Future plans already in progress

VERNON HOCKEY CLUB PREPARES TO HOST NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

By AL PATERSON
Daily News Sports

The Vernon Lakers won't play host to the Centennial Cup for another two years but already the team is recruiting for 1990.

"You build for a championship every year," said Lakers owner Mel Lis. "But we also are keeping the Centennial Cup in our minds. Hopefully, the team we build this year will stick around for next year, the Centennial Cup year. Having the Centennial Cup means we should be able to attract some pretty high calibre kids who want to play on a Centennial Cup team."

This past season the Lakers won the B.C. championship and went further than any previous local team, but that isn't enough for Lis.

"We hope to go to the Centennial Cup this year," said Lis. "You want to do that every year. Last year we won B.C. and this year we want to go one step further."

As soon as word got out that Vernon will host the national Junior "A" hockey championships, Lis said his phone started ringing.

"I had three phone calls last night," he said. "Guys really want to come here to play. Even without the Centennial Cup, though, we did our homework for the coming season and we sent out about 200 invitations for kids to try out.

"We can take them from anywhere but a B.C. Junior Hockey League rule states that we can only have eight imports per year," he added. "But, once a guy plays for you a year, he no longer is classified as an import."

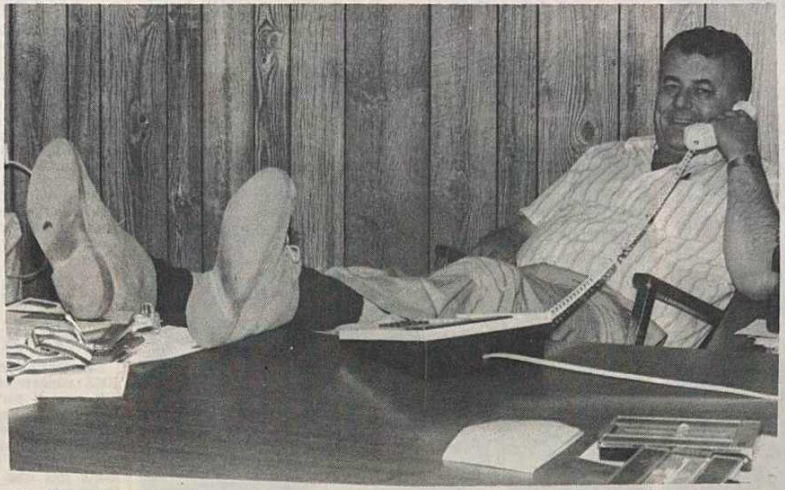
The 1988-89 Laker squad will be almost entirely different from last season's powerhouse. Lis said at least 17 changes are expected.

"That's the minimum," he says. "Hopefully, we'll be able to build a solid team this year and keep those kids together for 1990. Plus, if we can improve ourselves in a couple of areas, we'll certainly do that.

"One thing for sure, knowing we have the 1990 Centennial Cup means we'll certainly load up the farm team in Invermere," he added. "Players we're quite high on but who maybe need another year to develop, that's who we'll send to Invermere."

Lis estimates the Centennial Cup means a significant economic spinoff for the community.

"I talked to a guy in Pembroke, who hosted the Centennial Cup this year, and he told me they figured between $200,000 and $300,000 was left behind in the community," said Lis. "You're talking about hundreds of people coming here and staying for about 10 days. "And, we've got a good chance at TV coverage in 1990," he continued. "I already talked to Bernie Pascall at BCTV and he said they were very interested in it. Bernie told me they (BCTV) would look closely at picking up some Centennial Cup games. Also, CHBC said they were interested in doing something."



MEL LIS, owner and general manager of the Vernon Lakers, has reason to smile these days. His team, one of the most successful in Vernon history, is preparing to host the Centennial Cup in 1990 and the BCJHL All-star game this coming season.

(Daily News Photo)

Vernon outbid Red Deer, Alta. for the right to host the national championship but Lis admits it wasn't even his idea to go for the prestigious event.

"Actually, Fred Page (BCAHA former president) told me to go for it," said Lis. "Everybody had a little input. Fred Page and Vern Dye talked to me and said I should go after it. I thought it would be a lot of hard work.

"The budget is about $200,000," he added. "We had to convince the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association that we could generate enough support to cover that kind of expenditure. You're looking at about $50,000 for air fares alone. Then there's hotels, food, and everything else."

Teams will be coming from the Maritimes, the winners of Ontario/Quebec, Manitoba/Sask. and Alberta/B.C. plus the host team. If Vernon wins the Alberta/B.C. finals, there will be only four teams in the 1990 Centennial Cup.

The Vernon Centennial Cup committee will be chaired by John Johnson of Kelowna, a retired RCMP officer and former president of the BCJHL.

"John will do a great job," said Lis. "He has the time, he's good with people and he's a hard worker. Having him is a big plus for us."

Assisting Johnson with the project is Lakers' head coach Ernie Gare, Mel Lis, Lis' wife Elaine, and two more people to be named later.

"We'll get a tune-up by hosting the BCJHL all-star game this year," said Lis. "That experience will help us organize the Centennial Cup. I'm confident we will do a fine job and put on a good show."

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