



Bournemouth Stags 6, Lee Valley Lions 5

THE Lee Valley Lions suffered their first defeat this season by the narrowest of margins at the small Bournemouth ice rink on Sunday.

Despite a gutsy performance in the third period the Lions lost by a solitary goal, but they gained consolation from the performance of Finnish goal-minder Vesa Pennanen, who was brilliant throughout the match.

It was a tough baptism for Pennanen and Americans Will Fish and Bill Watson, who have been confirmed as the three Lions imports for this season.

They had to play at a rink far smaller than they are used to, but gave determined performances and blended with the team quite well.

Lions coach Dave Wurthman and manager Mike Smith had to make the difficult decision of releasing Jukka Krohonen, when the time came to pick the allotted three imports.

Said Wurthman: "I think the decision will be proved the right one in the long run. "Eventually imports will

Gutsy Lions narrowly lose

be a thing of the past, so it's important to give the English guys as much experience now as we can. Will and Bill have coaching experience and they help our English players. I was pleased with them at Bournemouth. Bill can play better, he's got a lot more to offer."

The Lions started well and took an early lead when Freddie Sandford hit a fine goal after good work by Watson.

It was soon two as Fish unleashed a long range shot which crashed into the net.

But complacency may have crept into the Lions players because the home side hustled their way back into the match.

Strengthened by their new import McNally, Bournemouth managed to completely turn events to lead 6-2 midway through the second period.

A nightmare spell for the Lions was also notable for the large number of penalties in a game which was never dirty.

Fred Sandford (2), Bergin, Murray (3), Alan Sandford, Williams, Fish and Pennanen all served penalties, as did several Bournemouth players.

But despite this and the small rink the goals didn't flow, and the Lions began to claw their way back into the

Ice hockey with Paul Newman

game slowly, but surely.

Rapley hit a good solo effort and seconds later Fred Sandford made it four with a fine back flick.

The fit again Ronnie Austin made it five as the game entered the last 20 minutes and the stage was set for yet another thrilling finale in this sport of non-stop excitement.

The chances went begging as both sides made a last ditch effort to beat the two in-form goal-minders.

And as the seconds ticked away, so did the Lions hopes of pulling the match out of the fire.

But there were no com-

plaints at the end of a fine encounter.

Added Wurthman: "That lapse in the second period cost us the game, but the guys played really well. We felt one of the Bournemouth goals should have been disallowed because the puck hit the netting high above our goal and we thought it was dead — but you can't win them all. We've never played on a rink that small before, but we were always improving and outplayed them in the third.

"We're under a lot of pressure and people expect us to win, but we haven't

been together too long and we're playing against experienced sides.

"It will take time to gain experience and we will just have to be patient."

Bournemouth had 69 shots on goal during the game and the Lions had 44 — a statistic which proves how well Pennanen and his opposite number played to keep the score to 6-5.

The Lions play their last friendly before the big League opener on Sunday when they entertain Brighton Royals.

Brighton are a second division side, but are favourites to gain promotion this year and should contribute to a good game at Lee Valley at 7pm.

● Stand by for the Lee Valley Lions cheer leaders. Led by regular supporters Tracy Davies and Natalie O'Neil, they will make their debut before the first home League game against Richmond on October 14.

LIONS coach Dave Wurthman will miss this week's game against Brighton.

He is travelling to Richmond to watch the home side tackle Grimsby.

This game is particularly significant for the Lions because Richmond and Grimsby are their first two opponents in the first division.

The league programme starts next week. The Lions travel to Grimsby next Saturday (October 13) and are at home to Richmond the following day — a big crowd is expected for that encounter.

This Sunday at Lee Valley, ex-Lions star John Gordon may act as coach in Wurthman's absence.

For a full preview on the league opening, with pictures, see next week's Guardian-Gazette.