

CHARITY BALL HOCKEY GAME

A former Detroit Red Wing will face a future Red Wing in the Vernon Junior Hockey Scholarship Fund Ball Hockey Game, Saturday night, in the Vernon Civic Arena. Dropping the ball for a faceoff between Team NHL player Eddie Johnstone, right, and Junior All-star player Dennis Holland is Vernon Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare. Johnstone leads Team NHL, which includes about a dozen professional players, against Holland and the Junior All-stars, with top players from the Western Hockey League and B.C. Junior Hockey League. Johnstone, who formerly played with the Red Wings, announced his retirement from pro hockey last month. Holland, who starred with Portland Winter Hawks during the 1986-87 season, was recently drafted by Detroit. Proceeds from the ball hockey game, which gets under way at 7 p.m., go to the scholarship fund and Vernon Special Olympics. Advance tickets are available at Sun Valley Sports and Al's Esso Service. (Daily News Photo)

Money plays important role when building a junior team



by
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It comes as good news to the B.C. Junior Hockey League that Orland Kurtenbach announced earlier this week that he would return as head coach of the Richmond Sockeyes.

Kurtenbach, once the captain of Vancouver Canucks and one of those people who has good red hockey blood coursing through his veins, led the Sockeyes to the Centennial Cup championship last spring.

Considering that the 1986-87 BCJHL season was Kurtenbach's first sojourn into junior A coaching, one has to wonder what the sophomore head coach will do for an encore. Richmond management, of course, is hedging its investment on the likelihood of capturing a second consecutive junior A national championship.

Therefore, since Kurtenbach and his Sockeyes have been to the mountain it stands to reason that every other team in the BCJHL, Vernon Lakers included, could benefit in a big way by having the lanky NHL veteran at the helm of the Richmond club.

There's an old expression that says something to the effect that if you want to be rich, watch rich people and do like they do. Of course, there's no guarantee that doing as rich folks do will make one rich, but it certainly can't hurt.

Assuming, then, that the Sockeyes are now the wealthy elite of the Canadian junior A circuit, then the rest of the teams in this league can benefit from the presence of that club.

Mind you, Penticton Knights went to the Centennial Cup championship two years running in 1985 and 1986 and it's doubtful if anything valuable was learned from Knights' success. In a roundabout way though, the success of both Knights and Sockeyes ensures that the BCJHL will be an attractive league to young talent in other parts of the country, especially the western provinces. The overflow of talent, should there be enough of it realized, will likely benefit other clubs in the league.

However, teams like Richmond didn't get to be national champs overnight without some under the table money passing hands. Anyone in a position to verify this would certainly deny the fact, but we all know that it happens.

Word around here, on the sly of course, is that Kurtenbach probably waited long enough to see if the purse strings were going to open up once again in Richmond before he agreed to stand behind the bench for another season. It's one thing to have coaching ability, but it sure helps if a virtually limitless supply of worthy talent is laid at your feet too.

Richmond goaltender Frank Romeo, for instance, didn't appear on Sockeyes' doorstep one day with hat in hand looking for a chance to play hockey for the club. Hollywood Frank, who came within a hair's breadth of signing with Lakers last November, was snatched out from under the noses of the local club by the chatter produced by rustling greenbacks.

It's the type of thing that is becoming more and more prevalent in junior A hockey these days and eventually it will probably come to be the norm rather than the exception. Junior A hockey will become a rich man's sport and the team owner with the most cash on hand at his disposal will eventually rule the roost in every junior A league across the country.

The teams without the financial backing may hang on year after year, but it's doubtful if they'll ever be competitive enough to go the distance.

The face of junior A hockey is changing and it's no thanks to the NHL either. A good number of quality players have made their way into the NHL ranks over the years and it could continue that way in the future. However, the NHL seems reluctant to utilize its great store of talent.

Where once dozens of players were selected each June in the NHL player draft, only a handful of tier two junior A players were taken this year. In fact, of the five chosen from all across Canada, two of those came out of Vernon. None were taken from Richmond Sockeyes, which seems just a bit odd under the circumstances.

At the same time, NHL clubs selected 69 players from United States high school teams. The reason is that the talent is probably the same, perhaps a little less in the U.S., but none of the NHL teams who select these players have to pay a cent in development fees to a U.S. high school.

Development fees are supposed to make their way back to the junior club which developed the players but little of it ever does, sad to say. With that type of input from NHL clubs, a lot more junior A teams could afford to stay afloat and be competitive.

It's hard to say where it's all going to get to in the end but my guess would be that Richmond Sockeyes are what the future looks like — even if the coach's face is familiar.