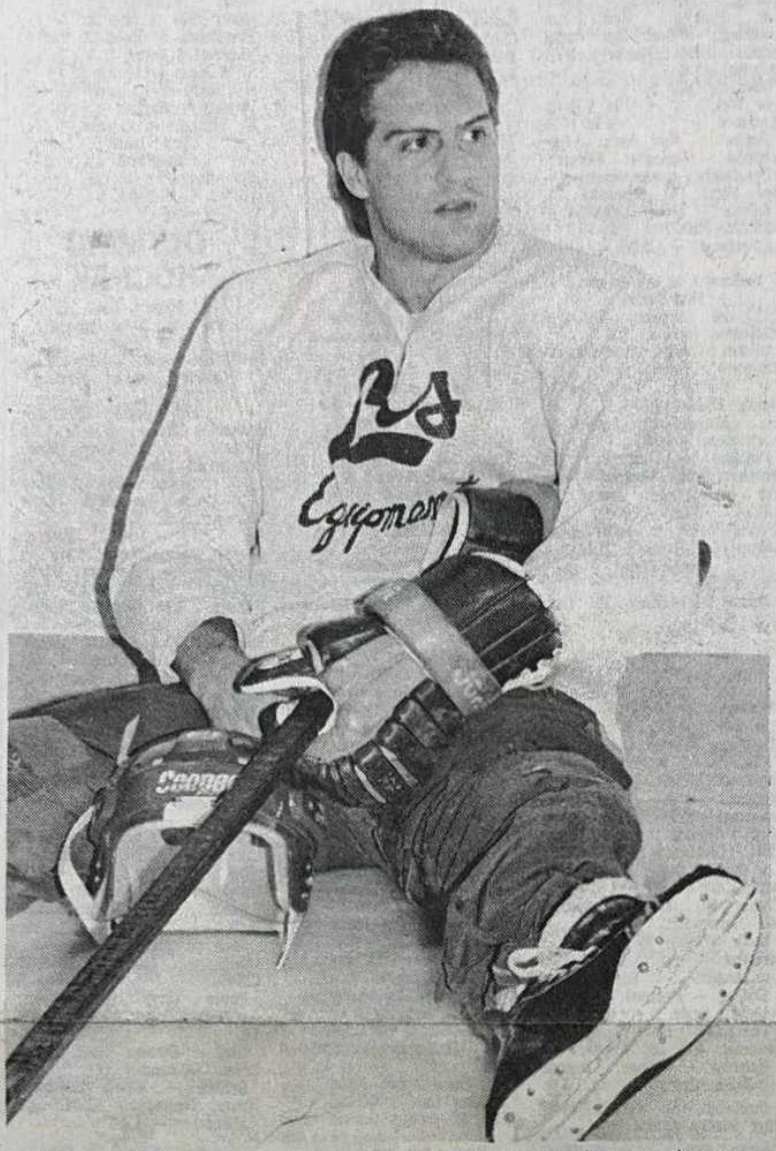
OLSON ON SKATES

Lakers return to work



GREG OLSON takes a breather on the ice during his first practice session with the Vernon Lakers since training camp more than three months ago. The all-star rearguard spent that much time recovering from ankle operations to remove bone spurs. His return to the lineup will further the exploits of the best offensive team in the BCJHL and won't hurt their strong defence either. (Daily News Photo)

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

The Vernon Lakers may have enjoyed a rare 16-day Christmas vacation from the B.C. Junior Hockey League but they'll more than make up for the lengthy layoff this week as the schedule resumes Tuesday night.

"We've got four games in five nights right off the bat which is good in a way because we can play our way back into shape," suggested Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare who is heading into the new year sporting a lifetime coaching record of 59-25-2 after a little more than a season and a half with the local club.

Tuesday night the Salmon Arm Tigers will face-off against the Lakers at the Civic Arena. Thursday night, the two teams meet again in Salmon Arm. Friday, the Lakers travel to Kelowna while Saturday night they'll host the Abbotsford Falcons of the Coastal Division.

Almost forgotten at this point is the fact that the Lakers have a six-game winning streak intact as well as a 14-game winning string on the road.

In spite of Gare's observation about playing back into shape, it was apparent from Sunday night's first practice that few, if any, of the individual players had softened appreciably during the layoff period.

"Most of them had icetime back in their respective towns but we'll definitely have to work on some conditioning," said Gare.

"There's lots of little things we'd like to keep working on. Playing better at home for instance — we'd like to win all nine of our remaining home games."

While the club has produced the best road record in the league (14-3) this season they have lost five times on home ice. Winning at home is now as important or even more so than winning on the road with 18 games left in the last stretch of the regular season.

"We want to win our division but we've talked about the possibility of first place overall," suggested Gare. "The guys are really gunning to play Delta (Flyers) — that'll be a big weekend and it's something to prepare for."

Delta, currently holding down first place overall by a slim margin over the Lakers, will be the club's opposition twice in two weeks during this month. On Jan. 16 they play in Delta on the third night of a three-game road-trip to the Coast. On Jan. 30 the Flyers will be in Vernon for a rematch. The result of those two outings could well determine first overall for either team.

Meanwhile, former all-star defenceman Greg Olson shuffled himself back into the deck Sunday night, taking to the practice ice for the first time since training camp. He was sidelined for more than three months following surgery to his ankles for bone spurs. While Gare could use his speed and finesse up front, he will utilize Olson at the rearguard position.

"He (Olson) is more valuable to us back there but if we were to run into injuries he's one guy we can always move up," Gare explained.

Defensively, the Lakers have led the league in the late going of the first half of the regular season campaign, averaging less than three goals against in their last 10 games while posting an 8-2 record during that span.

Offensively, the club has had nothing to complain about either as they lead the league in that department.

"We've been getting good scoring balance from all three lines so we'll keep working on our defensive play and getting our goals against down," Gare explained.

At this point, many teams would be envious of Gare's position if they cared to count up the years of experience on the Vernon club. One player, Ian Alger, is in his fifth season in the BCJHL while three others are in their fourth seasons and a number of others are in their third. In fact, with the exception of Jamie Steer, who happens to be leading the team in scoring, and Greg Parnell, all other members of the team have junior experience of some kind.

"The chemistry on the team is pretty good," said Gare somewhat understatedly. "We've got a good mix of vets and younger players."

In BCJHL action Saturday, the Nanaimo Clippers tied the Delta Flyers 3-3, Chilliwack beat Juan De Fuca 5-1 and the Richmond Sockeyes trounced Abbotsford 10-2.

Play resumes Tuesday when Delta visits Nanaimo, Penticton plays host to Summerland and Salmon Arm is in Vernon.

Sabres vacate division basement

By The Canadian Press

The Buffalo Sabres have climbed out of the Adams Division basement, leaving the struggling Quebec Nordiques in their wake.

Scott Arniel's goal snapped a second-period tie and goaltender Tom Barrasso made 27 saves as Buffalo edged visiting Quebec 2-1 in National Hockey League play Sunday night.

The victory came one night after Buffalo beat Toronto 6-4 at Maple Leaf Gardens.

"We're starting to show we are a good hockey club," said Barrasso, whose weekend victories vaulted the Canadiens 2.

In Buffalo, the teams traded goals in the first period but the Sabres took the lead in the second on Arniel's fifth goal of the season and first since Nov. 13.

Buffalo rookie Pierre Turgeon opened the scoring at 5:37 of the first period when he picked up Ray Sheppard's rebound and fired a low shot from the rim of the right faceoff circle past rookie goalie Ron Tugnutt. It was Turgeon's 10th goal of the season.

Gaetan Duchesne pulled Quebec even at 13:01 on a deflection.

Prior to Saturday's victory, the Sabres had lost three straight, scoring

Fulton hoopsters victorious

The Fulton Maroons dumped the Salmon Arm Golds 78-58 in exhibition boys' basketball action, Saturday night, at the Priest Valley Gymnasium.

Todd Dulaba led the Fulton attack with 18 points while Hank Vandeleest added 15 and Sean Milliken dropped in 14. Dulaba and Vandeleest grabbed nine rebounds apiece.

Trevor Jones also enjoyed a productive night with seven points, eight rebounds, and seven assists for the Maroons.

Fulton Coach Bob Shannon said neither club was particularly sharp. "After a two week layoff I expected the game to be a bit sloppy . . . and it was," Shannon said. "We had 25 turnovers."

The Maroons shot an impressive 36-for-70 from the field, including several fastbreak baskets against the Salmon Arm press.

The Maroons have a busy week with three league games in five days. Fulton visits W.L. Seaton, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; hosts Armstrong, Thursday; and travels to Revelstoke, Saturday.