

Ill-fated Lakers hit longest skid of season

Wednesday, 15 December 2010 - 2:19pm

By Dan Falloon, Staff writer

The Fort Frances Lakers will admit they didn't really put in the effort to win any of the three games on their slate over the past week. But a couple of key calls went against them, so it's not hard to picture a scenario in which the local Junior 'A' squad came away with four points in the standings instead of just one.

On Friday night in Thunder Bay, the Lakers (19-10-2) blew leads of 1-0 and 2-1 in the third period against the host North Stars en route to a 3-2 loss. But Colten Brûlé's game-winner with 52 seconds left in regulation time came off a rush where a North Star was "two, three feet" over the blueline, Lakers' head coach Wayne Strachan contended.

"If that's not offside, then I must be mistaken," he said.

"Referees are only human and they do make mistakes, but it's unfortunate that a game has to end that way," Strachan added, through stressing the North Stars had dominated play.

Strachan acknowledged he was livid with the call, leading to his ejection.

"It didn't sit very good with me, and obviously I went a little overboard," he admitted.

"But I'm going to stand up for my players when something's not fair."

Then on Monday night, the visiting Duluth Clydesdales (7-19-2) caught a break when goalie Jeff Dunaisky knocked the net out of position just before

a Tyler Stevenson shot beat him in the second period.

Duluth went on to win that game 5-4 in overtime.

In recent days, the net on the home bench side of the ice has been prone to being dislodged, including in the Lakers' previous home games and a Muskie girls' home game.

On Monday, the net had been bumped from its position a handful of times during the period before the disallowed marker.

Assistant captains Matt Caulfield and Morgan McNeill acknowledged the couple of tough breaks were tough to take, but stressed the importance of a short memory.

"You can't control what the refs do, obviously, so we've just to keep fighting through it all the time," Caulfield said.

"Friday night, it was a tough pill to swallow," added McNeill. "We just have to forget about it."

Strachan downplayed the effect the tough breaks had on the team, noting they responded with a goal shortly after Stevenson's was called off and also were beneficiaries of good bounces on goals by Caulfield and Henry Gutierrez against Duluth.

But they only had themselves to blame for the Clydesdales' equalizer and game-winner.

"In the first period, we caught a lucky break and were fortunate to be [down] 2-1," said Strachan. "[Then] we go up maybe on a lucky goal and maybe someone was on our side when that happened.

"Defensive blunders cost us the fourth and the fifth goal," he added. "We haven't taken care of our own end at certain times and our opponents have capitalized."

Ill-fated, And offensively, the power play struggled this past week, with just two goals by McNeill in 18 attempts.

"It's hurt us the last few games," observed Strachan. "It's not that we're doing anything different.

"It's the lack of not doing what we talk about; the lack of being intense and getting pucks to the net," he stressed.

The Lakers will look to break their three-game skid—their longest of the

season—tonight in Dryden when they visit the Ice Dogs (20-12-0).

Then they'll return home for a Friday showdown against the league-leading Wisconsin (20-6-2) at 7:30 p.m. at the Ice For Kids Arena before breaking for two weeks for Christmas.

Both games will afford the Lakers' opportunities to make a charge for the league's top spot after they tumbled from first to fourth thanks to the pair of narrow road losses in Thunder Bay (3-2 on Friday night and 1-0 on Saturday).

Then on Monday night against Duluth, things didn't get off to a great start for the home side as Chris Palm beat Lakers' goalie Jameson Shortreed high to the blocker side 5:15 into the game.

The goal came with just six seconds left in a penalty to Lakers' forward Dan Smith, who was playing against Duluth for the first time since being swapped for Mike Jourdain on Dec. 1.

Jourdain had a hand in the Clydesdales' second goal, earning an assist when Joe Nelson swung out in front of the Lakers' net and sniped a shot to Shortreed's right at 12:31.

The assist was Jourdain's first point in three games with Duluth.

The Lakers got one back shortly after when Blake Boaz forced a turnover in the corner to the left of Duluth goalie Jeff Dunaisky. The puck came out to Matt Caulfield, who ripped a shot high to Dunaisky's glove side for his fourth of the season at 15:07.

But Duluth restored its two-goal cushion just 46 seconds into the middle frame when Dane Morin whacked a close-range shot over the line.

After Stevenson's goal was disallowed because the net had become dislodged, Jace Baldwin took a pretty cross-crease feed from Jordan Sinclair at 14:28 and slammed the puck past Dunaisky.

The tally was Baldwin's 11th.

The Lakers then knotted things at 3-3 before the period was through when McNeill wristed a shot from the blueline that hit a Duluth skate and went into the net at 18:57.

The goal, McNeill's third, came during a five-on-three advantage.

The Lakers looked poised to complete the comeback midway through the

third as Caulfield scooped up a puck to Dunaisky's right and tossed it towards the net, where it banked in off of Henry Gutierrez.

Gutierrez's ninth of the season put the Lakers up 4-3 at 10:48.

The lead was short-lived, however, as Clydesdales' captain Tom Paine was allowed to get behind coverage, collecting a pass from Nelson and finding the top corner glove-side on Shortreed.

Knotted at 4-4, the game went to overtime, when Duluth's Julius Tamasy's wrister from the right circle beat Shortreed high and gave Duluth its first win over the Lakers in six tries.

Shortreed made 25 saves while Dunaisky stopped 33 shots for the expansion Clydesdales.

McNeill and Boaz netted the Lakers' goals in Friday night's loss in Thunder Bay.

Goalie Tyler Ampe played both games against the North Stars, making 62 saves combined.

