STREAK ON THE LINE TONIGHT

Lakers establish record

The Vernon Lakers can add to a B.C. Junior Hockey League record tonight when they take on the Tigers, in Salmon Arm.

BCJHL Historian Fred Hume confirmed today that the league is recognizing Vernon's current 14-game win streak on the road as the longest in league history.

Hume said there was no official record for consecutive road victories until now. "We have been unable to find any club in BCJHL history that has won as many consecutive games on the road. Therefore, as far as I'm concerned, Vernon now holds the record."

The 1983-84 edition of the Penticton Knights holds the record for consecutive victories with 22. And the 1985-86 Penticton club recorded an incredible 36 straight home-ice wins.

Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare was pleased to hear that his club's accomplishment is now recognized as a league record, but cautioned that it won't be easy to extend their streak tonight in Salmon Arm. Vernon edged the much-improved Tigers 4-3, in overtime, Tuesday night.

"They'll be tough tonight," Gare said. "The key for us is to get an early lead. When they stay close to us, they seem to gain confidence as the game goes on."

The Lakers will be without goaltender Barry Rysz, who was suspended by the club earlier this week for disciplinary reasons. Scott Austin, who was released by the Kelowna Packers last Sunday, will backup starting netminder Glen Fry.

"We'll have the situation with Rysz resolved before this weekend," Gare said. "He may play Friday or Saturday."

The Lakers visit the second place Kelowna Packers, Friday, and host the Abbotsford Falcons, Saturday.

In the lone BCJHL game Tuesday, the Richmond Sockeyes got goals from five players as they defeated the Juan de Fuca Whalers 5-2, in Richmond.

JUDDS JOURNAL

Timing your peak is crucial



by
Jim Judd
Daily News
Sports Writer

You have to like the odds on the Vernon Lakers at this point as they make a play to finish the B.C. Junior Hockey League season with the best record in the loop. But history has proven that the team that finishes first isn't necessarily guaranteed any great measure of success down the playoff road.

Sometimes, as it has been suggested, it's better not to show your hand before all the cards are on the table.

A quick glance at the current BCJHL standings show that the local junior A club is only three points shy of first place overall in the 12-team, two-division league. They trail the Delta Flyers right now, but with two games in hand the Lakers could find themselves occupying the top rung of the ladder after this weekend. Mind you, they have to play three games in three nights in the meantime, beginning with their rematch against the Salmon Arm Tigers, tonight, in Salmon Arm.

The Tigers have shown themselves to be toothless during stretches this season but at other times, like Tuesday night at the Civic Arena, the same Tigers have lived up to their nickname. The point here merely proving in spite of the fact that the Lakers are running away with the Interior Division regular season schedule, getting wins from here on will be doubly tough.

But there is common knowledge in just about any sport that warns against the pitfalls of peaking too soon during the regular season. When the playoffs arrive, no team wants to be over the hump and on the decline already but it's a particularly tough situation to gauge with any measure of accuracy. Above all, it seems to take the proper amount of intelligence and experience on behalf of the players and particularly the coaching staff of the teams involved.

A case in point here would be the Richmond Sockeyes and their intrepid mentor Orland Kurtenbach. Where the item of experience crops up, Kurtenbach is the junior hockey granddaddy of them all. His junior experience began more than 30 years ago, culminating with a victory in the 1957 Memorial Cup — the first time the coveted symbol of junior hockey supremacy in this country came West of the Great Lakes. It was, in fact, the lowly Flin Flon Bombers who wrenched it from the hands of the St. Catherines Saints and Kurtenbach's appearance was owing to the fact that the Western Canadian champions were allowed to pick up a number of players to bolster their roster before advancing to the Memorial Cup finals.

In the ensuing years, Kurtenbach forged a name for himself in the NHL and wound up wearing the first captaincy for the fledgling Vancouver Canucks when they entered the National Hockey League back in 1970. His experience in the game was already evident when the Canucks were headed for the playoffs in their first season before an injury to "Kaptain Kurt" put them into a tailspin.

Later, Kurtenbach spent a year and a half behind the Canucks' bench and spent two seasons with the Vancouver affiliate in Tulsa, of the Central Hockey League.

Obviously he had a good bag of tricks at his disposal when last season, his first as a coach in the BCJHL, he led his Sockeyes all the way to the national championship and brought the Centennial Cup back to B.C. for the second time in as many years.

Now the saying goes that if you want to get rich you watch the rich and do what they do. Kurtenbach and his Sockeyes have laid in the shallows through most of this season, barely staying abreast of other teams in their division at times. Now, in the final thrust toward the playoffs, Kurtenbach is showing signs that the Sockeyes are seriously gearing up for bigger things in the not-too distant future.

The serious push began a short while back when the wealthy Sockeyes opened the purse strings and purchased goaltender Willie Popp from the Ottawa 67's major junior club, of the Ontario Hockey League. The rumor around the league now is that a few more average players from the major junior ranks are now trickling into the Richmond organization.

As a result, it's the Sockeyes who are showing signs of taking command in the Coastal Division while teams like Delta appear to be on the leeward side of the slope now.

Last year, Kurtenbach held back his full poker hand until the playoffs arrived — going undefeated through the BCJHL playoffs and barely losing a game en route to the national championship. In fact, late in the season the Lakers had little difficulty disposing of the visiting Richmond crew at the Civic Arena. The Sockeyes, by comparison, showed little difficulty in disposing of the Interior Division champion Kelowna Packers, tossing them aside in the minimum five games in a best-of-nine league final.

Luckily, nobody can really say with any asurity at this point that the Lakers have peaked. On the contrary, most would say their best games are somewhere down the road.

Let's hope they arrive in March.