KENDALL'S KORNER

BCJHL is number one



by
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Vernon hockey fans have become accustomed to seeing men in trenchcoats congregating at the south end of the Civic Arena during junior games. And we will probably see more scouts than ever before next winter.

The B.C. Junior Hockey League has now established itself as the premier junior 'A' (tier two) league in Canada. Richmond Sockeyes defeated Humboldt Broncos 5-2, Saturday night, to capture the Centennial Cup. But, the BCJHL hasn't gained its reputation in one year.

Richmond's victory over the Broncos gave the BCJHL back-to-back national championships. In the past five years, BCJHL teams have reached the Canadian final four times.

Abbotsford Flyers thrust the BCJHL into the spotlight in 1982-83 when they were runner-up in the national championships. You may recall Vernon minor hockey graduate Kevin Poirier was a member of that Abbotsford squad.

In 1984, Langley Eagles captured the provincial title before losing in the Western Canada playdowns.

Penticton Knights, led by Brett Hull, posted an incredible 47-5 record during the 1984-85 campaign. Knights won the Western Canada title, but lost in the national finals.

Knights were back at the Canadian championships in 1986 and that time they wouldn't settle for second place.

Two former Vernon Lakers played prominent roles in Richmond's success last weekend. Jason Phillips, who starred for Lakers in 1984, scored three goals against Humboldt. And goalie Frank Romeo, who stopped pucks for Vernon before going on to play with Kelowna Packers and the Sockeyes, was named most valuable player.

Any lawyer, even Dan Fielding (for those of you who watch Night Court), could prove that the hockey we witness in the Vernon Civic Arena is as good, or better, than fans watch in Red Deer, Humboldt, Flin Flon, or any other Canadian city with a tier two franchise.

The facts:

(1) The last time the Lakers played the Sockeyes, in January at Richmond, Vernon won 7-6.

(2) Five members of the 1986-87 Vernon team have been offered U.S. college scholarships. And three other players have been invited to Western Hockey League training camps.

(3) Three members of the 1985-86 Vernon squad earned U.S. college scholarships and four more went on to play with Portland Winter Hawks, who reached the WHL finals this year.

(4) Next winter, there will be at least 11 former Vernon juniors playing college hockey in the U.S.

(5) While many junior leagues in the country are struggling, the BCJHL continues to grow. The Interior Division will expand to six teams next season with the return of Salmon Arm, after a one-year leave of absence. And on the Coast, the troubled Abbotsford franchise has already found a new home in Duncan.

(6) At the conclusion of the 1986-87 season, 22 BCJHL graduates had gone on to score 200 or more NHL points.

My case rests!