FIRST GAME IS FRIDAY

Lakers confident going into series

By DON KENDALL
Daily News Sports Editor

The 1986-87 edition of Kelowna Packers compiled one of the most awesome records in B.C. Junior Hockey League history.

Packers lost only five times in 52 games during the regular season, led the BCJHL in scoring, finished 24 points ahead of second place Vernon Lakers, and swept their Interior Division semi-final series with Merritt Warriors in four games. Based on those facts, Kelowna should be heavily favored in the Interior championship series, against Vernon. But, facts are sometimes deceiving.

The best-of-seven Interior Division final series gets under way Friday night, in Kelowna. Second game is scheduled Saturday, in Vernon.

"I feel confident going into the finals," said Lakers' General Manager Mel Lis. "We played Kelowna tough all year. We scored a lot of goals against the Packers this season."

The Vernon GM predicted before his club faced Penticton Knights, in the semi-finals, that if they eliminated the Knights, they would also defeat Packers in the finals.

Lis said, "I'm not the only one who feels we can beat Kelowna. Our coaches and players feel the same way."

The optimism in the Vernon camp may be warranted. Despite a dismal 2-7-1 record against the Packers during the regular season, Lakers played well in nine of the meetings.

"They only blew us out once all year," Lis said. "The other nine games could have gone either way."

In the two most recent confrontations, Kelowna outscored Vernon 10-9 and Lakers trimmed the Packers 7-6.

Lis said, "We know what we have to do against Kelowna. We have to keep (Brent) Mowery and (Pat) Mangold in check. As far as I'm concerned, they are their key players."

With the exception of some bumps and bruises from the Penticton series, Lakers are healthy. BCJHL scoring champion Kevin Scott and hard-working Ian Alger have been suffering from the flu, but will be ready for the series opener.

One of the key performers for Vernon will be goaltender Jason Palmer. Palmer has been a standout since Lakers acquired him, in December, from Langley Eagles. After posting a goals against average of 4.93 in the regular season, Palmer recorded a 2.75 average in the four-game Penticton series.

Palmer credits his defence with the drastic improvement in his average. "My job has been a lot easier in the playoffs," Palmer said. "Our defencemen are staying home and doing their jobs. During the regular season, our defencemen might have been worrying too much about getting points. But, in the playoffs, everyone is playing for the team."

Unlike many of his teammates, Palmer expects Kelowna to be a more formidable foe than Penticton. "I know a lot of our guys would rather play Kelowna than Penticton, but I don't think that is right," he said. "Deep down, I knew we could beat the Knights. We'll have our work cut out against the Packers.

"They have a well-balanced team. Kelowna has great defence and goaltending . . . and guys who can score goals. They only lost five games all year."

But, like Lis, Palmer feels his team can eliminate the Packers. "If we play defence the way we did against Penticton, nobody can beat us," Palmer said.

Third game in the series will be played Sunday, in Kelowna, with the fourth game back in Vernon, Tuesday. The remaining games, if necessary, will be March 11 in Kelowna; March 13 in Vernon; and March 14 in Kelowna.

Winner meets the Coast Division champion in a best-of-nine series, tentatively scheduled to begin March 19.

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SPORTS BRIEFS

Local minor baseball holds meeting tonight

Vernon and District Minor Baseball Association will hold its annual general meeting tonight at 7 p.m. in the William Halina Centre, at the Vernon Recreation Complex. Parents help is needed in all divisions. Player registrations will also be accepted tonight but birth certificates must be presented when registering players. Boys ages six to 18 years are eligible for tadpole, mosquito, colt, pony, and juvenile divisions.