Laker prospects impress

TALENT BETTER THAN LAST YEAR SAYS GARE

Vernon Lakers head coach Ernie Gare says the level of talent at training camp this season is superior to what was at camp last year.

"I think the overall level of talent is a little better than last year," said Gare. "There are some real good prospects, especially in the '72 group" (those born in 1972).



ERNIE GARE

While saying it is too early to start singling out players, this is only day three of the rookie camp, Gare says he is happy with the way things are going so far.

"Yesterday (Wednesday) we did some fitness testing, evaluation drills and skill development," said Gare. "Then last night we had our first scrimmage and there was good intensity in that."

Today and Friday there will be more of the same as the rookie camp winds down and the Lakers head for main camp Tuesday.

"We'll take what we feel are the top 10 to 15 players to our main camp," said Gare. "Most of the people we wanted to come here, about 90 per cent of the prospects we were after, are here."

Gare said local players will be given every opportunity to make the team this season.

"Actually, they'll get maybe a little more of an equal opportunity because they are local," said Gare. "If we have a local kid who has the ability to play at this level we certainly want to give him every opportunity to do so."

Most of the local kids trying out for the team this season are in the 1971 group (17 year olds) and Gare says they are "holding their own" so far.

The Lakers are searching for goaltenders to replace Glenn Fry and Barry Rycz and Gare says a couple of older goalies are looking good in the early going.

"It's too early to start naming names but generally, I am happy with the level of talent I see out there," he said. "There are definitely some real good prospects out there."

(Daily News Photo)

JUDD'S JOURNAL

New rules will be put to test



by Jim Judd
Daily News Sports Editor

One way or another Bruce Allison is going to forge a name for himself in the anals of amateur hockeydom.

It's a matter now of waiting to see if his first acts of governing the BCJHL pay dividends or leave the league with a bad taste in its mouth and egg on their faces.

Allison introduced some measures that may prove immensely popular to many while also being equally unpopular with others — particularly the owners of certain junior "A" franchises within the league.

The BCJHL's newest president decreed that the number of overage players finding their way to the Junior "A" ranks in this league was going to meet with some restrictions beginning this season.

This isn't to suggest that the number of overage juniors on any one club is to be reduced however. What it means is that no more than three 20-year olds from the Western Hockey League can be imported to bolster a team's lineup.

If the overage players start the year and play the entire season with their respective BCJHL clubs then they'll be exempt from the ruling.

Currently, BCJHL teams can have as many as 15 20-year olds in their lineup. Many teams, particularly those in the BCJHL Coastal Division, often waited until late in the season before air-dropping any number of players into their lineup. Of course it not only gave them a distinct edge come playoff time, but it also meant that nobody knew for certain who would eventually win the division. Early season play meant little if nothing to the eventual outcome.

The trouble with the system was that not all teams could afford the process. Let's face it, you don't entice an overage player out of the WHL and into a Junior "A" camp simply by promising to buy him a new pair of skates. Sometimes the payoffs were exorbitant. In fact there are horror stories that abound concerning these transactions but that's a whole other story too.

Most of the clubs within the B.C. league haven't got the financial resources to duplicate the process which meant that the rich got richer and the poor just . . . well, you know the old story.

Allison, however, has imposed a restriction which should, in essence, at least ensure teams that begin the season strongly, will maintain a reasonable chance of finishing the year in similar fashion. This, in turn, helps to bolster the players' confidence and it helps to keep the fans in the rinks a little later in the season.

On the other hand, none of the other Junior "A" leagues across the country have made any similar move which means that come Centennial Cup time, the BCJHL representatives may be left out in the cold. Of course, there's never any guarantee that the national championship belongs to the team which has the most over-age refugees from Canadian major junior leagues.

For instance, last season the Notre Dame Hounds won the coveted Centennial Cup with players 18 years of age and younger on their roster exclusively. Mind you, there's a story there that has never come to light as well but as I mentioned previously, that's another story.

More applaudable than this move, was the promise by Allison that he would personally see to it that the league cleans up its act, i.e. taking away theviolence and making way for a better brand of hockey.

It's too bad that Allison hadn't been around last season when the Vernon Lakers swept through the league with their brand of extremely fast, high-tech hockey. There was no room for anything but good clean hockey as many of their opponents found out.

It must have become very apparent to the teams they disposed of that theirs was the brand of hockey that would rule the future of the game in the BCJHL. In order to be competitive, teams will have to rethink their style more along the lines of the team that Mel Lis and Ernie Gare constructed from ashes last season.

However, Allison is determined to remove more of the chippy play and stickwork from the game and like I said, his attitude should be applauded.

But, we've heard this very tune before. Two years ago the league made moves to clean up its act and the result was a dramatic increase in the number of infractions whistled down by the officials. At least that was the case early in the season.

By the time the year wore on, less and less was heard of the idea until, by playoff time, it was business as usual around the league. The tough teams got away with murder and the smaller, quicker teams paid the price for their naivety.

So, what it all boils down to is that neither of the acts brought about by Allison will effect the Vernon Lakers too much. They've already got their sights set on bigger and better things for next spring and it just so happens that their plans fall in keeping with Allison's newest guidelines anyway.

As for the rest of the league, well time will tell if the measures will be fondly remembered or if it will simply be business as usual by March.