Vernon Lakers are strangers within their own building



by
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It should come as no surprise to local hockey fans that the Vernon Lakers play like strangers when they entertain teams at the Civic arena. It's basically because they are all strangers to the local arena themselves.

However, it's probably no consolation whatsoever to these same fans that their hometown hockey club is among the best in the B.C. Junior Hockey League when it's on the road. Sure, it's nice that they're winning their share of games somewhere, but what's really important to the fans is what the club is doing when they are on "home" ice.

For instance, in the past two weeks the Lakers have earned some spectacular victories while playing in the opposing teams' buildings. On Oct. 23 they picked up a 7-1 victory in Summerland; Oct. 24 it was a 14-2 romp over Salmon Arm; Oct. 31 they defeated Merritt Centennials 10-5; Nov. 6 they beat Penticton 10-4.

Terrific. So what do they do on home ice? Just lose three of their last five games is all. On Oct. 10 they dropped a decision to visiting Kelowna Packers, then defeated Summerland Buckaroos, lost to Merritt, beat Salmon Arm, and then lost to Kelowna once again last Saturday night.

One normally assumes the records would be reversed. Most teams deal with their inconsistency on the road and not in front of their hometown fans.

The trouble is, there's no real reason for any sort of inconsistency with this hockey club whether it's on the road or in their own barn. The trouble seems to lie within the attitudes of the players themselves.

It would seem fairly apparent that only a few of them feel the urge to play with any sort of intensity in front of the people who pay for their existence. They could lose every game on the road just so long as they play with desire and intensity when they are in front of Vernon hockey fans.

Fortunately, the lack of consistency on home-ice hasn't put a damper on local sports fans as yet. Saturday's escapade with Kelowna brought out one of the best crowds of the season. If they happen to dwindle a bit in the near future you couldn't blame them, however.

Until last weekend, the Lakers had three local players among the team's active roster. With the decision by veteran defenceman Keith Chase to retire from junior hockey, it leaves just rearguard Wes Elliott and winger Duane Dennis as the local input on the junior club.

There seems to be a general attitude with Lakers' management in the past five years, that local players are inferior to players from other regions. That assumption is unfounded since this paper documents the exploits of at least eight or 10 Vernon juniors playing in other parts of the country.

Nevertheless, the philosophy seems to be that when two players are of equal ability, the local player is dropped from the lineup and the other player is signed.

So by entertaining this philosophy, Lakers' management is paying the price: players who don't give a damn one way or another what they do inside Vernon Civic arena. For that matter, they don't seem to give a damn about holding onto first place in their division either since they've given up that position six times already since the season began — and they've only played 18 games.

So maybe in place of so much practice, the club should think about spending a little more time getting to know the community a bit better and the folks who dish out their hard-earned bucks to watch guys put out half-hearted efforts at home.

For instance, perhaps they could start with a few more public appearances outside of the rink. Head down to the local Malls on weekends and meet folks, hand out a few free tickets, chat and be friendly, etc.

Or maybe they might consider attending a few minor sports games to cheer some other local teams. They could even go to local high school basketball and volleyball games. After all, those kids are coming to their games.

I'm sure if they showed some support for the local high school teams then those local high schools would show substantially more support for them.

In short, nobody wants a team of mercenaries that they can't identify with. If the Lakers are the best team in the league why can local hockey fans only read about it? For every spot currently filled on this team there was at least one local player who was looking for the same opportunity.

There have been less talented teams than this one who have played better hockey. Mind you, they had players like Bob Wensley, Nick Kapicki, and Greg Kowal and other guys who played with big hearts and hard noses. Guys who grew up defending the Civic arena and carried that struggle with them into junior hockey.

If the current team had even a portion of the inspiration these guys showed, first place would be no contest.

BCJHL

Coastal Division

	W	L	T	F	A	P
Delta	16	2	0	130	60	32
Richmond	11	8	1	130	97	23

Nanaimo	10	6	1	94	78	21
Juan De Fuca	7	7	1	82	76	15
Chilliwack	7	11	0	87	134	14
Abbotsford	5	14	1	100	125	11
Interior Division						
Kelowna	13	6	1	101	78	27
Vernon	12	6	0	129	77	24
Merritt	12	8	0	119	124	24
Penticton	9	8	0	100	84	18
Salmon Arm	3	15	1	84	119	7
Summerland	2	16	0	62	166	4

SCORING

Coastal

	G	A	Pts	Pim
Holmes, D	25	34	59	23
Desjardines, R	20	26	46	80
MacDonald, D	20	23	43	24
Butterworth, C	17	25	42	2
Van Sickle, JDF	22	13	35	29
Methorst, A	19	16	35	71
Biagino, D	7	28	35	126
Lawrence, C	7	28	35	28
Parkes, N	19	15	34	34
Clarke, R	18	16	34	118

Interior

*Biller, M	27	22	49	99
Steer, V	15	23	38	6
Rushton, M	10	28	38	21
Schwartz, SA	15	20	35	105
Hilditch, P	12	21	33	25
McGowan, M	11	22	33	26
Alger, V	16	15	31	75
Parnell, V	12	19	31	30
Bianchini, K	12	19	310	68
Greyeyes, V	13	17	30	33

GOALTENDING

Coastal

	MP	GA	Avg
Dickson, D	848	46	3.25
Sutherland, N	353	20	3.40
Palmer, R	646	46	4.27
Dafoe, JDF	536	38	4.29
Jones, N	495	39	4.73

Interior

Casey, Ke	692	40	3.46
Fry, V	663	44	3.98
Rysz, V	367	26	4.25
Jones, P	291	23	4.74
Loewen, P	615	52	5.07