

Hodge sets fast pace

By FRANK BARRETT, Jr.
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BOSTON — In his previous five years with the Boston Bruins, winger Ken Hodge has twice scored over 40 goals and is best known for a slap shot that is one of the hardest in the National Hockey League, if not quite the most accurate.

But this season, the handsome resident of Lynnfield has charted a different course. He is using his great bulk (6-2, 225 pounds) and stamina more for finesse than sheer strength. And the results to his employers have been most pleasing.

Especially last night at the Garden when Hodge scored three goals to pace the B's to their 12th straight game without a loss, an 8-4 rout of the hapless California Seals before 15,003 onlookers.

The loosely-played triumph enabled the Bruins to move within two points of the first-place Canadiens (4-2 losers to the Buffalo Sabres), with a game in hand and stay tied with the Rangers for second place in the East, although Tom Johnson's boys also have an extra game here.

"This was not one of our classic contests," said Johnson, understanding the case. "We

seem to get a little too careless, even on Saturday night against the Flyers. We get a big lead and then seem to be waiting for the final buzzer.

"GIVE HODGE AND Marcotte (Don) credit. And I know about all that talk about Hodge's slap shot but he's pretty good around the net when he wants to be."

The rejuvenated Marcotte, whose work on the Bruins third line with rookies Gregg Shepard and Terrance O'Reilly has been immense, got the first two Boston goals while Johnny Bucyk (12th), Fred Stanfield (10th) and Fred O'Donnell (Fourth) notched the others.

Phil Esposito had two assists to run his league-leading point total to 44 on 17 goals and 27 helpers.

Eddie Johnston stopped 21 California shots (but let in three by Marshall Johnston and a fourth by Reg Leach) and now the fire is approaching for the B's.

For they visit Buffalo on Wednesday eve ("John Adams in goal," said Johnson) and confront the Rangers here on Thursday night in the latter's first appearance at the Garden this year.

"I DON'T KNOW who'll be my goalie then," said Thomas. "I'm just looking at Buffalo."

With that slick line of Gil Perreault, Rick Martin, and Rene Robert, Buffalo has been unbeatable at home (16 games) so far.

Meanwhile, the Rangers belted the Bruins, 7-1, in the clubs' lone meeting in New York last October.

"But it won't be like tonight," predicts Fred Stanfield, who got one of the Bruins' goals.

"We'll tighten up when we have to."

IN ALL, Marshall Johnston (no relation to Eddie), a 31 year-old converted defenseman (playing center for the injured Ivan Boldirev) had four points in a superb one-man show that kept the Seals in the game for about 25 minutes.

But Bucky's goal a tip-in of a Bobby Orr slap shot and was Orr brilliant in setting it up at 7:08 of the second period made it 4-2 and for all intents and purposes, sank the Seals to their 17th loss in 27 games.

The three goals raised Hodge's seasonal total to 15 in only 28 games but the 28 year-old right-winger on the Esposito, Wayne Cashman line doesn't know if the start is his best ever in the pros.

"I might have had faster starts in 1968-69 (45 goals) and 1970 (43 goals)," said the articulate Hodge, whose visage can be seen all over the TV tube these days in numerous commercials. "But I really can't remember."

While with the Black Hawks, Hodge twice accomplished the hat trick (three or more goals in a game), and with the Bruins he's now done it three times — twice in regular season fare and once in the playoffs.

AND IF YOU asked Chicago or Boston fans how he'd done it, a guaranteed reply from most of them would have been, "with his slap shot."

But not last night. Hodge's first goal on a power-play at 8:08 of the second period came in front of the Seals net when he tipped a Stanfield slap shot past California netminder Gilles Meloche.

Meloche was minding the store because the Bruins had bombarded Seals' starting goalie

Mary Edwards for three red-lighters in the first period to take a 3-2 lead.

As a long-reliever, however, Gilles was hit hard and often — for five goals.

Hodge's second goal at 9:39 of the frame was about a 10 foot slap shot from the left side. Ken had collected a nifty pass from Cashman and the only man between him and Meloche was Seals' defenseman Bob Stewart.

Quicker than a wink, Hodge-skated around Stewart and put the shot past the defenseless goaltender to boost his team to a 5-2 lead.

HIS THIRD goal was a short slap from the right side in the third stanza. "I'm closer to the net this year because we're trying to take some of the pressure off Esposito," explained Hodge. "They're really going after him and we figure if we move around in front of the net, the other team won't be able to concentrate so much on him."

Still, Ken isn't immune to cranking up his old slapper once in a while.

"It keeps the goalie honest," he smiled. The other guy who got the hat-trick, Mr. Marshall Johnston, graduated from the University of Denver in 1963 and up until the B's game had a lifetime total of three National Hockey League goals, mostly as a center.

Now, after displaying good timing and a quick shot, he has six. Oddly enough, Johnston was once the property of both the North Stars and the Canadiens and had not played defense at all in the pros until he joined the Seals last season.

"He's got a pretty good shot," says his coach Fred Glover and Eddie Johnston will testify to that.