KENDALLS KORNER

U.S. schools want Lakers



by
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The face of tier two junior 'A' hockey has changed drastically in the past decade.

Since American universities started actively recruiting Canadian teenagers in the late-1970's, tier two loops, such as the B.C. Junior Hockey League, have been able to offer their prospects the option of combining hockey with education.

While the majority of young hockey stars still dream of playing tier one junior hockey and then going on to pro, the tier two leagues now provide an alternative.

Penticton was the first BCJHL team to take advantage of using the potential of U.S. college scholarships to lure top midget stars.

Their slick recruiting methods netted the Knights dozens of top college prospects including Brett Hull, Ian Kidd, and Joe Murphy. The ultimate result was a national championship in 1986.

With the departure of Head Coach Rick Kozuback, who accepted a coaching position with a U.S. college, Penticton's recruiting program has suffered in the past two seasons. But, the Vernon Lakers have picked up right where the Knights left off.

Five members of the 1986-87 edition of the Lakers are now playing hockey in the U.S. on scholarships. And Vernon Head Coach Ernie Gare predicts as many as nine of his current players may obtain scholarships for the 1988-89 season.

"Three of our players are already committed to schools next year," Gare said. "And another six have been invited to visit, or are talking with, American universities."

Winger Jamie Steer (Michigan Tech), winger Mike Barkley (Maine), and centre Dallas Drake (Northern Michigan) have decided where they will spend their next four winters.

Defenceman Chad Biafore will visit the campus of Chicago-Illinois next week and winger Dane Jackson is at Michigan Tech this weekend.

Among the other Lakers who have caught the eye of American universities are: goalie Glen Fry, Northern Michigan; winger Mark Greyeyes, Alaska-Fairbanks; defenceman Phil Soukoroff, Colorado College, Providence, and North Dakota; and winger Ian Alger, Alaska-Anchorage.

The defection of up to nine players to the college ranks creates a mammoth rebuilding project for Gare and his staff.

"We realize that if we are going to work with the colleges, we'll have to rebuild every season," Gare said. "But, if we establish a good relationship with the colleges, a number of talented kids will want to come to Vernon . . . and it will be easier to recruit.

"Hopefully, we'll get some players to stay two years, but the really talented ones will only stay one season."

By cultivating their relationship with the American schools, the Lakers are guaranteeing us entertaining hockey every winter.