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Back to basics for Lakers



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About a hundred years ago they learned something about shootouts that rendered them obsolete forevermore. When both sides get all their guns blazing you have the same chance of shooting yourself in the foot as you do of gunning down the other side. If Doc Halliday and the boys were alive today they'd be able to tell you the same thing I'm sure.

Wednesday night it was the scene at the OK Corral all over again — deja vu all over again as Yogi Berra used to say — two teams with all their guns blazing, 19 goals scored in all. Generally the rule of thumb in these situations is that the last team to get a shot on net generally wins the game.

So far that fact has remained true to form as well. In the second game of this B.C. Junior Hockey League final I had a chance to catch up with the irrepressible Al Paterson who used to pen a column in these pages titled "Ask Al". Or, as we kidded around here, it was more along the lines of "Who Asked Al?".

At any rate, Paterson is now the Sports Editor of the Kelowna Capital News and has been busy keeping Kelowna hockey fans in touch with the goings on of this particular series.

The Big Guy (all 5'3" of him) suggested after the Lakers had just won the second game of the best-of-seven series that a loss might be good for them.

A loss? I questioned. What could possibly be the good of losing a game. Hell, when you only have to win four games to take the series why not get it all over with as soon as possible?

But the wise little one further suggested that the Vernon team was apparently developing a sloppy attitude about winning and that perhaps they were coming to expect it more than simply work for it. Therefore, Al reasoned, a loss night shake them up enough to put them back in touch with reality.

Now that they have finally lost a playoff game, I can actually see the logic in Paterson's suggestion. Maybe it was the best thing that could have happened at this stage of the playoffs.

Considering that the Lakers still have a 3-1 lead and more or less a stranglehold on the Sockeyes, it's not as though they need be overly concerned that the final outcome is in jeopardy.

In the first three games, particularly games one and three, it has been apparent that Richmond doesn't belong in the same building with the Lakers. In spite of the win Wednesday night that fact won't change. Maybe that win will offer a spark of new life to the Sockeyes but all it means is that the next game might be a little tougher for the Lakers and that they'll have to put in a full 60 minutes on the ice instead of opting to celebrate a win 10 minutes before it becomes official.

Another valuable lesson they can pick up from the loss is that when you get this far in the playoff season you can't possibly afford to underestimate your opposition regardless of how often or by how much you've beaten them in past games. The only really predictable thing about junior hockey is the fact that it can be so damn unpredictable. Every year there are teams that bite the dust along the playoff trail because they took their opponents for granted.

At the same time, you can't be too hard on a team like the Lakers for suffering a loss. After all, it was their first in 12 playoff games and it broke a chain of 22 straight wins going back to early January and regular season play. And, after a tremendously satisfying victory like the one they earned in game three at the Richmond Arena, it's probable that the club was overdue for mass attack of accumulated emotional deflation. With less than 10 minutes remaining before they would get their first BCJHL title in 17 years, the whole club suddenly panicked. What if something went wrong now they must have thought.

At this point the old Murphy's Law syndrome kicked in — whatever can possibly go wrong probably will, and it did. All you could do was feel sorry for them as they froze in terror realizing that they were all too numb with fear to do anything about what was happening.

Simply a case of buck fever I suppose.

With all that behind them, they have an opportunity to earn their league title Saturday night in front of a packed house of local hockey fans.

However, getting back to the original point, defence wins hockey games, expecially playoff games. Scoring 19 goals in a game is fun for the fans but it's no substitute for discipline.