Merritt suffering withdrawal pains

The Merritt Centennials are suffering from withdrawal pains.

The withdrawal in this case is other teams taking the best Merritt players. This week the Kamloops Blazers inked two of last year's star performers off the Merritt squad, left winger Paul Kruse, son of Centennials owner Hans Kruse, and slick playmaking centre Cal McGowan. And Chris Kaban is still with the Spokane Chiefs, Brent Thurston is still in Victoria trying to make the Cougars and Moose Jaw Warriors are still looking at Derry Menard.

So, Hans Kruse says his team will be at less than full strength Friday night when they make their visit of the season to Vernon Civic Arena to take on the high-flying Lakers, 5-1 winners last time the two teams met.

"But that doesn't mean we don't have any players," said Kruse. "Just that it's frustrating not being able to use the kids you've developed. Al Rushton is back, and he's playing well, our goaltender Belland is a good one, we have Bill Burke back and Scott Didman, he's a little guy but he works hard and he's a real sparkplus out there. We're in a situation now where we have to wait a couple of months and see who's coming back, if any of them do."

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While other skiers get introduced to the new sport in this area, the two enthusiasts will already have moved on to bigger and better things in the field. Both Usher and Bliss plan to leave soon for Whistler Mountain near Vancouver where snowboarding is taken much more seriously and where the two can engage in some healthy snow-baord competitions this winter to hone their skills and perhaps even win some prize money in the process.

"The competitions don't actually