

# Harris Walkout to Stir Revolt?

By RICH ROBERTS

Why did Billy Harris walk out on the Oakland Seals during their game with the New York Rangers last weekend?

Well, it wasn't to beat the traffic—not at Oakland, anyway.

All Harris said was that a situation between himself and general manager-coach Bert Olmstead had been building up for "a couple of months," and he needed time away from hockey "to think."

Earlier, though, Harris had told his story to a friend, who told it to this newspaper Monday.

When he left, Harris was the fourth highest scorer for the National Hockey League's lowest club, but he had been used sparingly in 41 games.

"I asked Bert to play me or trade me," he told the friend, "and he said, 'I'm not going to do either one, which leaves you one alternative—you can quit.'"

"But Billy didn't want to

give Bert the satisfaction," the friend said, "so he just stayed on until I guess he couldn't stand it anymore."

Saturday night against the Rangers, Harris played one shift and then was benched through the second period. When the club returned to the ice for the last period he changed clothes and left.

After Sunday's game with the Kings, Olmstead

announced that Harris had been suspended, and if he returns "my position is such that he'll have to be disciplined accordingly."

Harris came to the Seals in last summer's expansion draft. He was their fourth choice and held more NHL credentials than anybody on their roster — 634 games, including 610 with Toronto and 24 with Detroit.

His situation closely parallels that of Billy McNeill, who walked out on Olmstead at Vancouver after six games last season and two seasons as the Western League's most valuable player. He never returned.

Both are centers; both are 32; both have extensive NHL experience.

And both are proud and talented athletes with sensitive personalities who felt

they were sacrificing self-respect by knuckling under to Olmstead's stern discipline.

A Seals spokesman denied that Harris' departure would initiate a revolt by the rest of the club.

"Knowing Billy, this is just something he did on his own," the spokesman said. "It wouldn't be like him to encourage other players to do the same."

Apparently, it's just that guys named Billy get Bert's goat.