VERNON EDGES SALMON ARM

Lakers share division lead



Greg Parnell (22) fends off one checker while another looks on during action Tuesday night between Vernon Lakers and Salmon Arm Tigers. Parnell scored once, directly off a face-off, to help the Lakers earn a narrow 6-5 victory against the pesky Tigers.
(Daily News Photo)

Wes Elliott was a reluctant hero while Jeff Skoleski was an unlikely goat in Vernon Lakers' 6-5 victory over Salmon Arm Tigers, Tuesday night, at the Vernon Civic Arena.

The victory gives Lakers a 4-3 win-loss record and a share of first place in the B.C. Junior Hockey League's Interior Division along with Merritt Centennials and Penticton Knights.

Elliott, a veteran defenceman with the local club, scored a fluke goal midway through the first period and it proved to be enough to win the game eventually.

Skoleski, the Salmon Arm goaltender, allowed Elliott's clearing shot from the opposite blueline, off a faceoff, to elude him for Lakers' third goal. It was the only blemish on an otherwise outstanding performance by the former Manitoba Junior Hockey League goaltender as he made 50 saves off Vernon shooters, including 18 in the scoreless third period.

"It sort of took a weird bounce," explained Skoleski. "Those things happen and there's nothing you can do about it."

Elliott, meanwhile, concurred with Skoleski's comments about the goal and felt it was too bad it had to happen to the Salmon Arm goaltender.

"It was total fluke — I'll take it (goal) but it's nothing I'm proud of," said Elliott. "Except for that one goal he (Skoleski) was almost unbeatable."

If not for Skoleski's heroics in the Salmon Arm net, Tigers would have been out of the picture early. Instead of a blowout, the score remained respectable until the final buzzer.

At the other end of the rink, newcomer Jakki Turenen, a Finn, wasn't particularly sharp and was called on to handle 23 shots — only two of those in the final 20 minutes.

Lakers jumped in front of Tigers 2-0 and Elliott's goal game them a 3-1 lead but a pair of power-play goals by veteran blueliner Terrance Head enabled Salmon Arm to stay even with the Lakers after 20 minutes.

Vernon again jumped in front of the visitors by a two-goal margin with a pair of tallies early in the second period, but once again Tigers tied the game.

"We weren't as intense as we were against Richmond," suggested Vernon Head Coach Ernie Gare. "We have to work on getting up for all the teams.

"We got over 50 shots though, so we definitely deserved to win," he added. "It was just a matter of running up against a hot goaltender."

Mike Barkley scored twice, including the game-winner at 17:06 of the second frame, to pace Lakers.

Elliott, Jamie Steer, with his 11th goal in seven games, Greg Parnell and Ian Alger also scored for Vernon.

Darren Schwartz, Wayne Bailey, and Wayne Kirbyson also had goals for Tigers whose record slipped to 2-4-1.

In the only other BCJHL game Tuesday night, Abbotsford Falcons were shutout 4-0 by visiting Delta Flyers who ran their consecutive win streak to seven games and remain in first place in the Coastal Division.

In the lone game tonight, Nanaimo Clippers travel to Richmond. Lakers next action is Friday when they travel to Penticton.

Minnesota is tough at Home Sweet Dome

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — It's Home Sweet Dome for the Minnesota Twins.

This season the Twins had baseball's best record at home and that's where the best-of-seven American League playoffs begin tonight.

The Detroit Tigers will send Doyle Alexander, 9-0 since being acquired Aug. 12 from the Atlanta Braves, against Frank Viola, 17-10, in the opening game at the Metrodome.

Viola said he can feel the pressure of pitching the opener, especially at home, where the Twins were 56-25 this year.

"If we're going to have a legitimate shot, we've got to do well here," Viola said. "The only problem is they do well here, too."

The AL West champions had the worst road record of any division or pennant winner in history, 29-52. The AL East champion Tigers, meanwhile, were tied with Toronto for the best road record in the league, 44-37, and they were 4-2 this season at Minnesota.

"Of course that makes us feel very good here," Tigers shortstop Alan Trammell said. "We should feel confident, but we're not overconfident, obviously. We're not overlooking anybody.

"Sure, we'd like to get to the World Series, but Minnesota is in the way, and we've got to get them first."

Trammell said fielding high popups in the Metrodome can be an adventure because of what he feels is inferior lighting.

"That's one problem that hasn't changed," he said. "If the ball goes up high enough, there's a split second that you lose it. I've never lost one here, but it is a helpless feeling with a runner on first, two out and you lose the ball."

ay hurts club

Mediocre play hurts club



by
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Vernon Lakers would be well-advised to tear a page from their own history book and take a serious look at the season that lays ahead of them.

The club that sparked a number of hockey writers to suggest that they could easily walk away with the Interior Division and possibly just as easily win the B.C. Junior Hockey League title, has so far done very little to live up to the pre-season billing.

After seven games, the local club is sporting a mediocre record of four wins and three losses. And, if you stop to consider that that record has enabled them to creep into first place, it gives you an idea of how desperate things are in the Interior Division this season.

Mind you, if not for the fact that Vernon has had the opportunity to play four games on home ice to date, their current record might not be as good as it is. Three road games so far have produced three defeats. 0-for-three on the road is a pretty lacklustre record by any standard, but when you consider that the club was blown out of the rink in Merritt and then lost in Summerland, it gives an entirely new meaning to the word lacklustre.

For instance, just before dropping into the Civic Arena to suffer an 8-5 loss to Lakers, Richmond Sockeyes forced a 16-3 beating on the hometown Buckaroos in Summerland. It makes one wonder if Sockeyes were playing the same Buckaroos' team or if they were up against the same Vernon team which lost in Summerland the previous weekend.

Bucks have remained consistently bad so far this season, losing six games and picking up just that one win against Vernon. So, we can assume, from the evidence, that Vernon is the club which is guilty of inconsistent play.

In past years, the Lakers have never finished higher than second place in their own division. While it may appear as a mark of consistency for the club, it has proven to be its downfall in every case. Without the home-ice advantage come playoff time, the local team has faltered every time out. On only one occasion did Vernon advance to the division final series and that was last season.

Considering their current performance, that home-ice advantage may be more crucial than ever before for the club. That is, until they prove otherwise.

Last season Kelowna Packers proved what hard work and a willingness to play every game with the same intensity can produce results. The club produced a league record for most wins in a season and easily won the Interior Division. They also disposed of Vernon in six games in the division championship before bowing five straight to Richmond Sockeyes.

Even though the Packers lost, at least they lost to the team that won it all. Sockeyes were Centennial Cup champions last season, in case you had already forgotten.

There is another ironic twist here. Last season Sockeyes had a mediocre start though by late in the season they were rolling with the best of teams and seemed to save their peak performance for the post-season play. In fact, Lakers beat Sockeyes in Richmond late in the regular season.

The local club has already duplicated that feat, handing the Sockeyes a one-sided loss here last weekend. So, if it matters, it probably means that Vernon has a better club than Sockeyes do now and probably a lot better than Sockeyes had at this time last year.

"We're at the same point now that we were last year — maybe a bit worse on defence," suggested Richmond Head Coach Orland Kurtenbach following his team's loss to Vernon.

So here's a club that won all the marbles a year ago, suggesting that they are as well off as they were a year ago. I think if I were on a hockey club as potentially strong as the current Vernon club is, I would take heart from Kurtenbach's comments and get busy on improving the club now and in the future.

A half dozen years ago anything the Lakers did during the regular season was a welcome sight to local fans while anything that happened in the post-season was gravy.

These days, the team has been to the well a little too often to keep coming back with an empty bucket. Six consecutive seasons of being eliminated within their own division adds up to a team that isn't putting out enough effort.

So far this season, the Lakers haven't looked like a club that plans on improving their past record. In fact, unless they plan on having a lot of luck on their side, they might be hard-pressed to do as well as they have in years gone by.

Mediocre performances are getting a bit passe at the Vernon Civic Arena. It's about time the Lakers got some fire in their pants and some pride in their work.