Huffman was first in four races. Hank Aarsen, swimming in the

blers Division, 86ers tied Cosmos 2-2 and United downed Whitecaps 4-1. Meanwhile, in the Trappers Division, Blizzard downed Wreckers 5-2 and Stingers dumped Bombers 4-1.

Eagle does it