

# Seal Founder Discovers Hunch Pays Big Dividends

By SPENCE CONLEY

The California Seals, poised to enter the National Hockey League next year, are the outgrowth of one man's foresight and an "incidental" investment of \$350,000.

Coleman E. Hall, wealthy Vancouver sports entrepreneur, is the man who brought professional hockey back to the Bay Area in 1960 after a 10-year absence.

"The Western League was expanding," recalls Hall, "and when Los Angeles came in, the Cow Palace became available as a playing location if somebody would put in an ice-making plant."

"I had sold my interest in the Vancouver Canucks, and decided to try to get into San Francisco.

"I got the franchise for free, but the ice plant cost me \$350,000," Hall says.

The Seals, who took their name from the old Pacific Coast League baseball team in order to preserve some of

the city's sports tradition, started operations in 1961-62.

"I wasn't disappointed. I'll tell you that. We had three real good years. We won the Lester Patrick Cup twice and made the playoffs every year.

"We had some lean periods, but we finished in the black," Hall noted.

Hall explained that when he first got started in San Francisco, he only had about two months to get ready so he began a tour of National League training camps, grubbing around for players.

Hall, a colorful and controversial sports figure for many years on the Pacific coast, revealed that he was asked to make the Seals really a San Francisco team by taking in local investors.

"Mayor Christopher wanted San Francisco represented in ownership, so I created a private company and sold Mel Swig and others 40 per cent and kept 60 per cent," he said.

In July, 1964, however, pressed by the demands of travel ("I made 52 trips from Vancouver to San Francisco in one year"), Hall sold out.

Mel Swig and his associates

picked up controlling stock by obtaining 23 per cent of Hall's holdings. The remaining 37 per cent was sold by Hall to the Boston Bruins.

It was the Bruins' stock that eventually led to the involvement of the present owners: Shasta Corporation and wealthy young easterner Barry Van Gerbig.

In early 1965, Swig sold 13 per cent of the available stock to Shasta Corp., owners of the Ice Follies, and helped them subsequently pick up Boston's stock in order to have a 50 per cent interest.

"We were looking around for a good place to invest our money," says Shasta President Geroge Fleharty.

"Everywhere we had gone with the Follies, we found sports people talking hockey. With a chance for NHL expansion and the always-increasing popularity of hockey, the Seals looked like an intelligent investment."

The Swig-Shasta relationship was short-lived however, and when Swig learned he had little chance to control the Seals, even if they were successful in their NHL bid, he sold to Van Gerbig of

Palm Beach, Fla.

Shasta took control of the San Francisco Ice Hockey Co., and pressed its NHL bid in New York as San Francisco Seals, Inc., with Van Gerbig as a partner.

Their bid for the big league franchise was approved and the Seals, through Fleharty, announced they were moving their operation to the new \$30 million Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum for the 1966-67 WHL season and for the next 15 years in the National League.

As of now, the group is known as San Francisco Seals, Ltd., a partnership between Shasta Corp., Van Gerbig, and his associates.

Shasta, however, retains majority control, even though Van Gerbig represents the Seals on the NHL Board of Governors.

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