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# WHEN GARRY MET CHARLIE

## *The 1971/72 California Golden Seals and How They Almost Got It Right*

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**A**T THE CONCLUSION OF the 1967/68 season, it was difficult to argue the NHL's expansion to 12 teams hadn't been a rousing success, unless you considered the league's Bay Area entry. While every other expansion team eventually achieved some degree of success, the California Seals never did—not that they never had the opportunity. The focus of this paper is the Seals' 1971/72 season, when all the elements needed to establish a successful franchise were in place, and how everything quickly went awry.

### **Early Problems and the Finley Purchase**

When the San Francisco Seals played in the old Western Hockey League (WHL) from 1961 to 1966, the Cow Palace was a very exciting place to play. In 1964, the Seals became the first team in league history to win back-to-back Patrick Cups, and several past and future NHL stars would call the Bay Area home. In 1966, an ownership group led by Princeton alum Barry Van Gerbig bought the Seals and acquired the rights to the NHL's new Bay Area franchise. While San Francisco had proven itself a strong hockey market, the NHL was not convinced the Cow Palace was a suitable arena for a big-league franchise. Van Gerbig renamed the team the California Seals and transferred it across the bay to the sparkling new Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum for the 1966/67 season.

Unfortunately, the people of Oakland had little interest in hockey and the team floundered at the gate. At the 1967 NHL expansion draft, the team drafted several past-their-prime star players, resulting in a poor on-ice product. The team was renamed the Oakland Seals before Christmas, in an attempt to stimulate local interest, but in the end the

Seals stumbled to a 15–42–17 mark, and attendance was the lowest in the league.

Van Gerbig sold the team to Trans-National Communications and, thanks to an influx of young players such as Carol Vadnais, Norm Ferguson and Gary Jarrett, the 1968/69 Seals finished second in the West with a 29–36–11 record. The following year, the Seals made the playoffs again and attendance rose to 6,225 per game, but that mark was still the lowest in the NHL. The club hemorrhaged money so badly that Trans-National could not even make its payments to Van Gerbig, so he in turn attempted to sell the franchise to roller derby promoter Jerry Seltzer. At the same time, Charles Oscar Finley, owner of baseball's Oakland Athletics, also wanted to join the NHL. A judge decreed that the NHL had the right to find a suitable owner for the Seals and, in a moment of true ineptitude, the league sold the club to Finley.

The Finley era got off to a rousing start. "I know absolutely nothing about hockey," declared the owner at his first press conference.<sup>1</sup> Finley rechristened his club the California *Golden Seals*, which, according to Fremont-Newark *Argus* sports editor Rich Gohlke, "Almost sounds like a floor wax."<sup>2</sup> Players were fitted in retina-burning "Fort Knox gold and Kelly green" uniforms, including matching skates, but things could have been much, much worse. "Albino kangaroo skates are to be ordered as required uniform,"<sup>3</sup> Finley declared, because, you see, regular old kangaroo skates just weren't tacky enough — he just had to go the *albino* route! Thankfully, a few sensible voices in the organization persuaded Finley to forgo the kangaroo leather.

Finley was a "my way or the highway" kind of guy who rubbed many people the wrong way. Both general manager

Frank Selke Jr. and vice-president Bill Torrey (the latter of whom would build the New York Islanders' Cup dynasty) resigned before Christmas because Finley wanted them to sign new contracts at reduced salary, even though neither's pact had actually expired. Finley believed that when he bought the franchise, he was under no obligation to honour the contracts of anyone but the players.<sup>4</sup> With no one else capable of running the Seals' day-to-day operations, coach Fred Glover became interim general manager. Despite a roster featuring talented youngsters such as Gary Croteau, Ernie Hicke, Dennis Hextall, Dick Redmond and Ron Stackhouse, the Seals hit the skids around Christmas and crawled to a dismal 20–53–5 record.

### The Messiah Arrives

Once again, the Seals were in full rebuild mode, and Finley hired 35-year-old Garry Young to turn the ship around. Young had been a hotshot defence prospect in the Toronto Maple Leafs' system, and at age 17 he scored 35 goals with the Junior A Toronto Marlies, but in 1949, his career came to an end after taking a bad spill in practice, paralyzing him from the waist down.<sup>5</sup> Only after two major surgeries in six months did Young regain the use of his legs. Young then coached junior hockey, and later became the Boston Bruins' chief scout, making him privy to inside information that would later serve him as a general manager. "One thing that helped a lot," he said, "was that as a scout for so long, I had a pretty thorough knowledge of just about every player in the game."<sup>6</sup>

Veterans Ted Hampson, Harry Howell, Gerry Ehman, Earl Ingarfield and Bill Hicke were either traded or retired before the 1971/72 season, leaving the Seals a very green bunch. "We were stuck with a lot of older players who didn't have much future in hockey," Young explained, "and for that reason, the team didn't have much of a future, either."<sup>7</sup> It was going to be a long season one way or the other, so, as Young explained, "it would be better to lose with youngsters because then at least we'd have a chance to improve."<sup>8</sup> The problem was that the Seals had few prospects in their farm system talented enough to replace the departing veterans, so Young had no choice but to scour the league's scrap heap for cheap talent.

In May, Young dealt leading scorer Dennis Hextall to Minnesota for Walt McKechnie and Joey 'The Jet' Johnston. Young then picked up the 5-foot-7, 155-pound Bobby 'The Cat' Sheehan from Montreal for \$25,000. At the intra-league draft, Young nabbed centre Wayne Carleton, a 22-goal scorer with the Bruins who could immediately step in as one of the Seals' top pivots. Burly goaltender Gary Smith, who withstood nightly 40-shot barrages and finished 1970/71 with a 19–48–4 mark, was dealt to Chicago for Gerry Desjardins (2.42 GAA in 22 games), 13-goal forward Gerry Pinder and prospect Kerry Bond. Young also acquired 31-goal man Stan Gilbertson from Hershey of the AHL, while defenceman Marshall Johnston, forward Craig Patrick and goaltenders Gary Kurt and Lyle Carter were all plucked from the roster of the Montreal Canadiens.

Young had more former Habs, Hawks and Bruins in his midst than a kid with a stack of O-Pee-Chee hockey cards, and it was a good thing, too, because he was going to need that depth on the roster. Number-one goalie Desjardins failed his training camp physical, and Finley sent him to the Mayo Clinic, where he was told his arm, broken while he was still playing for Chicago, would have to be refractured and have a plate inserted into it. Desjardins would be out of action for three months.

Finley complained to the league that he had been dealt a lemon, and later, perhaps hoping to gain some sympathy, stated, "the team is bad enough as it is."<sup>9</sup> Thankfully for Finley, the league took pity on the Seals and forced the Hawks to take back Desjardins in exchange for rookie goalie Gilles Meloche. "We'll take a chance on him," Young said in response to the decision, "but of course, you'll have to add another player," which turned out to be rugged, underrated defenceman Paul Shmyr.<sup>10</sup> If you're keeping track, the Seals received four young players for their former number one goalie.

### The Seals Rise Up

As expected, 1971/72 got off to a shaky start. When the Seals started the season 0–1–2, Young replaced Glover with former Philadelphia Flyers coach Vic Stasiuk. The new coach was behind the bench on October 15 as the Seals played Vancouver, and he saw firsthand the problems Glover had had to deal with. Despite a commanding 5–1 lead just 16:34 into the game, including a hat-trick by Sheehan, the Canucks actually won, 9–6!

Despite some early jitters, the Seals would be okay under Stasiuk. While Glover's idea of coaching consisted of participating in scrimmages with his players and calling it a day after he was allowed to score,<sup>11</sup> Stasiuk was more about "Xs and Os." After the game, Vancouver scout Phil Maloney commented, "Vic will teach the Seals fundamentals. This is a stick. This is a puck."<sup>12</sup> This backhanded compliment was very telling; the Seals did lack fundamentals. They had talent, but had absolutely no structure or game plan. As a result, after four games the Seals had scored 17 goals, but had also given up 21!

After starting the season 0–5–2 (all games at home), the Seals finally gelled on the road. On October 24, Gerry Pinder scored a team-record five points (three goals, two assists) and Lyle Carter made 34 saves to lead California to a 6–3 win over Detroit. Three nights later, Carter made 21 saves and Sheehan scored two goals in a 6–4 win over Pittsburgh.

The Seals' season-long offensive splurge had the entire league doing double-takes, but once the defence picked up the slack, jaws really began to drop. Entering the Seals' contest with Boston on October 28, no one could have predicted that 21-year-old Gilles Meloche, with only two games of NHL experience, would deliver the most famous goal-tending performance in Seals history.

The Bruins made it known early in the game that it was going to be a long night for the young goaltender. Eleven

seconds into the game, Wayne Cashman got a soft shot off, which Meloche handled easily, and the Bruins controlled the pace of the game from that moment on. The opposition had a 15–5 edge in shots through one period, but the Seals had a precarious 1–0 lead on a goal by Ferguson. The Bruins continued to press, but Meloche stood tall, stopping seven more shots in the second period. Redmond put the Seals up by two at 6:26 of the final frame, and Meloche refused to give the Bruins a break the rest of the way. The young goaltender, acquired just 10 days earlier, stopped 34 shots to earn his first career shutout. Meloche took his astonishing debut in stride. “I knew I have to stop that first shot,” he said in his broken English. “That’s the one I had to stop.”<sup>13</sup> It would not be the last time Meloche would save his team from a sure loss. “He was great, he was fantastic, he acted like he’d been in the league 10 years,” Stasiuk beamed.<sup>14</sup> How historic was this game for the Seals? It had been nearly a year since anyone had blanked Boston. In 1970/71, the Bruins had outscored the Seals 33–8 in six games.

All the while, the goals kept on coming for the Seals. Against Toronto on November 7, California turned in their most decisive victory of the season by far, an 8–1 thrashing of the Maple Leafs, a game in which eight different Seals scored. In the early going of the schedule, Sheehan, Pinder and Redmond were all cruising along beautifully. Sheehan was tied for seventh in league scoring with 16 points in 14 games. In a short time, he established himself as one of the most exciting talents in the NHL, thanks to his breakneck speed and reckless abandon on the ice. His linemate Pinder had 14 points in 10 games. Redmond led all Seals defencemen with 13 points in 10 games.

But life wasn’t all “peaches and cream” for the Golden Ones. There were a few stinkers here and there, like the 8–1 and 12–1 humiliations suffered at the hands of the New York Rangers in November, and a 10–3 loss to Philadelphia on January 9; but for the most part, the Seals were frisky, feisty and competitive. By December, the Seals had surged into third place in their division with a 10–16–5 record.

The success of the high-flying Golden Seals was rightfully credited to Garry Young. He had gathered young prospects from around the league and instilled a positive team attitude. “Garry had done a lot for us and we feel bad if we let him down in a game,” one anonymous player explained. “As long as he’s with the team, I want to stay right here, but if he ever goes, you better believe that I’ll be interested in what the World Hockey Association has to offer.”<sup>15</sup> Munson Campbell, the Seals’ vice-president, praised Young for the remarkable job he had done. “I think we are years ahead of a reasonable pace,” he said. “Not many people knew what horrible shape the franchise was in. . . . There was no farm system, just a couple of stray scouts. A working agreement with Providence expired before the draft. We had had no No. 1 draft choices for three years. That’s the sad state the hockey organization was in. Now, we have something better than half the clubs in the NHL. Not a bad job and a feather in Garry’s cap.”<sup>16</sup>

## Whitewash

The saying goes, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” but Charlie Finley could not help pouring just a little oil under the hood of the car. Even though the Seals were winning, attendance was still the lowest in the league. Ever the entrepreneur, Finley believed that if his players wore *white skates*, it would bring the Seals some much-needed attention. The Seals started using the skates in home-ice practices in December, just to break them in, and then, on January 14, 1972, in a 5–3 win against Vancouver, the fancy footwear was unleashed upon the world.

Even before the skates made their official debut, the jokes began. The *Oakland Tribune’s* John Porter got the ball rolling with this good-natured rib just hours before the Vancouver game: “Always a bridesmaid, never a bride has been the lament of the Oakland Seals [he never called them “California Golden Seals”] and the rest of the expansion clubs in the National Hockey League. Tonight the Seals will don their wedding-gown white skates for their first game use.”<sup>17</sup> Meloche admitted years later that the skates “looked kind of silly. We heard comments everywhere we went. They [opposing players] said we looked like sissies or figure skaters.”<sup>18</sup> Ironically, when Vic Stasiuk became coach, he stated his practices would be tough and vigorous, “not figure skating.”<sup>19</sup> No one ever said coaching the California Golden Seals would be easy.

White skates notwithstanding, the Seals were still holding down a playoff spot long after Christmas. On January 28, Meloche stopped 30 shots in a 3–0 win over Toronto, and followed that up two nights later with his fourth shutout of the season, a 2–0 whitewashing of Vancouver, becoming the first Seals goaltender to record back-to-back goose eggs and tying the club record of four shutouts set by Gary Smith in 1968/69. Each shutout earned Meloche a nice \$300 bonus from Charlie Finley.<sup>20</sup>

The Seals’ comfy position became threatened in February when they stumbled to a 1–7–6 record. Most of the games were close, but the Seals’ offence had suddenly dried up. Sheehan started the season with 17 goals in his first 38 games, but scored only three the rest of the way. In an attempt to shake things up, Young went back to the Boston well and sent the Bruins Carol Vadnais and Don O’Donoghue in exchange for forward Reggie Leach and defencemen Rick Smith and Bob Stewart. “This trade will put us in the playoffs,” Young declared. “. . . Reggie and these players are the future of this club.”<sup>21</sup> The speedy Leach had an innate ability to find the back of the net. He was placed on a line with Joey Johnston and Gary Croteau, and in their first 11 games together the trio exploded for 16 goals and 17 assists. Stewart would become a character player for the Seals and their number one “policeman,” while Smith became a solid offensive contributor on the back end.

The new arrivals were in the lineup the night of the trade as they faced their old Boston teammates before a Coliseum crowd of 10,492. More than halfway through the game, the

Seals had a 6–1 lead and the Bruins were spinning their wheels. Nothing seemed to be going right for Boston until Wayne Cashman scored at the 14:36 mark of the second period, but a Bruin victory still seemed out of reach.

Just two minutes after Cashman's goal, Bert Marshall tripped up Fred Stanfield, and the Bruins were awarded a penalty shot. Stanfield skated in on Meloche and directed a high, hard wrist shot to the top left corner of the net, but Meloche made a brilliant glove save.

And then, just as quickly, everything fell apart. Stanfield scored his second goal just seconds after his failed penalty-shot attempt, making it 6–3. At 2:52 of the final frame, Bobby Orr blasted a shot from inside the blue line that beat a screened Meloche to bring the Bruins to within two. About three minutes later, Stanfield received a tape-to-tape pass from Orr, carried the puck into Seals territory, deked a helpless Meloche to his left for the hat trick and made it 6–5.

With still plenty of time left, Ed Westfall skated in along the boards to Meloche's left and directed a perfect flip pass to Phil Esposito, who was streaking in from the right. Before the puck even settled onto the ice, Esposito picked it out of the air and sent it past the helpless Meloche to make it 6–6 with still 5:29 left to play. Less than three minutes later, Esposito tipped in a weak shot from Cashman standing on the lip of the faceoff circle to the right of Meloche. The Bruins had come back from a five-goal deficit and were now leading 7–6.

In the dying seconds of the game, Derek Sanderson broke in on the Seals' vacant net despite Reggie Leach's persistent hooking and took a clear shot at the cage. Dick Redmond valiantly stood in the way of the shot, making the best save of the night, but Sanderson picked up the rebound and scored. In disgust, Redmond slashed his stick against the post. Final score: Bruins 8, Seals 6.<sup>22</sup>

While Chicago and Minnesota had all but clinched the West's first two playoff positions, California, St. Louis, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh were all vying for third and fourth place, and the final two playoff spots. The Boston debacle could have destroyed the young Seals' confidence, but starting March 3, the Seals went 3–1–3 in a seven-game span to keep themselves in playoff position. By this time, fans had taken notice, too. In nine home games between February 4 and March 17, the Seals attracted an average of 8,336 patrons per game. While that may not seem like a lot, the Seals had averaged fewer than 5,300 during their first four seasons.

On March 17, before a sellout crowd, the Seals led the St. Louis Blues 2–1 in the third period, but let the lead slip away in the final minutes. With the Seals attacking in the Blues' zone, the puck hit Shmyr's heel and was stolen by Frank St. Marseille, who then skated in alone on Meloche. Redmond dove out, hoping to take the puck away from St. Marseille, but the attacking Blue still managed to beat Meloche with a good shot from 20 feet out.

The Seals struggled to regain their composure after the back-breaking goal. In the last minute, a Stan Gilbertson shot

deflected off goalie Jacques Caron's pads and onto the stick of Joey Johnston, but the Jet was unable to put the puck into the open cage. Final score: Seals 2, Blues 2.<sup>23</sup>

Things just went downhill from there. The Seals finished their home stand by tying Pittsburgh on March 19, then started a four-game road trip by losing to both Minnesota and St. Louis. The Seals' skid had allowed Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to close to within two points of fourth place. The Seals had only four games left, while the Penguins had five, including one against California. The Flyers had six games left, one against California, on March 25.

Against Philadelphia, the Seals got a lucky break about five minutes into the game, when the Flyers' Joe Watson had a goal disallowed due to a delayed penalty, but the Seals were not able to capitalize on the man advantage. The Seals paid for their impotent power play at 12:48, when Bobby Clarke redirected a Rick Foley shot past Meloche. Bill Clement made it 2–0 when a shot by Ross Lonsberry landed in the goal crease. All Clement needed to do was tap it in. The Seals pressed in the third period, outshooting the Flyers 14–7, but goaltender Doug Favell was up to the task, keeping the Golden Ones off the scoreboard. When Bobby Clarke scored an empty-netter with just 31 seconds left to play, one could see the Seals' playoff hopes evaporate.<sup>24</sup>

The Seals concluded their road trip in Pittsburgh on March 29. If the Seals won, it would put a serious damper on the Pens' playoff hopes. The Seals jumped out to a 3–0 lead early in the second period, yet they once again blew a golden opportunity. At 12:59 of the middle period, Ron Schock reduced the lead to two goals while Rick Smith was serving a penalty. Stan Gilbertson scored his 16th goal less than two minutes later to put the Seals up by three once again, but something still didn't feel right. Syl Apps made it 4–2 with a goal at 17:00, but even more alarming was the fact the Penguins had outshot the Seals 14–7 in the period. In the third, the Penguins wasted little time mounting a comeback. Just 1:47 into the frame, Greg Polis scored his 27th goal, followed just 2:28 later by Nick Harbaruk's 11th, and just like that, it was 4–4. The Penguins' defence was tight all night long, allowing just 20 shots, and their big guns came through in the clutch. At 14:48, Jean Pronovost put Pittsburgh up 5–4, and that's how the game ended.<sup>25</sup>

The loss left the Seals three points back of both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and with just two games to play. The only hope the Seals had would be for the Flyers and Penguins to tie in their head-to-head confrontation on April 1, and for both teams to lose their remaining contests, which would both be played the next day. Of course, the Seals would have to win their two remaining games. If the script played out exactly as hoped, the Seals, Flyers and Penguins would finish in a three-way tie for fourth. As it turned out, the Flyers and Penguins tied 4–4 in their matchup, and the Flyers lost 3–2 to Buffalo on April 2, killing Philly's playoff hopes. The Penguins, however, did the Seals no favours, trouncing the St. Louis Blues 6–2 and claiming fourth place.

It didn't really matter what the Penguins did anyway, since the Seals lost both of their remaining games, 2–1 to Minnesota on March 31, and 9–4 to Los Angeles the next night. The Seals had gone 17–25–10 in the first 52 games and seemed a lock to make the playoffs, but in the last 26 games they went 4–14–8, including a six-game losing streak to close out the year.

Despite the disastrous finish, the Seals' hard work did not go unnoticed. Meloche was named the 1971/72 *Sporting News* NHL West Division Rookie of the Year, thanks to his 3.33 goals-against average and four shutouts. Pinder led the team in scoring with 23 goals and 54 points. Redmond led the defence with 35 assists and 45 points, both franchise records. Rookies Stan Gilbertson and Ivan Boldirev each scored 16 goals, while Joey Johnston potted 15. Overall, the Seals had 12 players with 10 or more goals, and of those players Ferguson, Sheehan, Pinder, Vadnais and Johnston scored hat tricks. With an average age of 24.6 years, the Seals were by far the youngest team in the NHL.

Garry Young had succeeded in building team spirit, something that had been lacking for some time. "I decided a key thing was to develop a sense of togetherness," he explained. "What you have here is a group of men playing a strange game in strange surroundings. Moreover, they are forced to overcome a lot of disadvantages which don't normally face NHL teams. They don't get to practise much and they're on the road a lot. So I worked hard to develop esprit de corps. The club did everything as a unit—travelled to games, went to movies, ate, went out after a game. This brought them together and resulted, I think, in a better overall effort."<sup>26</sup>

*The Toronto Star's* Jim Proudfoot declared that "never had an NHL general manager done so much with so little in such a short space of time."<sup>27</sup> In October, the only people who would have predicted the Seals would be competing for a playoff spot would have been wearing straitjackets. "On the plane to the West Coast from training camp," revealed Garry Young, "one of the players showed me an article in a Toronto newspaper saying we should get a gold medal if we won 11 games this season. Well, we tied 18 and won 21, so we must have been doing something right."<sup>28</sup> Whether anyone on the Seals ever got those medals is an open question.

### The Aftermath

In the summer of 1972, the new World Hockey Association (WHA) hit the Seals harder than any other NHL club. Finley never took the WHA threat seriously and refused to overpay his free agents, so Pinder, Sheehan, Carleton, Shmyr, Kurt and Tom Webster (acquired in a trade for Ron Stackhouse), not to mention several minor-leaguers whose contracts had expired, jumped to the "rebel" league. Making matters worse, the Seals also lost Ferguson and Hicke in the latest expansion draft, while Jarrett retired briefly before signing with the WHA. That's nine regulars—just less than half a team—that needed to be replaced without the help of free agency.

Everything Garry Young had built had just gone up in a

puff of smoke, although disaster could have been averted. Young, however, did his best to save the team, even resorting to underhanded tactics. In the most notable example, Young signed Redmond to a two-year, \$180,000 contract, but when Finley discovered the defenceman was making a small fortune, the owner decided to pay him only \$30,000 a year. Redmond complained to the NHL Players' Association, and was then traded to Chicago for defenceman Darryl Maggs. Unfortunately, Maggs bolted to the WHA at the end of the season, leaving the Seals with a chasm to fill on defence.

Vic Stasiuk was not retained as coach, so Finley moved Young behind the bench. Young was forced out, however, after just 13 games because Finley had discovered the truth behind the Redmond contract. "I was conned," the owner said. "Not being a hockey expert I turned the operation over to Young, who I had faith and confidence in. Unfortunately, that confidence was, you might say, betrayed."<sup>29</sup> Fred Glover, who always got along with Finley, was rehired and became, if you can believe it, coach, general manager and executive vice-president.

In December of 1971, just about everyone had sung the praises of Garry Young and the California Golden Seals. Just one year later, legendary hockey writer Stan Fischler described the Seals as "an embarrassment to the National Hockey League; a festering sore on an otherwise rosy NHL financial complexion that bothers Clarence Campbell and his governors more than they dare admit."<sup>30</sup>

By this point, even the most skilled alchemist could not have made the Seals golden again. The roster was decimated beyond repair, and the Seals would never be the same. The 1972/73 club stumbled badly and finished with a pitiful 16–46–16 record. Of course, Finley blamed Young for the team's freefall, claiming the former GM's mishandling of contracts "cost [Finley] a good million dollars... I'm certain we would have averaged 8,000 attendance this season, instead of 4,000, and we would have been in contention."<sup>31</sup> Columnist Geoffrey Fisher of *The Hockey News* questioned Finley's finger-pointing: "If, in fact, Young had signed players to inflated contracts, it seems highly questionable that so many of the Seals would have defected to the WHA when they did."<sup>32</sup>

### How Good Were They?

Had the 1971/72 Seals stayed together a few more years, not only would they have likely become a winning club, they would have remained and thrived in the Bay Area. Several players on the squad enjoyed excellent careers in the NHL and WHA, and most hadn't even entered their prime. Walt McKechnie, for instance, would score 606 points in 955 NHL games, while Ivan Boldirev would notch 866 points in 1,052 games. Joey Johnston would participate in three All-Star games and eventually become the Seals' all-time leading scorer. Dick Redmond, Rick Smith and Gary Croteau all played into the 1980s.

When Gilles Meloche retired in 1988, he had played in two All-Star Games, 788 regular-season games (then eighth all-time) and had won 270 (then 14th all-time). Think about that for a second: 270 wins, and he spent the prime of his career with the *Seals/Cleveland Barons* franchise!

Wayne Carleton scored just 17 goals in California, but he blossomed in the WHA, scoring 312 points in 290 games and playing in two All-Star Games. He was also a Second-Team All-Star in 1973/74.

Underrated Paul Shmyr was named a WHA First Team All-Star three times and a Second Team All-Star once. In 1974, he was included on the Team Canada roster (made up of WHA players) that took on the Soviet Union in the second, less-famous Summit Series. He was also named the WHA's top defenceman in 1975/76.

The best of the bunch, Reggie Leach, scored 381 career goals, including a 61-goal season in 1975/76 with the Philadelphia Flyers. That same year, despite losing in the Stanley Cup finals to Montreal, he won the Conn Smythe Trophy, scoring an NHL-record 19 playoff goals.

When Garry Young died in a boating accident on September 13, 1994, the Seals had long since expired and become a footnote in hockey history. Little mention was made of Young's Herculean effort to resurrect the Seals. Today, some 40 years after his season at the Seals' helm, he has largely been forgotten as a builder. His tenure at the top may have been brief, but he proved he had the chops to succeed in the NHL. Sure, his team never won any hardware or even qualified for the playoffs, but the competitive bunch he had scrounged up out of the scrap heap never even got the chance to prove itself. While the Seals paved the way for the San Jose Sharks, one can speculate that if Young had been allowed to do his job, unfettered, the Seals would be known today as the Bay Area's hockey team.

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## Notes

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3. "Should Seals Wear Spats?" *Newsweek*, 29 Jun 1970, 87.
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5. Ed Levitt, "Seals To Imitate Flyers," *Oakland Tribune*, 21 May 1974, E33.
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7. *Ibid.*, 116-17.
8. *Ibid.*, 116-17.

9. John Porter, "Seals Blast a Bad Deal," *Oakland Tribune*, 29 Sep 1971, 37-43.
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14. John Porter, "Seals' Rookie Goaler Meloche Shocks Bruins with Net Play," *The Hockey News*, 19 Nov 1971, 5-25.
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25. "Symbolic end to Seals' NHL playoff chances," *The Daily Review* (Hayward, Calif.), 30 Mar 1972, 23.
26. Proudfoot, *Pro Hockey '72-'73*, 118.
27. *Ibid.*, 116.
28. John Porter, "Baseball Delays Seals," *Oakland Tribune*, 12 Apr 1972, 41-43.
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30. Stan Fischler, "Charlie O's Golden Seals Turning to Rust," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 Dec 1972, 62.
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