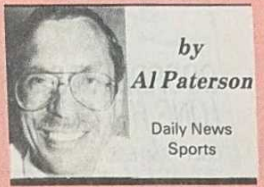
THE VIEW FROM HERE

Hello Vernon — it's good to be back



by
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Sports

Boy, it's great to be back.

All those nasty rumors about me, I assure you, are untrue. In Jim Judd's column recently he described me as Rambo II. He described me as "fair, tough, but impartial, a guy who tells it like it is, somebody who makes people mad at him always."

The only part he got right was the bit about people getting mad at me.

The first guy to phone and welcome me back was Mel Lis, Vernon Lakers owner. I appreciated the call but I know what he really wanted. Great to have me, but you won't write anything bad about us, will you old buddy?

Not a chance, Mel.

If you play like horse pucky I will say that. It's the only way I know.

I've been kicked out of many dressing rooms and off team buses during the 14 years I have been a sportswriter. It wouldn't be a normal season if it happened any other way.

One thing I absolutely assure every sports person in Vernon — I will never deliberately write anything about you on a personal level. It's your performance that I will grade. Some people in Vernon will like me, some will detest me. That's the way it's always been and will probably always be.

The reason I decided to come back to Vernon, besides the money, was that I like Vernon more than I like Kelowna. I have always felt Kelowna people were a little too snooty. There's too much money in Kelowna, and too many people there act like they have a lot of loot.

Vernon, on the other hand, isn't nearly as pretentious and the people here are much more down to earth.

Don't get me wrong, I met some absolutely great people in Kelowna and I have friends there. It's just that Vernon suits me more.

About the only people I take it easy on are those involved in minor sports. Those people devote their time and energy to help the little gaffers so I won't go after them unless it's really bad.

But, for those organizations which charge admission, that's fair game for guys like me. I only hope that general good manners and a sense of fair play are the rules we play by.

Here's a little inside information for you concerning this week's NHL draft. Look for several Vernon Lakers to go in the draft with Dane Jackson likely leading the way. I look for Jackson to go in the second round but he would be a first-rounder if I was an NHL general manager. The only thing Jackson lacks right now is a mean streak. He's got the size scouts look for (6'2" and 193 pounds) and he just turned 18.

If I was drafting, I would also put Dallas Drake near the top of my list. Last year Ron Delorme of the Vancouver Canucks was in town and I spoke to him at length about some guys in the Western Hockey League and also the BCJHL. I know the top two picks are Mike Modano of Prince Albert and Trevor Linden of Medicine Hat but I wouldn't be at all surprised if the Canucks used the second pick overall to take Saskatoon's Curtis Lesyshsyn. He's the one WHL rearguard right now who could step in and make an immediate contribution.

I look for Vancouver to take Lesyshyn especially if Minnesota takes Linden first overall.

Mike Barkley and Phil Soukoroff should also be selected this year off the Lakers' roster. Barkley has big league ability, judging from what I've seen, but injuries slowed him down and he had a less than spectacular playoff this past season. And Soukoroff just kept getting better every time I saw him.

What it means is that the Lakers will have to rebuild this season. Just about everybody will move on next year, either to college or WHL teams. Good thing Mel Lis has done his homework and has plenty of first-rate prospects coming to camp.

Another Vernon product who should go in this year's draft is Troy Mick. He was an absolute star last year with the Portland Winter Hawks. After you got by Dennis Holland and Mick there wasn't much on that Winter Hawk roster, yet every night Mick came to play . . . sometimes hurt. NHL scouts like that kind of thing.

As a midget, I thought Mick rode the coattails of Holland but I don't think that anymore. He is a first-rate player and a top-notch guy, too. Holland went to Detroit in the third round last year but it's anybody's guess where Mick will go this year. Doesn't matter, really, as long as you get to go to somebody's training camp.

So, there you have it. It'll be interesting to follow Saturday's draft and see how accurate my predictions are.