

# Rx For The Lowly California Seals

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. (UPI)— When he's out of his pads injured limb, and off the ice for prolonged periods, goalie Gilles Meloche of the California Golden Seals becomes a nervous wreck.

And for the past few weeks, he has been quite jittery. The 23-year-old netminder, unanimously voted the most valuable Seal last season, has been sidelined since Nov. 28 when teammate Reggie Leach sliced open the back of his right hand with a skate in practice.

"It's been very tough not playing," said the Montreal native. "For three weeks, I couldn't skate, run, ride a bike or take a sauna bath. I couldn't do anything except watch a lot of television and go shopping."

It took 18-20 stitches to close the gash Leach's skate made across the top of Meloche's right hand just below the wrist. Some tendons were cut.

Meloche wore a cast on the hand until Thursday and is now finally able to skate and take

Since their departure, the Seals get better and stronger" are 2-3-2.

"There's been a lot of pressure on Champoux and Tucker filling in for our top-line goalies," said coach Fred Glover. "They're playing in strange rinks where they don't know the bounces off the boards.

"But the team has been playing very well since our goaltenders got hurt. They've been playing better on the road than the records show. A break here and there turned a lot of those games around in favor of the home clubs."

Glover feels the Seals will make a strong bid for the playoffs after the first of the year when the team plays the bulk of their games in Oakland. And he says the return of Meloche also should make a difference.

"Gilles is quick and can do everything well," said Glover. "When he was hurt, he was playing as well as any time in his career. And he's going to

"After the New Year, we have a good schedule. We play two or three games at home (where California has been 6-4-3 through Dec. 19) and go on the road only for one or two games at a time. The players can give a little more when they know they're going to be on the road for only a short time."

When he was younger, Meloche said he admired Bobby Hull and veteran goalie Glenn Hall of the Chicago Black Hawks, Detroit Red Wings and St. Louis Blues.

"I liked Hall's spirit and style of going to his knees to stop a shot. But I never copied him. I like to stand up."

Meloche, who signed a three-year contract with the Seals last season after turning down offers from Edmonton, Chicago and Minnesota of the World Hockey Association, said "the NHL was the league I wanted to play in."

Right now he's itching to practice what he preaches.

In 17 games this season, Meloche compiled a goals-against average of 3.78. Only in his third year in the NHL, he has established himself as one of league's top goalies because of his lightning reactions and natural instinct to stop the puck.

Last season, he spent 3,673 minutes on the ice, more than any other goalie in the NHL.

This season Meloche is disheartened by the fact that the Seals dropped 18 of their first 19 games on the road.

"We started the season losing on the road and I guess some of the guys have lost confidence," said the 5-10, 170 pound goalie.

"We've also been on the road for long periods and, naturally, the home teams get psyched up by the cheers of a partisan crowd.

"But don't count us out of the playoffs yet. The Seals have the individual talent to make the playoffs once we get more confidence in ourselves.