Lis and Gare built team



by
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Hockey fans in Richmond really believed they had a duplicate team to the one which won the national junior A hockey championship last year so you can imagine their astonishment when a relatively unknown team from the Interior walked into town and kicked their butts last week.

Not that there were an awful lot of fans on hand at either of the BCJHL championship series games that took place there, but those who were in the stands were awfully impressed with what they saw in the Lakers. In fact, even after the Sockeyes had somehow managed to overcome a three-goal lead in game four and stave off elimination, most of the locals I spoke with believed their own team only had a slim-to-non-existent chance of ever beating the Lakers back in Vernon.

Obviously most of them weren't too surprised, then, when they woke up Sunday morning and learned that their Sockeyes were on the way home with their heads a bit lower than when they had departed the Lower Mainland community.

The one question directed at me during those two evenings in Richmond was about where these players had come from. Everyone naturally assumed that they must have all been former major junior players much like the Sockeyes of last season, and the current edition.

I met with astonishment when they learned through this scribe that not only was there but one member of the Vernon team who had played in the major junior ranks and that only five members of the club were 20-year olds.

It also only occurred to me when I began listing their previous places of employment that I realized the skilful way in which Ernie Gare and Mel Lis had put together one of the best junior clubs in the league without having to resort to buying major junior expatriates.

Trevor Pohl, the lone major junior man on theclub, was the most recent addition, having left the Portland Winter Hawks after a season and a half in the Western Hockey League. Mike Paller, who wore the "C" for the club all season, came this way via the doormat Abbotsford Falcons. Glen Fry was traded to the Lakers from the Richmond Sockeyes while Keith Chase and Ian Alger, completing the list of 20-year-olds with the Lakers, were both members of the local squad last season.

Meanwhile all-star defenceman Phil Soukoroff, along with forward Mike Barkley, came to the Lakers via a trade with the Juan De Fuca Whalers. Defenceman Shawn Hendry played junior A hockey with Calgary in the AJHL.

Defencemen Chad Biafore and Wes Elliott were also members of the 1986-87 edition of the Lakers. Two members of the blueline corps — Adrian Markin, and Darcy Martini, graduated to the Junior A loop this season from the Kootenay International Junior Hockey League as did forward Dane Jackson.

League scoring champion Dallas Drake also came to the club from the Junior B league in the Kootenays. Drake was actually cut, on two occasions, when he tried to make the Vernon club in past years. Luckily for the club, he decided to give it one more chance this season. Watching Drake in motion with the puck for just one good shift is actually worth the price of admission to the game if you ask me.

Greg Parnell, one of the strongest individuals on a pair of skates in this league, along with high-scoring forward Jamie Steer were midget players last season.

Duane Dennis, a graduate of the Vernon minor hockey system, spent a season with Mount Royal College in the Alberta Colleges Hockey League before an outstanding stint in the Vernon Molson Summer Hockey League brought him to Gare's attention.

Mark Greyeyes, who never would have played junior hockey if he hadn't been given a chance in Merritt three years ago, was also with this club last year.

Backup goaltender Barry Rysz was a lowly netminder in the Peace-Cariboo Junior Hockey League as a 16-year-old last season.

Of course it takes more than just a collection of talented players to make a good hockey club. There has to be more than just good coaching and discipline too. There has to be a common fibre that bonds the 20 players together and makes them want to win for the sake of the team and for the sake of themselves.

It took Soukoroff to put the common thread that bonds this team into perspective. The speedy blueliner had no trouble putting his finger on the common catalyst.

"Nobody on this team has ever been on a winner," explained Soukoroff, who scored the game-winning goal in game five to give the Lakers the BCJHL title for the first time in 16 years.

"Me and Barks (Barkley) got traded here so we're really happy but everybody here is part of the team . . . and we're a family."