

George Henderson, possibly the best cheerleader in the world.

"Hey, you ugly turkey. Look at me."

If you've been an opposing player facing the California Golden Seals at the Oakland Coliseum within the past couple of years, chances are you've had those remarks aimed at you.

"You ugly turkey weirdo."

It might be any Seals fan, but if you suddenly hear the loud banging of a drum coming from the same direction, your problem is solved. The screamer is George Henderson, known as "Krazy George", possibly the wildest "rebel-rouser" the National Hockey League has seen.

George, a 30-year-old high school electronics teacher living in San Jose, drives the 32 miles to Seals games as often as possible, and once he arrives, he always makes his presence felt.

With his hair in disarray, his arms flailing wildly, and his face contorted, George moves through the Coliseum crowd and leads the fans in what he calls "very short intense yells." His yells, however, are never more than three words long; they're simple and direct. "Oakland Seals" may be one, or "Go Seals Go" another, but the cheer that gets the best response is simply "Seals, ohh, ohh," as the crowd imitates the sound made by a real seal.

Krazy George, who started his antics at San Jose State University football games, was not interested in hockey until the 1971-72 season, when he travelled to a Seals game with the soccer team from Buchser High School, where he teaches. Brought along to help "pep up the group", George managed to lift the

entire crowd with his cheers. "As I was cheering, the crowd picked it up, so I started walking around the audience," he says. "I liked it so much I decided to come back."

During the 1972-73 season, George came to four Seals home games, and then last season, made as many as he could without having it affect his classwork and students. "I came to all of the games during the last third of the season, except the Los Angeles game," he explains. "That was when my car blew up."

George is now completely sold on hockey, and claims that he loves the game because "it's the best spectator sport I can imagine. You're close to the action. The game's fast moving and hard hitting. I just like contact, and with hockey, you're right on top of it. Even in the worst seat in the house, you

can feel them hit."

With his crazy antics and love for the game, George has made the Seals crowds more aware of the excitement the game can provide. "This is the easiest crowd I've ever worked with," he says. "There are 4,000 very loyal fans at every game; they have to be loyal to keep coming. They yell so much, I have no trouble at all. They do everything they can, and they always sound like 10,000 people. Even visiting teams have said that."

George, who insists that he "will never cuss", does admit to throwing out as many insults as he can to opposing players without cussing. "Sometimes I call a player a 'weirdo', and that always seems to get a reaction," he says. His yells can be heard when action has temporarily halted, and players wait on the ice for a resumption of play.

"I do it for the humor," he says. "I enjoy getting on the players, and most of the time they take it very well. Sometimes they smile or make a gesture, and that helps the crowd get going. Maybe one in ten players appears to dislike it, but no matter how he reacts, I win. The crowd always loves it. When a player or ref reacts to my screaming, the fans yell even better, and get more involved in the game."

Although he's the hero of most Coliseum fans, visiting players can sometimes take just so much of George's antics. During a late season game last year against the Boston Bruins, Terry O'Reilly and his teammates showed their disapproval. After O'Reilly entered the pen-



alty box for a holding penalty during the game's second period, George came over and beat on his drum within close vicinity of the Bruin's ear. "I didn't like what he did," George says. "He cheated. I was mad."

O'Reilly, however, had had enough. After throwing his glove at George and missing, he tried using his stick. Again he missed, but the excitement brought over more than ten Bruin players, some of whom attempted to scale the wall leading to the stands.

As if problems weren't enough, George was then jumped by two Boston fans, and a scuffle ensued. The Seals cheerleader got away without being hurt, but was accidentally scraped on the elbow by his own drum.

When the smoke finally cleared, George had become an even bigger hero with the fans. "I don't like to fight in the stands because innocent people can get hurt," he says. "When it does happen, though, it makes it easier for me to work with the crowd. When I was cut, everywhere I went fans were cheering. I'd just walk through the stands and people would start applauding. I was really happy when we (the Seals) beat those turkeys (the Bruins)."

Earlier in the season, Brian Watson (then of Pittsburgh) also took a swing at George with his stick. This attempt also missed.

Although he dislikes fighting, Krazy George can certainly take care of himself in the stands or anywhere else. He was a member of the San Jose State national collegiate champion judo team for six years. The team never lost the national title during those years.

When he's not screaming at players or leading the fans in a yell Krazy George still entertains the crowd. With George as its leader, it's not too unusual to see an entire section of people with fingers in their ears and their tongues sticking out. "The more things I do that

are different and weird, the more people hear about them, and the easier it is for me to do my thing," he says. "The crowd and I get along great."

George, who never drinks during a game because "my stomach would turn inside out," can sometimes finish a game in worse shape than some of the players. "I'm really physically beat after every game," he says. "I lose about five pounds per game, and I'm hoarse for about three days. The next day I'm really tired, and sometimes my voice disappears completely."

The judo black belt explains that he wouldn't have to work as hard or yell as hard if the Seals become a winner. "Winning would make my job a lot easier," he says. "When we're losing, I've got to work twice as hard and do twice as many cheers. I'm always more tired after a game that we lose than one we win."

He also doesn't hesitate to add that "it's easy to cheer for a winner, but it shows no class. Seals fans have class. They're the best fans in the world without a doubt."

The leader of those loyal fans, as well as everyone else at California Seals hockey games, however, is still Krazy George Henderson. Why does he do it game after game? "I think it's a lot of ego", he claims.

"I enjoy making people happy, and when I do my cheers people are happy — they laugh. Everything I do has a humorous approach. I enjoy being out in front of the crowd and getting good responses. All the time out there I'm having a great time. Actually, I have to think I'm the best cheerleader there ever was."

The best cheerleader of all time? In case you were thinking of holding an election in Oakland for best cheerleader, don't bother. The winner would be Krazy George.