

# The Forgotten Hockey Player

By STAN FISCHLER

It would have been perfectly understandable if Gerry Odrowski had rejected the Oakland Seals' invitation to join the Western Division team this NHL season. Few players in hockey history have been forgotten the way the Seals forgot this utility player last year.

The episode unfolded last November 12th. The Seals were visiting New York for a game at Madison Square Garden against the Rangers. Midway in the contest Rod Gilbert of the Rangers accidentally collided with Odrowski sending him to the infirmary with an injured eye.

Odrowski, who is variously known in some hockey circles as "Gerry The Hook," the second string defenceman's second-string defenceman or the alternate penalty-killer's alternate penalty-killer figured it would be an overnight recuperation.

"You'd better be goin' to the hospital," the doctor informed The Hook. Odrowski, not one to quibble, left by the side door and walked two blocks to St. Clare's Hospital for his rest and rehabilitation.

Already it was becoming obvious that The Hook was making a better impression on hospital attendants than on his teammates. The Seals jetted out of Kennedy

Airport the next day and nary a member of the team realized Odrowski was among the missing.

Of course, The Hook couldn't have cared less at the time. He was well accommodated in the hospital but, after a few days' rest he began suspecting that, maybe, just maybe, he was a forgotten man. Like, nobody, not even The Traveller's Aid Society nor The Ranger Fan Club phoned.

For days not even The Seals bothered to contact him; no doubt on the assumption that he was till with the team and just having a couple of unimpressive games.

And it's conceivable that The Hook might eventually

have joined the St. Clare's Hospital staff were it not for an alert Oakland sports writer who eventually noticed someone was missing from the Seal's lineup. He promptly wired The Associated Press in New York:

"Understand Seals' player has been left in your city. Please check."

Dick Couch, an enterprising Associated Press sports-writer, got the message and phoned the hospital. "To my utter amazement," said Couch, "I discovered there was a Gerry Odrowski at St. Clare's."

A whimsical ferret on the spoor of a story, Couch finally got through to the trapped player. Couch regarded the discovery as no less momentous an occasion than the day Stanley found Livingstone in darkest Africa.

"His feeling was 'lemme outa here,'" said Couch. "Nobody had visited him; he was all alone, money was running out and he was finding it quite boring except, maybe, for pacing the halls."

Couch wired back to Oakland that, yes, The Hook was alive and well and noticeably anxious to be sprung from St. Clare's. "I felt real bad about it," said Couch. "Even I, who knew he was stuck there, didn't visit him."

In time the Oakland Seals "found" Gerry The Hook

and he managed to play 42 games for the Seals, scoring four goals and six assists. A forgiving type, Odrowski accepted Oakland's invitation this year and in his congenitally obscure way has been rather helpful.

During one of his early penalty-killing stints he broke away and scored a goal as the Seals edged Minnesota, 3-2. "He's a valuable player," said rookie coach Fred Glover, who promises not to forget The Hook. "He works hard all the time."

Kind words but the suspicion remains that if anybody is going to be forgotten it will Gerry The Hook.

The other day a reporter walked into the New York Rangers' office to do a story on Odrowski. He pored over the player file, searching for an envelope on Gerry Odrowski from Trout Creek, Ontario. He found envelopes for such notables as Francois Lacombe, George "Snowy" Swarbrick, Joe Szura and Carl Vadnais. You name 'em, everybody, but no Gerry The Hook.

"Just a minute," said Janet Halligan, the Ranger librarian. "I've heard that name before."

She leaped from her seat and finally extracted the Gerry Odrowski envelope from the folder where only the obscurist of the obscure are hidden. It was appropriately marked: "Lost File."



GERRY ODROWSKI