



ED LEVITT

Seals Get S.F. Freeze

Since news broke that Oakland would acquire the San Francisco Seals and major league hockey, suddenly something terrible has happened across the bay.

Seal attendance at the Cow Palace has dropped 2,000 per game, which in cold cash amounts to \$5,000.

"Before," says Seal General Manager Bud Poile, "we were drawing 5,500 a game."

"Now we're down to 3,500. If it keeps up the club could lose \$125,000."

But Poile doesn't blame the decline all on the fact that the team is moving, and that San Francisco hockey fans are pulling a Milwaukee and boycotting the club.

"The big splash about Oakland getting major league hockey along with our being down in fifth place damaged us at the box office," says Poile.

"If we ran first or second in the race we'd be hurt, too. But not to this extent."

"This major league tag has steamed up everybody. People are big league conscious now."

Seal Owners Prove Honest

The Seals, though, failed to do much for their own cause.

"You must play 800 hockey at home to draw. We've got a 35-13 record or just a little over .500," says Poile.

"This is the penalty of a minor league tag. You must win or be a contender to attract a crowd."

"Lately our record has been up and down. We won three in a row. Then we lost four."

"Now we've put together two straight. And Saturday night we drew less than 4,000 at the Cow Palace."

Poile believes the Shasta Corp., part owners of the Seals, proved honest businessmen by making the announcement of next season's move to Oakland while the present season was still in progress.

"They showed a lot of class," says the GM. "They could have waited until the end of the season before popping the news."

"It might have avoided ticket selling problems this year. But the Shasta people didn't want to deceive anyone."

"They played it honest. They now can go to bed with a clear conscience."

New Faces Coming Here

The Seals have received a total of 25 angry letters from their San Francisco customers, those outraged because "you sold out to Oakland."

But Poile dismisses the mad missives.

"We have 3,200 hard-core S.F. fans and I think 90 per cent of them will come to Oakland to see our games."

"In addition, the new Oakland arena should attract thousands of new viewers."

"Of course, the East Bay reaction to our move has been most gratifying."

"I'm looking forward to a great year in Oakland. On some nights I would like to think we could fill those 13,000 seats at the new arena."

"But I'd settle for 7,500 a game. I think we can do it. We did at the Cow Palace during the 1963-64 season. We took in over half a million dollars."

When the Seals come to Oakland even their most devoted followers won't recognize them.

Besides taking on a new name — the California Seals — the club will take on a new look.

Burns Will Stay Coach

"We'll open with as many new kids as possible," says Poile.

"The two big things I'm concerned with is molding a contending club and setting up a farm system."

"Charley Burns, as far as I'm concerned, will remain as coach next year."

"This was only his first season of coaching and he has a long way to go."

"Charley has the right attitude, the necessary imagination. All he has to do now is to get lucky."

The playing coach, though, has been brutally unlucky.

He suffered a back injury and had to be sidelined.

"That's one of the reasons we're in trouble," says Poile.

"We also lost several other players. You can't lose 100 guys in this league and come up with replacements of equal ability."

"We're still fighting for the playoffs. But we've got to win 80 per cent of our remaining 15 games to make it."

The next Seal skirmish is Wednesday night at the Cow Palace.

Drop in and get a preview of coming events in Oakland.