

# Young Figures Trade Will Assure Seals Of Spot In Playoffs

BY JOHN PORTER

OAKLAND—

"This trade will put us in the playoffs," said Garry Young, general manager of the California Golden Seals.

And for a little over 30 minutes of actual playing time against the Boston Bruins, there were plenty of believers in the Alameda County Coliseum Arena in Oakland.

The Golden Ones were ahead of Boston 6-1 and newcomers Rick Smith, Reggie Leach and Bob Stewart were impressing the first turnaway crowd of the season in the Bay Area.



Rick Smith

But leads for the youngest team in the National Hockey League have been hard to protect this year. Boston, with former Seals' captain Carol Vadnais in a Hub uniform, scored seven consecutive goals to win, 8-6.

It was a first-hand look at the trade made that morning and most press box observers felt California made a great deal for the long run. As for the short run, i.e. making the playoffs this season, the Seals were hampered considerably with the loss of center Walt McKechnie to a leg injury. His possible return to the lineup will be critical.

However, the three additions from Boston have certainly fired up the team.

"You should see the enthusiasm on this club," said Young. "I talked to Tommy Webster and he said we'll be as good as anyone in a couple of years."

Webster, a 30-goal rookie last year with Detroit, missed most of this season because of a back problem and needed an operation in early January. His successful return next season would greatly enhance California's future.

But for the present season, though, the Seals keep having trouble with leads. The Boston game was not unique.

California lost a 4-0 lead to Vancouver in the first month of the season. Another time the club squandered a two-goal advantage against Detroit and lost. In a recent 4-4 tie with Buffalo, the Seals once were in front, 3-0.

"I don't know what it is," said coach Vic Stasiuk. "Is it the youth of our team or a conditioning thing? We certainly are too defensive when we get the lead."

The West Division's third-place resident most of the season, California steadily gave up ground during a horrendous month of February. The team's only win came over Philadelphia. There were six defeats and five ties.

In fact, although the Seals had 51 points at month's end, they had only 18 wins. Last season the club totaled 50 points, but won 20 times.

The difference, of course, has been ties. Yet many of those deadlocked games were hard to swallow since the Seals were the ones being tied.

The addition of Leach resulted in one of those picture two-on-one goals by Gary Croteau against Boston. His first goal for California came two games later in Buffalo.

"Didn't I tell you he was good?" exclaimed Young, who now has seven former Boston players on the Seals' roster. "Reggie and these players are the future of this club."