

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BIG GAME

Vernon Lakers Coach Ernie Gare, right, goes over some break-out plays with members of the club, from left, Campbell Blair, Doug Spooner, Mark Greyeyes, and Kevin Scott. Lakers open the best-of-seven series for the B.C. Junior Hockey League Interior Division Championship tonight in Kelowna. The series reverts to Vernon Civic arena Saturday night at 8 p.m. (Daily News photo)

quarter-final 4-0)

B.C. Junior

Langley 4 Delta 3



(Best-of-seven quarter-final
tied 3-3)

Canadian University

SERIES OPENS IN KELOWNA TONIGHT

Gare will go with status quo



By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Vernon Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare, in the wake of a brilliant four-game sweep of Penticton Knights in the B.C. Junior Hockey League Interior Division semi-final series, has adopted a philosophy that makes a good deal of sense.

"If it isn't broke, don't fix it," suggested Gare who will lead his Lakers into battle tonight in game one of their best-of-seven series for the Interior Division Championship against Kelowna Packers.

Gare is referring to his line combinations and his playing strategies, of course, indicating that he plans on changing nothing before tonight's opening encounter in the Orchard City.

Lakers will enter the series as the underdogs owing to the fact that Packers lost just five games during the regular season schedule. Two of those losses were at the hands of the Vernon club which also registered a tie with Packers. However, a tough fact to overlook is that Packers won seven and tied once against Lakers in 10 regular season outings. Packers will also have home ice advantage if the series goes to a seventh game.

The Vernon club has shown drastic improvements in all areas but the one in which no improvement was necessary heading into the playoffs, however. While the forward units have struck with ferocity, much like they did during regular season play, they have also played well at both ends of the rink in four playoff games. Forwards have done a tremendous job of both forechecking and backchecking and this may be the key to winning yet another series.

Meanwhile, Lakers' defensive unit has remained well back of the play doing a good job of staying at home and playing sound defensive hockey.

The only area which needed no improvement was the goaltending of number one starter Jason Palmer. Palmer has been outstanding in the playoffs to date, much as he was in nearly every regular season game he appeared in since being acquired from Langley Eagles back in December.

Although they are the underdogs, Lakers have a number of advantages working in their favor heading into this series opener tonight.

For one thing, the club was forced to play texbook-style hockey against a superior team from Penticton which had been defensively oriented and well disciplined throughout the season. Packers, on the other hand, were allowed to throw caution to the wind in their quick series against Merritt Warriors, winning games by scores of 11-2 and 11-1 at home while etching out wins of 5-4 in both encounters in Merritt.

If anything, Packers may have developed bad habits in that first round series and with any luck Lakers can catch them off-guard and force Kelowna to make the necessary adjustments instead of vice versa.

Lakers have also shown a well-balanced scoring attack with all three lines accounting for an almost equal number of goals in four games against Knights. Packers had just one line doing all their scoring against Merritt.

Packers' first line of Kerry Russell, Brent Mowery, and Kevin Taillefer accounted for 16 goals and 38 scoring points in four games.

Russell has picked up 14 points while Mowery and Taillefer have 12 apiece. Nobody else on the club has more than five points in four games, however, indicating that neither the second line of Jay Luknowsky, Kelly Hurd and Pat Mangold, nor the third line of Bruce Bianchini, Jamie Kurki, and Rob Steele, is providing much scoring punch.

Defensively the two clubs are very similar. As mentioned previously, Lakers may hold an edge however, since they have played a much tougher opening round series. Vernon's ace in the hole is Campbell Blair. Blair, who is playing extremely well defensively, can still provide additional scoring punch and Lakers' defensive unit moves the puck well at all times.

The difference in the series will likely come right down to a coaching duel between Packers' Bill Hogaboam and Lakers' Gare as they fight to match their lines with the greatest success against one another.

Game two will be at Civic arena Saturday night at 8 p.m. while game three is Sunday night in Kelowna.

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