

Len Frig Matures as Seals' Defenseman

By **FRAN TUCKWILER**
San Jose Mercury-News

Len Frig has matured in a hurry as a defenseman for the California Seals.

He is one of the senior citizens on the blueline although he is in only his third full season in the National Hockey League.

He played all 80 games last season but this hasn't been exactly a full campaign for the Lethbridge, Alta., native.



SEALS DEFENSEMAN LEN FRIG
—Photo by Bill Fox

He has missed several games because of a broken thumb although efforts have been made to rig a special cast and brace that would enable him to play.

"Before he got hurt, Len was playing outstanding defense for us," said coach Jack Evans. "One of the top ones."

Frig has had to take on more of a leadership role with the Seals than perhaps he might have with the Chicago Black Hawks, who traded him along with Mike Christie to California in exchange for Ivan Boldirev.

Seals defensemen have met twice on their own in the last few months to take a hard look on what their problems, ambitions and goals might be. The first occurred before the season started. The second came shortly after the injury to

veteran defenseman Jim Neilson.

"We met at Bobby Stewart's house," said Frig. "We realized that without Neilson we had some real problems. The only veteran we had was Stewart and he's not all that old.

"We talked about how we'd have to tighten up without Neilson, that we weren't going to be able to sit back and rely on his experience."

The big thing as Frig and all the other defensemen agreed, along with Evans, was to cut down the goals against.

Len Frig was recently sidelined for the balance of the current season with torn cartilage in the right knee after enjoying his finest campaign in the NHL.

"We did a pretty good job of it early in the season," Frig pointed out. "Then about the time we were scoring more we started giving up more goals. It was one of those things that's hard to figure. But we're still way ahead of last season."

When the Seals started giving up more goals they also started to score more, but the results too often were the same, a defeat by one or two goals. In fact, over

the first half of the season the Seals led the league in involvement in one and two-goal margins. But Frig believes the club is close to turning the whole thing around.

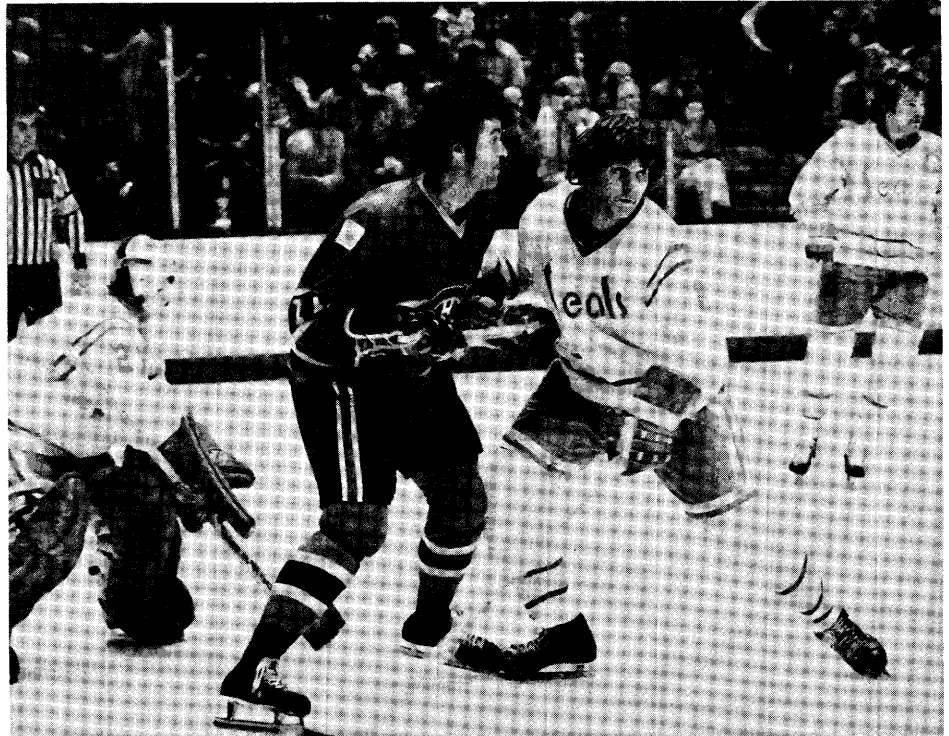
And like most players on the club, he keeps coming back to the theme that this is a young club and the future is bright.

"We just have to stick to the basic things, keep working on the fundamentals and that's what Jack has been doing all season long."

The workouts during the season have not been the most exciting.

"They get dull at times," says Frig. "We work and work on the fundamentals. The little things that can cost goals. He works us on getting back to the puck in a hurry, so we can turn and set up the play coming out. He stresses hustle all the time. We work on staying between the puck carrier and our man. Over and over. But it's little things like that which will pay off. We don't have all that much experience, we've got to learn. That's what all the good teams do, like Montreal and Philadelphia, they just keep working on the fundamentals and now that's what we're doing."

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LEN FRIG USES MUSCLE TO CLEAR 'EM OUT OF THE SLOT

—Photo by Bob Hakins



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LEN FRIG MATURES AS SEALS' DEFENSEMAN

A large factor in rating the efficiency of a hockey player is his plus or minus. Is he on the ice when his team scores more goals than are scored against it?

"We've improved on that score, too," Frig says. "We probably had a few players last year who were about minus 40. This season I'd say the worst is probably about minus 20. And a lot of the guys are probably right around being even. That's a big improvement."

When he was drafted off the Calgary Centennials by the Black Hawks in the third round of the 1970 amateur draft, Frig undoubtedly had ideas of being on a playoff contending team for some years to come. He did in fact participate in four playoff games with the Hawks after being called up late in the 1972-73 campaign from Dallas of the Central Hockey League. And he got into seven playoff games the following year.

But now it's a new ball game for Frig and others like him. But he appears confident that it can be done here, even though it may be somewhat boring working on those fundamentals.

He has established himself as an NHL defenseman who is a hard hitter, can handle himself in a fight and make the plays coming out of his own end.


He appears to be the kind of blueliner who can fit well into Evans' style and system of defensive hockey.

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