

First division here we come

THE Lee Valley Lions roar into the first division this weekend with two exciting games in prospect.

History is made tomorrow (Saturday) when they travel to Grimsby for their opening League game against the Buffaloes and Sunday sees the London showdown between Richmond and Lee Valley.

And there is a mood of confidence in the Lions camp as the big day draws closer.

"The only thing I'm worried about is the travelling," said Lions coach Dave Wurthman. "Otherwise I'm fairly confident."

Wurthman travelled to Richmond on Sunday to watch the Flyers play Grimsby — but left after two periods because the game was disappointing. Grimsby won 8-6.

He said: "The pace of the game was so slow it was pathetic and there was hardly any noise from the crowd."

The Buffaloes are a young side and have the advantage of playing home games on the tiny Grimsby ice rink — something the Lions will have to conquer tomorrow.

They are also totally English, with the possible exception of Robert Graham, the whippet-like Canadian forward who trialled with the Lions in pre-season. He was going to return home because of business commitments, but the lure of cash from Grimsby may persuade him to stay.

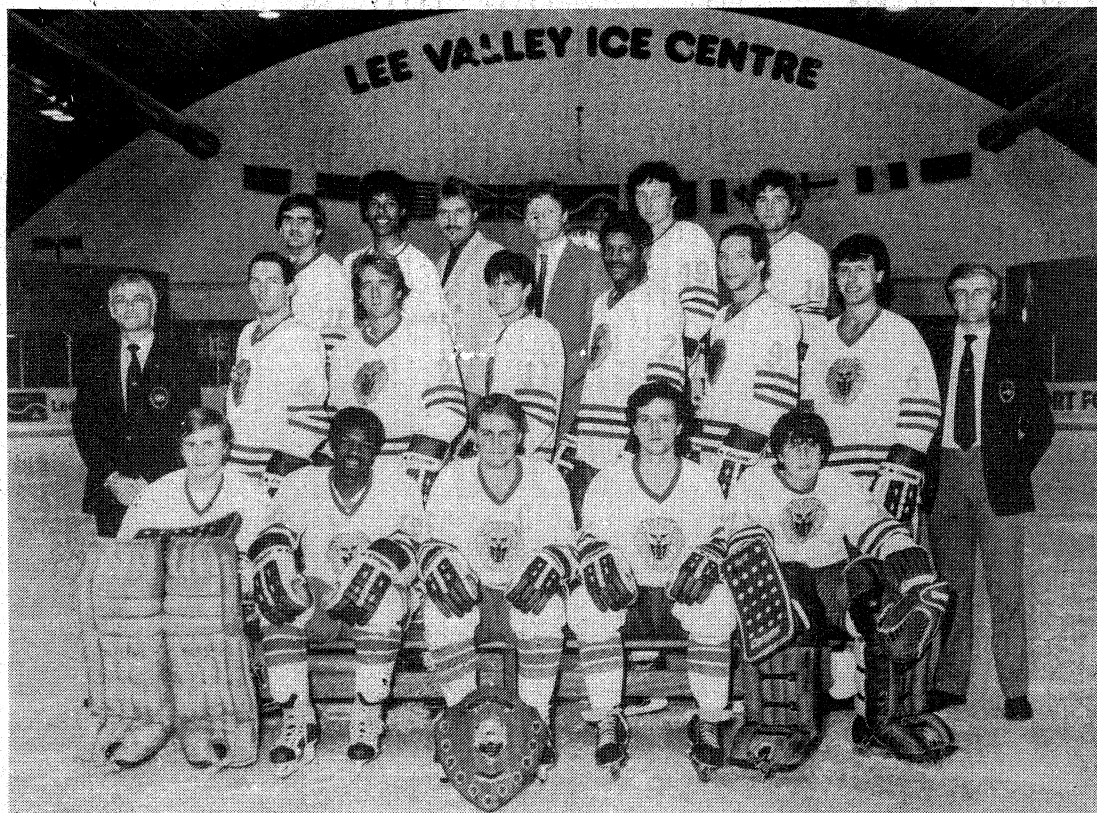
Said Wurthman: "They are a very well organised team who have a different approach to the game. They always have somebody out wide at face-offs and are well positioned."

The two players Wurthman named as threats are Mike Kirk and Mike Sleeth.

As for Richmond, the Lions are firm favourites to take them and confirm themselves as London's second team behind the Redskins.

There is a strong rivalry in this game and several of the Lions players, like Geoff Delderfield and others, are former Richmond players.

The Flyers have Andy Nunn in goal (stand-by for some long shots) and Michael Shead on the side-



THE Lee Valley Lions — ready to go roaring into the First Division this season.

Ice hockey with Paul Newman

lines. They many also include Jukka Krohonen, who is favourite to secure third import place to play alongside fellow Finns Sammi Pennanen (Vesa's brother) and Matti Ncusiainen.

All three Richmond Finns trialled with the Lions, but all are forwards and Lee Valley needed a defender and a goal-minder as well as one forward.

The Lions are pleased with their choice of imports, but the Finns may feel they have something to prove and everything is lined up for a real corker — the match starts at 7pm. Also look out for Paul Hughes who is a ringer for Ronnie Austin in appearance.

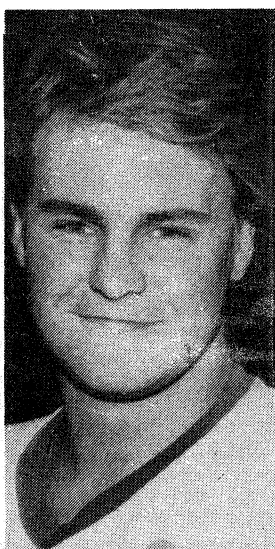
The Lions warmed up for the league campaign with an easy 19-1 win over second division challengers Brighton in a friendly on Sunday.

They showed just how big a gap there is between Lee Valley and the second division by dominating the game in every aspect and were able to give valuable ice time to several squad players to keep them in trim for their important

part in the first division proceedings.

Simon Murray didn't have a downer at all — he led the scoring with four goals, the last of which was a beauty.

American Bill Watson had his best game in a Lions shirt to date by hitting a good hat-trick and the irrepressible Geoff Williams smacked another three to lead the challenge from defence.



Everyone played their part and it seemed as though Vesa Pennanen would achieve a shut-out right up to the last period, when Brighton finally managed to score.

The other Lions scorers were Ron Austin (2), Will "Thumper" Fish (2), Dave Rapley (2), Freddie Sandford, Alan Sandford and Dave Petrie.

Commented Lions manager Mike Smith: "I was pleased with all the players because they showed a lot of spirit and effort. I felt sorry for Vesa, losing out on a shut-out like that, but

it was a good game. Our team spirit will help us against the stronger sides and I think Dave Rapley's team work is improving a great deal."

The Lions have signed a back up goal-minder to support Vesa Pennanen.

He is 17-year-old Paul Black, who originally comes from this area, but has spent much of his life in Canada. He now lives in Hackney and is a good prospect. If foreign goalies are banned next season, as expected, he will be a very important member of the squad.

Geoff signs for us

LEE Valley Lions captain Geoff Williams (left) joined in the goal feast at Brighton on Sunday, hitting a hat-trick of fine goals.

And his scoring spree came on the day Geoff announced a sponsorship deal with the Guardian-Gazette.

We are keen to promote sport in this area and jumped at the chance of sponsoring Geoff for this history making season — the Lions' first in the top flight. We are the first organisation to sponsor a player.

And we hope that other local companies will follow our lead by sponsoring other Lions players as they bid for success in the first division.

We are proud to support the exciting and fast developing sport of ice hockey in this area.

All the hockey news and in-depth coverage of all local sport can be found in this newspaper weekly.

Vesa — at your convenience

A LOUD chant erupted from the Lee Valley Lions supporters during an exciting ice hockey game — Ve-sa, Ve-sa came the cry.

But the Lions new Finnish goal-minder thought they were shouting obscenities at him.

Vesa Pennanen (right) is a highly talented goal-stopper who will be starring for Lee Valley between the sticks this season.

He said: "I thought they were shouting Vessa, which is Finnish for toilet — my name is pronounced a bit differently. But I love the crowd, they made me feel good at Bourne-mouth."

And Vesa is looking forward to the start of the League season — particularly Sunday's home game against Richmond.

He is staying in the same house as his brother Sammi and another Finn, Matti Ncusiainen — they both play for Richmond.

"Sammi and Matti have been told that they will beat us and they think they will," said Vesa. "But no way is that going to happen."

He is also good friends with Jukka Krohonen, the Finn who had trials with the Lions, but who may also be playing for Richmond on Sunday.

"I played for Normanit in Finland and Sammi and Jukka were also in the team," said Vesa. "They scored most of our goals and Jukka was a great player back home. I don't think he's re-produced his best form here because he hasn't had as much practice."

Vesa played at all junior levels in Finland and progressed to a premier division side, where he played for three years. He was then in the Finnish first division for two years before joining Normanit in the third.

When he was in the premier division he played against New York Rangers and the Edmonton Oilers when they toured Scandinavia. Vesa's team beat New York, but lost to Edmonton.

How he is enjoying his hockey in England.

"The standard is much better than I thought, especially Lee Valley," he said. "I'm really



enjoying it and I hope I can stay for a while. I need a sponsor though to help with my finances."

How he is grateful to Richmond goalie Dominique Magill and his family, who helped the Finns come to this country.

"Without them I wouldn't be here," he said. "We all went to Richmond originally, but they didn't want any foreign goalies and I came to Lee Valley, which I'm very glad about."

Richmond's loss is the Lions' gain.