WHALERS BATTLE BACK

Lakers caught napping

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

The Vernon Lakers let control of the game slip through their fingers and hundreds of local hockey fans watched in silent disbelief as the local team deteriorated beyond recognition until visiting Juan De Fuca Whalers skated off with a 5-3 victory, Saturday night.

The loss, Vernon's eighth of the season, leaves the Lakers in first place in the B.C. Junior Hockey League Interior Division. The victory put the Whalers one game above the .500 mark for the season.

Vernon led 2-0 after one period despite the fact that they played shorthanded through much of the frame.

The club missed a number of other golden scoring opportunities during the first period that might have widened their lead and finished off the Whalers quickly and for good.

Then, for no apparent reason, the bottom fell out of the Vernon team in the second period and the visitors seized the opportunity. After two periods, the Whalers had turned the score around with three unanswered goals. They added two more in the third period before Vernon picked up one more tally in the dying seconds of the game.

After the lopsided first period, the final outcome surprised everyone, including Juan De Fuca Coach Dale Sproule.

Sproule was surprised by the Lakers' tactics, especially in the early stages of the game where the Vernon club was trying to use uncharacteristic intimidation tactics.

"I would think that in a third game in three days you wouldn't want to play a physical game with anybody so I didn't understand their tactics at all," Sproule said.

The tactics did net the Lakers a good number of first-period penalties including a five-minute major to Ian Alger for high-sticking Whalers' top scorer Mike Van Sickle. The energy the club had to use up in killing the penalties took its toll of the Vernon players while Van Sickle gained his revenge in the best possible way — with his stick.

Van Sickle scored twice and set up one other goal for the Whalers who also got goals from Todd Sawtell, Ian Doak and Kevin Robertson.

Lakers scored a pair of power-play goals in the first period as they caught the Whalers' defence flat-footed on a few occasions. Later, both the Juan De Fuca defence and goaltender Byron Defoe tighted up their game considerably. They held Vernon off the scoresheet for the next 50 minutes after the second goal of the game.

"We play a very conservative game," suggested Sproule. "We were able to get by a bad first period but during the intermission we decided we'd play hockey.

"We think we play the best defensive hockey on the Coast," added Sproule.

While the Whalers decided to play hockey during the first intermission, the Lakers took the opposite route. During the second period the normally fast-skating club looked as though they were standing still. By the third period, that's just about what they were doing.

"We had control of the game in the first period but we took some bad penalties in the second period and all of a sudden the complexion of the game changed entirely," explained Lakers' Coach Ernie Gare.

"They (Whalers) got a bit of confidence and they started to play much better," added Gare. "Once they got a lead they played a good defensive game."

Dane Jackson, one of the few bright lights for the Lakers during the night, scored twice while Jamie Steer added a first period power-play goal. Steer might have single-handedly won the game for the Lakers if he had capitalized on more than one of his opportunities in the early going.

In other BCJHL action Saturday night, the Summerland Buckaroos won their fourth game of the season with a 7-4 victory against Salmon Arm; the Chilliwack Eagles defeated theMerritt Centennials 8-6; the Delta Flyers beat the Nanaimo Clippers 5-1; and the Abbotsford Falcons edged the Richmond Sockeyes 3-2.

In Sunday's action, Salmon Arm defeated Juan De Fuca 5-3.



MIKE BARKLEY (15) gets a rude reception in front of the Juan De Fuca net Saturday night during second period hockey action. The visiting Whalers overcame a 2-0 first period deficit to walk away with a 5-3 victory against the lacklustre Lakers.

(Daily News Photo)