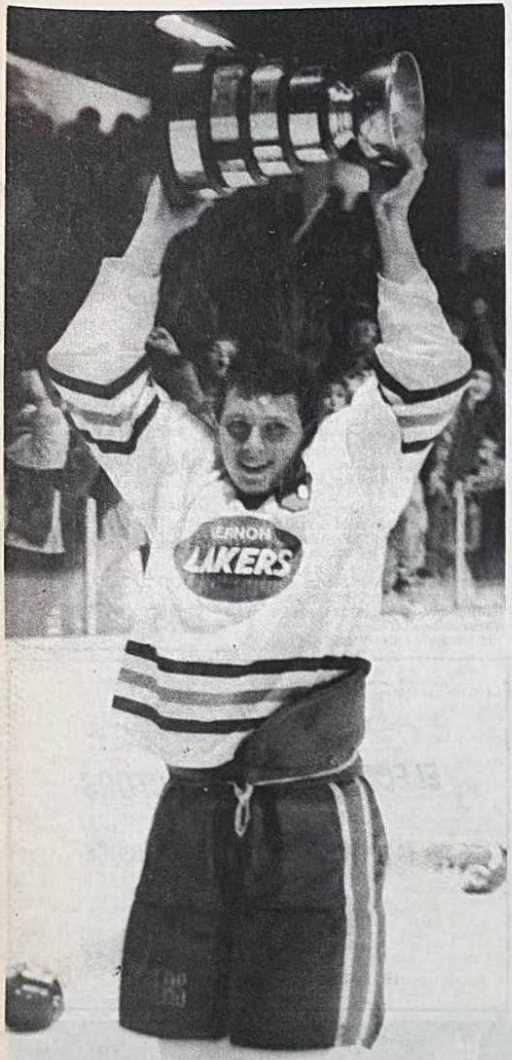

MIKE PALLER hoists the Nat Baily Cup, emblematic of BCJHL supremacy following the Vernon Lakers' 9-6 victory over the Richmond Sockeyes Saturday night at the Civic Arena. The Lakers now face the winner of the Peace-Cariboo Junior Hockey League for the right to face the Alberta representatives in the Western Canadian semi-final series.
(Daily News Photo)

LAKERS WIN BCJHL CHAMPIONSHIP

Onward and upward!

By JIM JUDD
Daily News Sports

Champagne flowed like water Saturday night as a jubilant hockey club celebrated its first league title victory in 16 years.

The Vernon Lakers staved off a rally by the Richmond Sockeyes to earn a 9-6 victory and their first B.C. Junior Hockey League Championship since 1972. The win gave the Vernon club a 4-1 decision in the best-of-seven BCJHL final series.

The flow of French bubbly could just as easily have been a flow of tears, however. The Lakers squandered a 5-1 second period lead to the visitors who finally drew even again at 7:13 of the third period.

However, just 12 seconds later rookie winger Jamie Steer potted his first of two third-period goals while defenceman Phil Soukoroff scored what proved to be the game winner and Trevor Pohl put the icing on the cake with an empty-net goal in the dying seconds.

The dramatic resurgence of the failing club late in the game sparked an enthusiastic coach Ernie Gare to admire the character and intestinal fortitude of his charges.

"The character came through on this team," said Gare, the BCJHL coach with the best winning percentage in history. "It was a character win.

"A lot of teams would have folded after blowing a four-goal lead but we hung in there," he added.

Indeed, just three nights previous, the local squad had been victimized by four late goals which gave the Sockeyes a come-from-behind win in game four. The memory of that loss weighed heavily on the team and when they surrendered their big lead once again Saturday night there might have been a lot of room for dissenters in the crowd of almost 3,000 fans on hand.

"It was nice to come right back because they had the momentum and it could have been trouble," said Steer who beat Richmond's Mike Doyle with identical goals 10 minutes apart in the third frame.

"Jamie's (Steer) sixth goal was the big one," said Gare later. "When they (Sockeyes) tied it my heart sank but we bounced right back with his quick goal."

Meanwhile, Soukoroff, who skated into the slot with authority and beat Doyle with a wrist-shot to score the game-winner, brought things into focus from the players' standpoint.

"It was nice to be up by two goals at that point but remembering what happened in Richmond we were still worried," he said. "We just didn't know.

"Nobody was celebrating until there was about 30 seconds left," he added.

By that point Pohl had already given the club a three-goal cushion and the Sockeyes, sensing that the end had finally arrived, lost the will to fight until the bitter end.

The teams battled through a defensive first period with each team missing three power-play opportunities before Ian Alger scored the lone goal of the stanza. Alger's wrist-shot found its way through Doyle's pads to give the Lakers a 1-0 lead.

The Sockeyes tied the game early in the second frame but two goals each by captain Mike Paller and Mike Barkley gave Vernon a commanding 5-1 lead by 14:19.

However, the Sockeyes closed the second period with three straight goals to close to within a goal heading into the third period.

Rick Rozecki scored a pair of goals while his defensive partner Rick Herbert added another. Barry Kress scored the goal that opened the second frame.

Keith Fair scored Richmond's tying goal in the third period and added a second tally later to make the score 7-6.

The Sockeyes, outshot 50-29 on the night, managed three power-play goals but had six extra chances thanks to the officiating.

Following the game the two teams lined up and shook hands before Interior Division Vice-President VERN DYE presented MIKE PALLER and his teammates with the Moet Cup, emblematic of BCJHL supremacy.

The club will have 12 days off before they face the winner of the Peace-Cariboo Junior Hockey League in a best-of-three series. That series, between Prince George and Grande Prairie, Alta. is currently tied 1-1.

Vernon Daily News | **sports**
Editor — DON KENDALL



VERNON LAKERS' captain Mike Paller (19) dumps Richmond Sockeyes' leading scorer Barry Kress (22) along the boards in the Vernon end zone during action Saturday night. Kress managed to score once but Paller, who scored twice, and his teammates hammered out a dramatic 9-6 victory to win the B.C. Junior Hockey League Championship series four games to one.
(Daily News Photo)

SPORTS BRIEFS

Richmond too strong for Vernon juveniles

Vernon Coca Cola Juvenile reps gave it their best shot but they were simply outmatched by Richmond which swept two straight games from the local club in the provincial juvenile semi-final series on the weekend. "They've got a hell of a team," said coach Jim Sparrow after Richmond defeated his team 10-5 and 17-2. Scott Cameron scored twice in the first loss with singles from Darcy Quir-