REPLACEMENT GOALIE

Veteran joins Lakers

Goaltender Willie Popp has joined the Vernon Lakers for the remainder of the junior hockey playoff season.

Popp, 20, starred for the Richmond Sockeyes during the 1987-88 campaign. He replaces rookie goalie Barry Rysz who was suspended indefinitely, for personal reasons, earlier this week.

The Lakers applied to the B.C. Amateur Hockey Association for the services of a replacement netminder and received approval, Friday, to use Popp.

"We're extremely happy to have Popp join us," said Lakers' General Manager Mel Lis. "He is an excellent goalie . . . and a great competitor."

Popp spent four years in the tier one ranks, including the 1986-87 season when he played with the Oshawa Generals. With the Sockeyes, he posted the lowest goals against average in the B.C. Junior Hockey League's Coastal Division. However, he suffered a broken wrist in late-February and missed all 15 of Richmond's playoff games.

"He is ready to go now," Lis said. "He has been practicing on the Coast for more than a week and he'll be at our practice on Sunday."

Lis said Glen Fry will continue to be Vernon's number one netminder. Fry combined with Rysz to earn the Forslund Memorial Trophy, emblematic of the best goals against average in the league.

"But Popp gives us some insurance," Lis said. "If Fry gets injured, we have a great goalie ready to replace him."

The Lakers travel to the home of the Peace Cariboo League champion for the best-of-three provincial final series, which starts next Friday.

KENDALLS KORNER

Lakers representing Canada's best league



by
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The Vernon Lakers have earned the right to defend the reputation of the B.C. Junior Hockey League.

When the Lakers defeated the Richmond Sockeyes in the BCJHL championship series, they burst into the national spotlight. Vernon now goes on to represent Canada's premier tier two hockey league in the Centennial Cup playdowns.

Over the past five years, the BCJHL has amassed an incomparable record.

The first stop for the Lakers will be the provincial finals, against the Peace Cariboo League champions, April 8-10.

The best-of-three series is considered more of an inconvenience than a confrontation.

"I'm disappointed that we have to play them," said Lakers' General Manager Mel Lis. "They don't deserve to be called a junior 'A' league.

"If we beat them, we'll only have two days to get over to Calgary or Edmonton to start the next series."

And everyone, with the possible exception of the Peace Cariboo players, expects the Lakers to knock off the northern champs. Since 1983, when the Peace Cariboo and BCJHL champions started meeting in the provincial finals, the BCJHL titleist is unbeaten in 10 games.

The BCJHL's record at the interprovincial level is almost as impressive.

During the past five years, the BCJHL has iced two national and two Western Canadian champions.

The league's rise to the top started in 1983 when the Abbotsford Flyers reached the Canadian final, where they lost to York, Ont. You may recall that Vernon minor hockey graduate Kevin Poirier was a member of that powerful Abbotsford club.

The following year, the Langley Eagles won the B.C.-Alberta series before losing to the Weyburn Red Wings in the Western Canada final.

In 1985, the Penticton Knights won their first of two straight BCJHL titles. The Knights lost to Orillia, Ont. in the national final, but they avenged that defeat by capturing the Centennial Cup in 1986.

Then, Richmond gave the BCJHL back-to-back national champions last May.

The Lakers have a long way to go to equal the feat accomplished by the '86 Knights and the '87 Sockeyes, but they have the horses to carry the load. And they have the honor of their league to defend.