(Daily News Photo)

Lakers' stingy defence helps send Merritt home defeated

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

The Vernon Lakers limited visiting Merritt Centennials to one power-play goal per period en route to a 7-3 victory Tuesday night at Civic Arena in what amounted to a very satisfying win for Head Coach Ernie Gare.



ERNIE GARE

The win moves the Lakers two points ahead of Centennials into second place in the B.C. Junior Hockey League Interior Division — one point behind first place Kelowna Packers.

"I'm happy with three goals against," suggested Gare following a solidly entertaining hockey game in which the local club held a territorial advantage during the night but only outshot Merritt 45-41.

"In spite of the three power-play goals we killed penalties well."

The Lakers did, in fact, do a reasonably good job during Merritt's man-advantage situations. Vernon took 13 minor penalties to only seven for the visitors, putting them on the defensive more often.

In the long run, goaltending became the key to the victory as Glen Fry turned in his most outstanding, and steady performance of his brief career with the club. Both he and Merritt netminders Randy Beekhuizen and Gord Besse made 38 saves on the night — indicating a much closer game than the score might have dictated.

Vernon pounced on the visitors quickly, scoring four goals in the first period, winning the second frame by a one-goal margin, and splitting a pair of goals with Centennials in the third stanza.

"We had a good start and that helps in our own rink," explained Assistant Coach George Fargher. "When they score first it seems to take us longer to get going so we stressed getting that first goal and it really paid off."

Gare concurred with the observations of his assistant.

"We took it to them (Centennials) in the first period," he said. "We had some tense moments in the early going but we got things straightened out."

Up front, the team received one of its most balanced scoring attacks of the season with seven players scoring single goals.

Rearguards Adrian Markin, Phil Soukoroff and Darcy Martini each scored once while forwards Ian Alger, Dallas Drake, Jamie Steer and Greg Parnell had one goal each as well. Alger also contributed a pair of assists to move into a first-place tie with Steer for the team individual scoring lead. Mark Greyeyes collected assists on goals by Steer, Soukoroff and Parnell.

Bob Vermette, Interior Divison leading scorer Frank Biller, and team captain Richard Brew replied for Merritt who trailed 4-1 and 6-2 by period scores.

Centennials kept the Vernon club honest all night long and tried desperately to turn their fortunes around, especially in the first period. However, Fry stood his ground and captured praises from both coaches for his efforts.

"In the first period when they (Centennials) were pressing hard he (Fry) kept them off the scoreboard," said Fargher.

The Lakers are idle until Friday night when they host the lowly Summerland Buckaroos. Saturday night the local club will travel back to Summerland for a return engagement.

Status quo preserved in super league loop