BCJHL PREVIEW

Vernon favored in Interior Division

By Terry Edwards Kelowna Courier

KELOWNA, B.C. (CP) — Don't expect the Richmond Sockeyes and the Kelowna Packers to run away with divisional titles again this year in the British Columbia Junior Hockey League.

When the BCJHL opens its 27th season Friday, the Vernon Lakers are touted as the team to beat in the Interior Division while the Delta Flyers are favored in the Coastal Division.

The Packers have lost most of the top players who carried them to a 45-5-2 record last season. The Sockeyes will likely have to take a back seat to the Flyers, who recruited extensively during the off-season.

One new franchise was accepted in the Interior Division with the return of the Salmon Arm Tigers after a one-year absence. The only change in the Coastal Division was the transfer of the Langley Eagles to Chilliwack.

INTERIOR DIVISION

Vernon Lakers

The Lakers have endured 15 seasons without winning a divisional title while the Interior has been dominated by Penticton and Kelowna.

Although the Lakers, second with a 33-17-2 record last season, lost the league's top scorer in Kevin Scott and the highest-scoring defenceman in the history of the BCJHL, Campbell Blair, they have several returnees and have recruited well enough to be labelled by rivals as the team to beat.

"I think we'll be fighting for first place with Kelowna and Penticton," says coach Ernie Gare, who played for the champion Vernon team in 1971-72. "We look pretty solid on defence and, if our forwards come through, we'll be all right."

Kelowna Packers

The Packers tied a BCJHL record for fewest losses in a season while winning the Interior Division last year, but were left with only seven returning players. Gone are high-scoring forwards Kevin Taillerfer (117 points), Pat Mangold (114), Kerry Russell (102), Brent Mowery (97) and Kelly Hurd (93).

Head coach Ed Ruff, stepping up from co-coach, says because of the loss of his prolific scorers the Packers will have to be a more defensive team.

Penticton Knights

The Knights are no longer the dominant force of the division after reaching the Centennial Cup final in both 1985 and 1986.

Coach Dwayne Pentland has a sour taste in his mouth from last year's Interior Division playoffs when the Knights were eliminated in the first round by Vernon.

Salmon Arm Tigers

The league's only newcomer has recruited players from as far away as Thunder Bay, Ont., and coach Cam Ftoma isn't ruling out a first-place finish.

"We have all the ingredients that successful teams have — the ability to score goals, stop goals and play the physical game," Ftoma says.

Merritt Centennials

The death of former coach Joe Tennant, who led Merritt in 1977-78 to its only B.C. championship, prompted the new owners of the team to rename the Merritt franchise to the Centennials in honor of Tennant. The team had been renamed the Warriors two seasons ago.

Summerland Buckaroos

The Buckaroos have nowhere to go but up after a dismal 5-45-2 season that set a league record for the worst winning percentage of 9.6 and tied the mark for fewest points in a season.

"We're young and unexperienced, but I think we'll surprise a few people," says Bakogeorge.

COASTAL DIVISION

Delta Flyers

The major addition for the Flyers, who finished third last season with a 29-23-0 record, is Todd Voshell, a four-year Western Hockey League veteran who also had a stint in major junior with the Spokane Chiefs.

Returning veterans include division scoring leader Lance Momotani (60 goals, 119 points), Peter Holmes (39 goals, 100 points) and Doug McDonald (28 goals, 77 points).

Richmond Sockeyes

Last year the Sockeyes opened the season with almost all rookies, but as the season wore on they picked up several WHL veterans and some proven BCJHL performers who carried them to a first-place 38-14 record.

Nanaimo Clippers

The Clippers, fourth at 24-27-1 last year, probably have the most talented rookie crop in the division with defenceman Jason Knox and goalie Corey Jones, both of Williams Lake, and forwards Jack Piechutta from West Germany, Ross Laidlaw and Jason Patterson of Victoria, Greg Allen of Coquitlam and Nanaimo's Wally Bzdell.

Juan De Fuca Whalers

The Whalers, fifth last season with a 20-32-0 mark, have a good mix of veterans, including leading scorer Randy Zulinick (30 goals, 91 points), defencemen Rod Trenholm and David Bortoletto, and a talented group of rookies.

Abbotsford Falcons

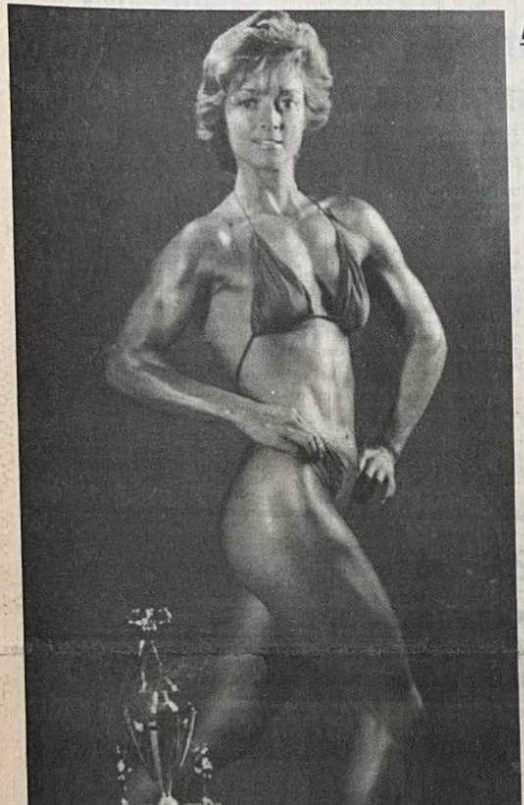
The Falcons have made several additions which should improve their last-place standing of last season.

Blaine Moore, a 17-year-old Fort St. John centre who produced 71 points in the Peace Cariboo League last season, and Dean Methourst, who collected 140 points in juvenile last season, should make offensive contributions.

Chilliwack Eagles

Coach Muzz MacPherson has lost three of his top scorers from last season, when his team placed second with a 31-19-1 mark. The Eagles also lost the division's second-best goaltender, Jamie Stewart, who took a scholarship at Michigan State University.

The schedule opens Friday when Nanaimo plays host to Merritt, Vernon travels to Penticton and Richmond is at Chilliwack.



NHL VETERAN BECOMES COACH

Johnstone joins Lakers

By DON KENDALL
Daily News Sports Editor

Eddie Johnstone has come home!



EDDIE JOHNSTONE

After 13 seasons in the pro hockey ranks, Eddie Johnstone will spend this winter in Vernon as an assistant coach with the Vernon Lakers, of the B.C. Junior Hockey League.

Lakers' President and General Manager Mel Lis announced Wednesday that Johnstone will begin working with the club immediately.

"We're very pleased to add someone with Eddie's experience and knowledge to our organization," Lis said. "I'm sure he will be an asset to the Lakers."

Head Coach Ernie Gare said Johnstone's duties include evaluating players and acting as the team's eye-in-the-sky during games. "He'll be in contact with our bench, from the press box, to give us a different perspective on what is happening on the ice," Gare said.

Vernon's other assistant coach, George Fargher, will remain on the bench with Gare during games.

Johnstone, 33, started his junior hockey career with Vernon Essos, of the BCJHL, in 1970. He joined Medicine Hat Tigers, of the Western Hockey League, in 1972 and two years later signed with Michigan Stags, of the World Hockey Association.

After stints in Michigan; Greensboro, which was a member of the now-defunct Southern Hockey League; and Providence, of the American Hockey League; Johnstone earned a spot with New York Rangers, of the National Hockey League. The highlight of his pro career was in 1981 when he was chosen to play in the all-star game and shared New York's most valuable player award with defenceman Barry Beck.

In 1983, a six-player deal sent goalie Ed Mio, Ron Duguay and Johnstone to Detroit Red Wings in exchange for Willie Huber, Mark Osborne, and Mike Blaisdell. Johnstone finished his pro career last season with Detroit's American Hockey League affiliate, Adirondack Red Wings.

Lis said he expects the Lakers and Johnstone to benefit from the agreement. "Eddie will gain experience as a coach and we'll call on his knowledge of hockey to help our club," Lis said.

Meanwhile, Lakers reduced their roster to 23 players in preparation for the BCJHL regular season opener, Friday night, in Penticton. Vernon released forwards Ian Young, Jason Kemila, and Taylor Harding; defenceman Don Burke; and goaltender Travis Piercey. Piercey has reported to Lakers's affiliate in the Kootenay International Junior 'B' League, Columbia Valley Rockies.

On Saturday night, Lakers entertain Portland Winter Hawks, of the WHL, in an exhibition game.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Vernon Daily News | sports
Editor — DON KENDALL

Junior player seriously injured

ESTEVAN, Sask. (CP) — A junior hockey player from Minot, N.D., was in serious condition in hospital today with suspected spinal injuries suffered during an exhibition game Wednesday.

Mark Nyrmyr, 18, of the Minot Americans of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League, was shoved into the boards by a member of the Estevan Bruins during the game Wednesday night.

He lay motionless on the ice for about 25 minutes before doctors and ambulance attendants removed him from the arena to a hospital in this southeastern Saskatchewan city.

Nyrmyr, a native of Minot, was later moved to Minot Trinity Hospital where doctors said they suspected he had suffered a spinal fracture.

Hospital spokesmen said Nyrmyr has no feeling from his waist down and he remained in serious condition today. The incident occurred during the second period of the game.

It's the second such injury to happen during a hockey game in Saskatchewan in less than a year. Last March 1, forward Brad Hornung of the Regina Pats of the Western Hockey League also was slammed from behind into the boards.

Hornung, the son of former National Hockey League defenceman Larry Hornung, is paralysed from the neck down and now is a quadriplegic.

The Minot club joined the 11-team Saskatchewan league this season. Minot isn't far from the Saskatchewan-North Dakota border. Estevan is only 16 kilometres away from the boundary.

The exhibition game resumed after about 30 minutes and the Bruins eventually won, 6-2.