

VERNON LAKERS' Head Coach Ernie Gare calls the game from behind the bench but his job is made easier by the presence of assistant coaches George Fargher and Eddie Johnstone. (Daily News Photo)

THREE-MAN SYSTEM WORKS

Coaches share the load

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

It has been often said that too many cooks spoil the broth.

But, on the other hand, consider the case of the Vernon Lakers.

While every junior hockey team has at least one coach, often two, the Lakers are basking in the advantages provided them through a rare three-coach system — the only team in the B.C. Junior Hockey League that enjoys such an advantage.

The system is obviously an advantage considering that the club moved into first place overall in the BCJHL last weekend with a 29-9 record including a 15-4 road record which is tops in the league.

Earnie Gare serves as head coach while his assistant coaches are Eddie Johnstone and George Fargher. Gare and Fargher were behind the bench during the 1986-87 BCJHL season, as well, and during that time Gare has amassed a won-loss record of 62-26-2 which equates to better than a .750 winning percentage.

A great deal of the team's success this season, however, is directly attributable to the addition of Johnstone as the third member of the club's coaching staff. Johnstone's view of the game comes not from behind the bench as with Gare and Fargher, but from a lofty perch, usually high above the ice surface from which he keeps a statistical record of what is going on. At the same time his watchful eye is ever on the lookout for a chance to improve upon certain situations be they of an offensive or a defensive nature.

"During the game Eddie charts our hits and turn-aways (opposite of a hit) in both the offensive and defensive zones," explained Gare of Johnstone's role with the team. "What that does is it shows us who's pulling their weight during the game and it provides instant feedback for the kids. It also gives us a perspective that you don't see on the bench."

Johnstone also charts every goal that is scored against the team, making note of every players' position on the ice at the time the goal was scored. In this way, an instant analysis can be made and the mistake can be corrected for future use since the reason for the breakdown can be almost pinpointed.

The result has been a dramatic reduction in the team's goals-against since the season began. It has paid off handsomely in the long run too since the club's nine losses have been spread out over the past four months. In fact, it was in late-September when the Lakers last lost two games in a row and both of those (Sept. 27 and 29) were on the road.

"We're able to pinpoint our mistakes so our goals-against has dropped because we're not making the same mistakes over and over again," explained Gare.

Although it is Johnstone's first crack at the coaching aspect of the game, he comes with an impressive list of credentials on his resume including more than 10 seasons as a pro in the National Hockey League, American Hockey League, and World Hockey Association.

"After all those years of pro he's picked up a lot of tips and his experience has really helped."

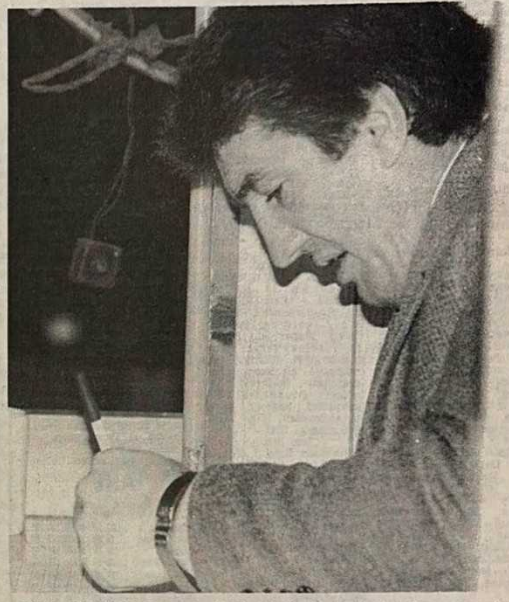
Fargher, meanwhile, adds yet another dimension to the three-man system but his job behind the bench helps alleviate much of the responsibilities that Gare must shoulder during a game. By looking after the defensive unit, essentially half the job behind the bench is taken care of. Fargher is also responsible to see that the defence pairs change with the proper regularity.

All three coaches share an equal task during practices, however, and it is here that Gare feels the additional coaching staff member comes in handy and is well utilized.

"In practices it's nice to have three coaches because it breaks the team up into smaller units," explained Gare. "That way we can each work on something different and by having a smaller group the coach-to-player ratio is greater so more is learned."

All three coaches spend an almost equal amount of time in the execution of their duties so that the team benefits consistently both at home and on the road where such information as is compiled by Johnstone is usually lacking.

"We're able to use the stats more both at home and on the road so it's very consistent and it gives the kids a good idea of what they're doing both right and wrong," Gare said.



EDDIE JOHNSTONE, perched high above the ice-level during games, is the Vernon Lakers "eye in the sky" type coach. He compiles individual player statistics from which mistakes can be remedied and goals-against cut. (Daily News Photo)

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SPORTS BRIEFS

Freestyle club schedules meeting

The newly-formed Vernon Freestyle Ski Club will hold an informational meeting Jan. 19, at 7:30 p.m., in room 405 at Vernon Secondary School. The club offers instruction, practice, and competition in ballet, moguls, and aerials. Spokesman Iean Dobson said, "We have a national certified level II freestyle instructor, a CSIA level I instructor, a trampoline instructor, access to a gymnasium, and the support of Silver Star Mountain with respect to a designated jump site. For further information phone Dobson at 542-3380, after 7:30 p.m.

Girls undefeated

The Vernon Secondary School

second in 34:23.6 and Switzerland's Giachem Guidon finished third in 34:36.6.

Lakers begin tough trip tonight

Vernon Lakers begin their toughest road trip of the B.C. Junior Hockey League season tonight, in Abbostford, where they meet the Falcons.

The Lakers visit the Delta Flyers, Saturday; and the Richmond Sockeyes, Sunday.

Vernon leads the Interior Division with 58 points, 16 more than the second place Kelowna Packers. But, the Lakers are involved in a much tougher race for first place overall in the BCJHL.

Delta, which leads the Coastal Division, has 57 points and the red-hot Sockeyes are also within striking distance with 51 points.

Lakers' Head Coach Ernie Gare said his club must win at least twice this weekend to maintain top spot. "If we can stay away from penalties and injuries, we'll do well this weekend," Gare said. "At full strength, we can play with anyone."

In Thursday's lone BCJHL game, Greg Schulte scored his fourth goal of the night 18 seconds into overtime to give the Salmon Arm Tigers a 7-6 win over the Packers, in Kelowna.

The Tigers came back from a 3-1 first-period deficit and took a 5-4 lead going into the third frame.

Brad Neumeier added a pair of goals for Salmon Arm while Wayne Kirbyson scored a single.

Jamie Kurki, Mike Kasubuchi, Len Jorgensen, Don Burke, Craig Gustasfson and Brian Lofroth did the scoring for Kelowna.

Salmon Arm goaltender Garvin Weber stopped 35 shots while Tony Hildebrand made 26 saves for Kelowna.