

SPORTSCENE IN THE FIRST DIVISION

Lions off to a flyer

Lee Valley Lions 8, Bournemouth Stags 5

THE Lee Valley Lions started the new ice hockey season with a good win on Sunday — but for two periods the match looked to be ending in disappointment.

An intriguing encounter was led by Bournemouth for much of the time, but the Lions struck form in the last 20 minutes and cracked five goals of the highest quality in the third period to increase optimism for the forthcoming first division season.

The Lions displayed three of their on trial imports for the first time in this friendly, but were stopped from giving their others a chance by the league.

In the event they weren't needed because new Finnish goal-minder Vesa Pennanen and American outfield players Will Fish and Bill Watson made excellent debuts and are now favourites to seal the three import places.

The Lions got off to a sluggish start against a team who have played twice already this season, losing narrowly on both occasions to premier divi-

sion outfits Nottingham and Southampton.

Forward Darrell Lipsey, who was offered to the Lions but cost too much money, scored a long range goal which seemed to go through Pennanen.

But Lions manager Mike Smith insisted that the Finnish first division stopper was unsighted and wasn't at fault.

Bennett scored the Stags' second goal before defenceman Fish marked his debut with a fine goal which augers well for the future.

Parrish made it three for Bournemouth in the second period before forward Watson also got on the scoresheet to pull one back for the Lions.

Pleasing

Another pleasing aspect of the second period was the way the Lions stopped Bournemouth scoring when they were down to the outfield players for 73 seconds because of penalties. The defence was generally very tight and Fish can only add to the already strong Lions defence.

Coach Dave Wurthman, not playing this season to create three import

places, said: "We are aiming for a more defensive style of hockey this season. That doesn't

Ice hockey with Paul Newman

mean we're going to copy the old Arsenal type of soccer, but we want to be tighter and we don't want to concede more than three goals a game. An ideal scoreline in our matches will be 6-3 to us and I'm sure that the hockey will be more interesting if we can achieve that."

The familiar Lions roar emerged from the crowd in the final period as the home side stamped their authority on the proceedings.

Ron Austin equalised after going close on two previous occasions and Dave Rapley began to show the form everyone knows he's capable of by hitting the fourth.

In a flurry of activity, Simon Murray, Rapley again, Fred Sandford and Geoff Williams scored for the Lions while Bournemouth pulled two goals back and had several more chances, but Pennanen was excellent throughout and made

some superlative catches and great stops.

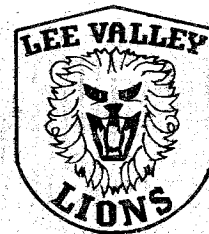
Said Mike Smith after the game: "That will do

for openers, but we were not quite good enough. Bournemouth are not one of the best teams in the first division and on that showing neither are we. But we're on our way now and I'm reasonably happy. The goal-minder kept us in the game for long spells and Fish looks very good. He lost a contact lense out there and played with only one for the third period, which can't be bad."

Added Wurthman: "We're a young side and we had the legs to come through in the final period. Vesa is premier division standard and I was very pleased with Will and Bill."

The other on trial imports, Robert Graham, Richard Steeves and Yukka Kronen may play at Deeside tomorrow (Saturday) in another friendly.

But Graham's future with the club is in doubt.



He may have to return to America because of business commitments.

Said Smith: "He's very hot and he's like a whip-pet in practice, but we may lose him."

Unknown

North Wales side Deeside are something of an unknown quantity because they've changed their set-up, but they are supposed to have three good new imports and will provide a tough test for the Lions on Saturday.

A coach is running for supporters, leaving at 11am from the Lea Bridge Road rink. Price is £8, ring the centre for full details.

There is no hockey this Sunday and there will be skating at the rink.

The Lions travel to Bournemouth for a return friendly a week on Sunday.