

Oakland Tribune Sports

GEORGE ROSS, Sports Editor

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1969 F 41



ED LEVITT

Carol -- Top Puncher

Carol Vadnais stands 6-1, weighs 195 and would be an odds-on favorite to beat Cassius Clay and Joe Frazier on the same night.

He'd win, that is, if the combatants fought on ice skates.

Vadnais is the uncrowned heavyweight champion of the National Hockey League.

The Oakland Seals' slugger has split open more eyelids, bloodied more noses, loosened more teeth, knocked down more NHL players and drawn more penalties fighting than any other guy on ice.

He is also the only man in the league who has never lost a beef.

"He's our undefeated champion," says Frank Selke, the Seals' general manager.

If there were such a thing as a Rink Record Book in the National Hockey League, Vadnais' mark now would probably be 24 fights, 24 knockouts.

"All the time I've known Carol Vadnais — and that goes back four years and dozens of battles — I have never seen anybody beat him," says Selke.

"He's cleaned up on Reggie Fleming about four times. He gave Eddie Shack a thrashing the last time the L.A. Kings were here. And those two are the toughest guys in the league."

Vadnais is no bully, either.

"He's our policeman," says Selke. "He protects the little fellas on the club. After all, we're not a physical hockey club."

"We're not too strong. We've got more small guys than big guys. Well, Vadnais keeps the bullies from running over our little fellas."

★ ★ ★

Here last Friday night, Pittsburgh's Tracy Pratt, a 6-2, 195-pound ruffian, picked on the Seals' Ted Hampson, who is 5-8, 160.

Twice Vadnais rushed over to warn Pratt to keep his hands off Hampson.

Pratt didn't heed the advice. He went on to slug Hampson against the boards after the period had already ended.

At the time Vadnais was on the other side of the rink. But seeing his teammate in distress, he came flying across the ice, leaped over three players and threw a haymaker at Pratt.

And down on his prat went Tracy Pratt.

"That was the end of Mr. Pratt for the night," said Selke. "He didn't bother anybody else."

Meanwhile, Carol Vadnais, the 24-year-old French Canadian from Quebec, went on to score two goals to pace the Seals to a 4-1 win over the Penguins.

But it is Vadnais' fighting that is making him a very respected young man around the league.

It has also kept him in the penalty box for 115 minutes in 27 games — tops in the NHL.

The L.A. Kings' rookie left winger, Ross Lonsberry, is an authority on Vadnais' prowess as a puncher. The 6-1 Vadnais and 5-11 Lonsberry have tangled on several occasions.

"Besides mixing it up with him," says Lonsberry, "I've also observed Vadnais in other fights. Believe me, he is one of the few players who can really fight. Most of us aren't very good."

★ ★ ★

Carol Vadnais doesn't come to the rink with boxing gloves — or brass knuckles.

His two big identifying features are the No. 5 on his jersey and a hawk-like nose.

But if you spot him here tomorrow night against the Minnesota Stars, and then Friday night against the Chicago Black Hawks, you won't see him go out of his way looking for trouble.

He is, in fact, fun to be around. He has a sharp sense of humor and he speaks a strange sort of half-English, half-French that is very comical.

Sometimes he'll break up his teammates by keeping up a rapid fire commentary in two languages during practice sessions.

He speaks French very well and English not so well.

"But he has improved a lot," says Seal coach Fred Glover. "I used to have trouble trying to figure him out. Now at least I can understand what he's saying."

Vadnais wears sideburns and sharply cut clothes. "He's a mod guy," says Selke. "He has that special

Continued Page 43, Col. 2

French-Canadian flair about him. They're a different breed of cat.

"A lot of guys in the league have the mod look, but not too many of them can carry it off as well as Vadnais."

On the charter plane returning from a recent game, his teammates needled him about the cowboy boots he wore with his Continental-style slacks.

"I look," said Carol Vadnais, "just like Jahn AUTREE, eh?"

The other night Vadnais was moved from defense to left wing. Already in two games he's scored three goals and has had two assists.

"This is his second season with us," says Selke, "and he's still the same happy-go-lucky young man we drafted from the Montreal Canadiens."

"He has a little bit of growing up to do. But that's not unusual in young professional athletes. He wants to play and he wants to win and he's got an awful lot of talent. I think he'll become one of the outstanding players in the National Hockey League."

But is Carol Vadnais good enough to be a professional fighter?

"No," said Selke. "The reason Carol is such a good fighter on skates is that his balance is so good. The other players just don't have that kind of balance when they throw a punch."

Remember the name — Carol Vadnais . . . Oakland's world's heavyweight champion.

On ice.