KENDALL'S KORNER

Lis makes shrewd trade



by Don Kendall

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General managers around the B.C. Junior Hockey League haven't learned their lesson yet. They still don't hang up when Mel Lis is on the phone.

Lis, the amiable owner and general manager of the Vernon Lakers, earned the nickname of 'Mel the Trader' after making more deals than Oliver North during the 1986-87 hockey season.

He made a total of six trades and everyone of them strengthened his club. But, he outdid himself last weekend. As Howie Meeker would say, "Mel gave up four plough horses and received four thoroughbreds in return."

Lakers received centres Mike Barkley and Darren Naylor, defenceman Paul Soukaroff, and winger Jeff Dobish from Juan de Fuca Whalers in return for forwards Jan Zeidel and Todd Demchuk, and defencemen Mike Conrad and Brian May.

I hate to see Demchuk leave the Lakers. He is the perfect example of how a player can overcome limited talent and skating ability with hard work and desire. His forechecking and hustle helped to turn more than one game in Vernon's favor last winter.

But, even with the loss of Demchuk, Vernon stole the four players from Juan de Fuca. It is doubtful Zeidel, Conrad, or May would have earned jobs with the Lakers next season.

On the other hand, the four players coming here from Vancouver Island could all help the Lakers in their pursuit of a BCJHL championship.

Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare and Lis consider Barkley to be the key player in the deal. Barkley is ranked as one of the top 17-year-olds in the province and has the potential to score 100 points in the BCJHL.

Naylor and Soukaroff were both regulars with the Whalers last season and should earn spots with the Lakers.

But, the guy I like is Dobish. Last January when Lakers visited Vancouver Island, I sat beside a man in the Juan de Fuca concession stand who was telling his friends about why he had quit his team. It seems he couldn't get along with the team president, who had recently fired the coach and took over the dual role. I assumed he was talking about his football or basketball team. I later found out it was Dobish who was beside me.

He can't be compared to anyone in the BCJHL. At 6'4" and 220 pounds, the only hockey player I've seen who is comparable physically is Al Secord of the Chicago Black Hawks.

I've never seen Dobish play hockey, but they tell me he should score 25-30 goals, and he isn't a bad skater. With the loss of rugged winger Ed Tuckwood, who is overage, Lakers needed someone to bounce around opposing defencemen. Dobish could be just what the doctor ordered. If he comes to camp in shape, with a good attitude, he will be invaluable.

Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare and Lis have done some great recruiting during the off-season. The prospects include four top players from the Kootenay Junior 'B' League. And Lis is receiving some assistance from an old friend.

Vancouver Canucks' defenceman Doug Lidster, who Lis met in Kamloops about 10 years ago, has persuaded a Burnaby teenager to turn down an offer from a BCJHL Coastal Division team and tryout with the Lakers.

"I told him that if Mel was involved with the team, it would be a first class organization," Lidster said. "Every time Mel gets involved with something, he gives it 100 per cent."

Even after his latest and biggest trade, you get the feeling Mel the Trader isn't finished wheeling and dealing yet. And if that is the case, other BCJHL executives would be wise to be inaccessible when he phones.