

Seals Win Thrilling Debut, 6-5

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ED LEVITT

Seals vs. Russians?

The organist played "This Could Be The Start of Something Big."

And you better believe it.

The 9,413 fans at last night's hockey opener in the sparkling new Oakland Arena heard it and believed it.

It was a superb start in every way. The California Seals won in overtime.

The Arena, though, took a little less time to prove a winner. It took as long as one look.

The coloring, the seating, the lighting, the scoreboard, the rink, the concessions and even the building temperature thoroughly pleased the opening night audience.

It is a great spot for viewing a hockey game. And it will be even greater for viewing a boxing match.

Mrs. Aileen Eaton, who puts on fights in Los Angeles, came up here with several southern writers to inspect the place for the Nov. 28 card which she is promoting here.

"This is nicer than the Los Angeles Sports Arena," she raved.

"With all the glass around it," said syndicated columnist Jim Murray, "all you need now is one big windshield wiper."

Hockey on Global Scale

Enjoying last night's opener was Bob Wilson, National Hockey League scout for 23 years who discovered and signed Bobby Hull, the Willie Mays of the ice sport.

"Since I've been out here," said Wilson, "I have watched six Western Hockey League games. And four of those six have gone overtime. It's most amazing."

Wilson envisions the day when a hockey team from Russia or Italy or Czechoslovakia will come to the Oakland Arena to battle the California Seals.

"Telesatellite, with its worldwide possibilities, will open hockey competition on a global scale never dreamed of before," the super scout predicted.

"Within seven to 10 years we will be able to sit in our living room here and see a telecast of the Seals facing off against the Russians direct from the Moscow Sports Arena."

The team from the Soviet Union would give our guys a furious fight.

"Russia has the best hockey team in Europe," said Wilson. "The players practice 18 hours a day. They're as regimented as the Army."

"The Russians are rough. But they don't shoot the puck rapidly enough to beat an NHL team. The Americans fire faster than the Russians are used to seeing."

Soviets Need U.S. Goalie

A Soviet coach has already stated that if he ever got an NHL goal tender the Russians would beat anything over here.

"Of course," said Wilson, "if we played them according to their rules and with their referees, we would lose. They rule out body contact. That's a big part of our game."

Wilson scouted for the Toronto Maple Leafs for eight years and the Chicago Black Hawks for 15. Now he is employed as the chief talent hunter for the Oakland club and will soon comb the world for players.

What's the chance of bringing a Russian, Czech or Norwegian over here to play for the Seals?

"It could happen," said Wilson. "Canadians are now instructing and coaching hockey in Europe. That helps."

"These lads come back and give us the lowdown on talent over there."

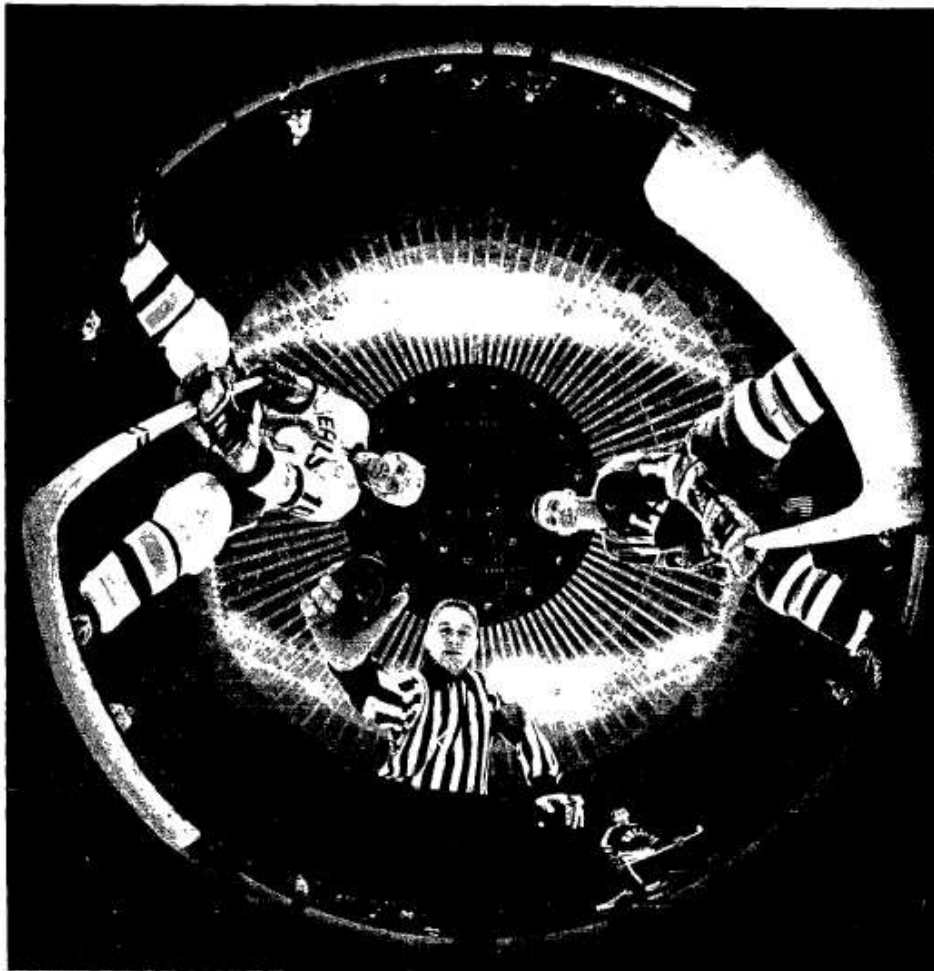
"Someday one might say, 'There's a player in Italy who could be the greatest. All he needs is to learn our style of hockey.'"

"Well, there is nothing to prevent us from signing that young man and eventually moving him here to play for Oakland."

Now that the NHL has finally agreed to permit the Seals along with five other clubs to join its exclusive major league federation there suddenly arises a dearth of young, unsigned top talent.

"I discovered Bobby Hull when he was 13. At 18 he was starring for the Chicago Black Hawks," said Wilson.

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FIRST FACEOFF—Referee Barry Ballance gets ready to drop the puck for first event in beautiful new Arena as playing-coach Charlie Burns of Seals (left) and San Diego's Gordon Wilkie await

start of action. First-night crowd of 9,413 saw Seals win a thrilling, overtime Western Hockey League contest, 6-5. Seals play Victoria in their next game at the Arena Saturday night.

Sudden Death Victory

By SPENCE CONLEY

For a team confronted by opening night jitters, a delayed start, soggy ice, artistic frustration, and the scrambling San Diego Gulls, the California Seals fared pretty well.

But not without the help of Denny Belote, a 29-year-old right wing, whose goal at 3:46 of sudden death overtime last night gave the Seals a 6-5 victory, a successful Coliseum Arena debut, and undisputed possession of the WHL's second position.

Otherwise, the Seals lacked the sharpness they showed on their season-opening road swing, passing wildly, missing body checks, and failing to choke off the free-wheeling Gull offense.

"The loss of two practice days this week because of unavailability of ice was obvious," lamented cautiously happy Rudy Piloux, the Seals' coach and general manager.

"We weren't sharp at all. We didn't have any legs under us and our timing at play-making was really off. But the name of the game is mistakes and you've got plenty when there are 11 goals scored."

"The only thing we can be thankful for is that we made one less mistake than they did," Piloux said.

He noted, however, that if the Seals are to enjoy success in their second series they'll have to tighten up their defense considerably and be more precise in their offense.

The one thing that continues to impress Piloux, though, is the Seals knack of pulling victory out of the fire: five times this year the Seals have come from behind to win or tie.

In the 11 games they have played so far in the inland Western Hockey League season, six have gone into overtime and the Seals haven't yet been knocked off in the sudden-death period.

San Diego played very well.

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Coliseum Arena Sparkles in Opening Night Cliff-Hanger

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every sheet of ice in the land.

"The finest in the nation," he repeated, "and that goes for the 'Queen Bee,' the Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto."

So bursting with pleasure over his new home arena—and his team's jittery win—was Pious that he proclaimed the "big time" is now, for Oakland, the Bay Area and Northern California.

"Hockey has a big chance of being very good here this year, never mind next year," he said. "I think the boys enjoyed playing for that crowd. They wanted something to yell about and we gave it to them with 11 goals. I think they bought what we had, not like some places where they sit on their hands all night."

The man who took the famed Chicago Black Hawks to the Stanley Cup in 1960-61 may have been the top hockey authority to put a stamp of approval on the Arena side of Oakland's \$30-million sports center; his was hardly a lone voice.

As they entered, the fans—many of them Seals loyalists coming from the San Francisco side of the Bay—stood and gaped in wonder.

The building is beautiful, its high stretch of glass walls rising up from the green and blue padded seats to a ribbed concave ceiling of spectacular sweep.

The brightly illuminated scoreboard was an instant hit.

And there was never a dull moment; even as they found their seats, the spectators got an unusual show, the frantic movements of a corps of a hard-hatted workmen still installing sheets of tempered glass, $\frac{3}{8}$ ths of an inch thick, to the dasher wall around the rink.

It was a close race, one which the Oakland-Alameda County Complex nearly lost and barely tied, to get the last Western Hockey League season launched here on schedule.

Seats were still being bolted into place just hours before the scheduled 8 p.m. face off — which was more than 45 minutes late.

"They were being air-lifted

from the east, and about 150 of them just didn't make it in time," Ray Ward of Coliseum Inc., reported. "We got them all in but five or six, and we put folding chairs there."

A truckload of aluminum extrusions used in the floor-level "risers" upon which other folded chairs are placed, also didn't make it.

"The truck got caught in a snow bank on Donner Pass," Ward said. "But we had most of the work in place by game time."

The timing was so close that none of the hockey pros had been on the ice until they skated out to big cheers just after the speech-making and dedicating had been completed.

A few hours earlier hot welding sparks had been dropped to crackle and sizzle on the ice, and imbedded in it were workmen's bootprints and even a few scattered cigaret butts. The ice was not at its best for the hockey game for these and other reasons, but that's simple to fix and workmen were out early today to get on with the project.

The people got on with the show quickly and in high spirits last night, applauding even the tin-hat crews working overtime to open.

Some 3,600 cars and a couple dozen buses brought them into the four big parking lots which, Coliseum Inc. reported, handled the load "so nobody was more than five minutes from gate to seat."

Huge spot lights were signaling as far as the eye could see, certainly throughout East Oakland and across the Bay to San Francisco and the Peninsula, that a happy night—first of many thousands—was climaxing years of planning and work.

Inside, colorfully-uniformed vendors and ushers and brightly-enameled signs took the incoming crowd into the breathtaking oval.

"I stood there for two minutes, unable to believe my eyes," a sportswriter's wife said. "It's a magnificent building."

The quick ceremonial which dedicated it was conducted by a galaxy of the planners and builders and deers of the community.

Former U.S. Senator William F. Knowland, president of the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, introduced them. The Most Reverend Floyd L. Begin, Bishop of the Diocese of Oakland, delivered the invocation.

Oakland's Vice Mayor Fred Maggiora, Chairman John Murphy of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, and Pres. Robert T. Nahas of Coliseum, Inc. were presented and introduced their colleagues.

John Merrill, of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, took a bow for the architects and engineers.

Tom Henderson, project boss for Guy F. Atkinson Co., General Manager Bill Cunningham of Coliseum Inc., and Pres. George Fieharly of the Seals, took part.

Young Barry Van Gerbig, co-owner with Fieharly's Shasta Corp., beamed from the sidelines, anxious — as were the hockey fans — to get on with the game.

As the Associated Press teletyped it around the country, the opening burst into motion:

"OAKLAND, Calif. (AP)—Seventy days early and 53 minutes late, the new window-walled Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Arena opened with a movie script ending Wednesday night..."

AP Cameraman Sam Houston, working on center ice with a "fish eye" lens to get a new camera angle looking straight up at the descending puck, added a few seconds to the delay...

Then, in 16 seconds after Referee Barry Balance dropped the puck, the young Gulls had smashed it into the Seals net and the second professional sport season was on in earnest in come-alive Oakland.

As Fieharly said after the sudden-death finish in the new hall he already loves with a world-traveler's passion:

"It's a long way from the Cow Palace."