

Gilbertson . . . California's Favorite

By HANK MASLER

In the rugged, fast, and violent world of professional hockey, only a very few players gain almost instant popularity with the fans. It usually takes a special kind of competitor to get the fans' attention and respect.

In hockey, he might be a high scoring forward, an aggressive defenseman, a good stick handler, or an exceptionally fast skater.

In the case of Stan Gilbertson, however, it appears to be a simple matter of constant hard work and hustle on the ice that makes him one of the favorites of the California Seals' fans. According to Gilbertson himself, maybe it's that type of play that the average fan can associate with.

Gilbertson's hard play paid off last year. He played the best hockey of his career, and was a terror to opponents particularly during the final quarter of the season. During the final 15 games, the left winger scored four power play goals and knocked in two game winners. He finished with an NHL personal season high of 18 goals for the year.

Gilbertson said that his late season surge was at least partly due to the team's change in management, and admitted that, "From the day Marshall Johnston and Munson Campbell took over the team, I think I was one of the most effective players. I was really working hard and playing both ends of the rink. I hope that will continue this season."

The personable winger is also well liked by fans because of the off season promotional work he's been doing in the Bay Area. This past summer, Gilbertson worked at a local hockey clinic for ten weeks, while at the same time working five weekends for the Seals at hockey clinics to help explain the rules of the game, illustrate different shots, sign autographs, show films, and answer questions.

Gilbertson, who has worked in summer clinics every year since joining the Seals in 1971, enjoys the work, but insists that,



Left Wing Stan Gilbertson . . . a familiar figure in the Bay Area. photo—S. Palmer

"We've got to sell the game on the ice. The fans want a winning team, and that's what we've got to give them."

The 6-0, 175 pounder has actually worn a Seals uniform longer than any other player. He played for the old San Francisco Seals and California Seals of the Western Hockey League in 1965-66 and 1966-67, but then moved on in the Boston organization to Vancouver and Hershey. He returned to the Bay Area when the new NHL Seals, organized in 1967, picked him in the intra-league draft of 1971.

Now in his fourth season with the Seals, Gilbertson is certain that the Seals will be able to give NHL teams a lot of trouble this year. "There's no doubt that this team is going to improve," he said, "but we're really going to have to put out in order to win. We'll have to work hard."

Gilbertson is also sure that lots of changes will have to be made in the play of last year's squad, which won only two of 39 road games. He emphasized that the team's main objective will be to cut down

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Seals' Stan Gilbertson, who scored a career high 18 goals last season, raises his stick after putting one by Chicago's Tony Esposito, as Black Hawk defenseman Keith Magnuson looks on.

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on its goals-against average, which was more than four per game last year.

In order to do that, he said, "We'll have to be more aggressive in front of our net, mainly within a 10 to 15 foot radius. The more competitive you are, the more aggressive you'll become. It's the nature of the game, and it goes hand in hand with winning."

Of course, it might be dangerous to get too aggressive as it may lead to more fights on the ice, but that doesn't seem to bother Gilby. "I go into the corner and take my medicine sometimes," he admits, "and I figure it's part of the game. But we're not out there for a boxing match. We're trying to play hockey, and that means being able to skate and having discipline."

The left winger used the Stanley Cup Champion Philadelphia Flyers as an example. "They don't win by being a bunch of fighters. Every player knows where he's supposed to be, and what he's supposed to be doing. They've got a great coach, and they're a very disciplined team."

Gilbertson also praised Seals coach Marshall Johnston as having a great rapport with the players. "He's played with us, lost with us, and worked hard with us," he said. "The players think highly of him, and I'm sure that they're happy to play for him."

One of the established American players in the NHL, Gilbertson said that the team's attitude thus far is "as good as it's ever been." There are many players who either haven't played in the NHL before, or who haven't received much ice time with other clubs, and all are anxious to play.

While he's had a fine personal record during the past three seasons with the Seals, Gilbertson has set no goals for himself this year, and in fact, wasn't very impressed with his 1973-74 season. "When you finish as far in the cellar as we did, those statistics are irrelevant," he said. "You don't pay much attention to them. All I know is that I'm tired of losing."

If the rest of the Seals play in the style of Stan Gilbertson this year, those losing seasons might just be reversed. He has proven that his hard work and hustle can not only provide fan support, but can also produce goals.