

This time Finley got out-- with a bundle

To use his own colorful phraseology, Charles O. Finley stepped out of the Bay Area hockey scene one day last week "smelling like a rose."

Under doctor's orders to dispose of his professional sports holdings, he had just resold the rag-tag California Golden Seals to the National Hockey League for a sum of money which more than compensated him for his initial investment and the losses he had incurred during the three years he had operated the club.

Finley was guarded about the figures. Try as we might, we couldn't get him to say how much he'd made on the deal. But the smile, even on the pallid face of a sick man, suggested a cool million.

Relating it to the full dosage, it was a case of one down and two to go. Finley still must unload the basketball Memphis Tams and the Oakland A's, twice crowned champions of the baseball world, if he is to comply with the M.D.'s three-pill prescription.

The Tams, expected to be sold before the end of the month, should present no difficulties. But, mainly because he has no stomach for it, the third pill, requiring the sale of the A's, will be a tough 'un to swallow.

"I've gotta go through with it," Finley told us. But, with the next breath, he said: "Once more in '74." Identified by him as a jingle Mrs. Finley composed, it was hardly the sort of toast, or chaser, we'd associate with one who was going out of the baseball business.

Anyway, Finley is well rid of the National Hock-

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ey League. And vice versa. It's a tossup as to which of the two parties to the transaction is the happier.

There are no hard feelings. Paid in full, Finley said: "Hockey is the roughest, toughest, fastest, most exciting game of them all." A spokesman for the NHL was in full agreement. "Right on," the man said.

Finley added that he was sorry, terribly sorry, he was unable to make a go of it. "I tried to give the Bay Area a winning team," he said. "But too many things went against me."

Like what? Like Finley himself? That is the answer one gets from Finley's critics who hold him solely responsible for the team's wretched showing and its failure to gain a solid following.

The argument ignores the fact that Finley was not the first loser. The San Francisco-Oakland franchise had been in three different sets of corporate hands before Finley took over and obviously none of them made a go of it or they wouldn't have wanted out.

From the outset it was said of Finley that he "knew nothing about hockey." Granting his lack of knowledge was established through failure, is the success of Finley's world champion A's the proof that the man who owns them knows everything there is to know about baseball?

We don't believe it, either. But if we were to buy one we'd feel pretty sneaky if we didn't buy the other.

More to the point, Finley shouldn't have been expected to know all there is to know about hockey. Expert knowledge of a particular sport, while desirable, isn't a rigid requirement of ownership.

Joan Whitney Payson, the grand lady who owns the New York Mets, is esteemed as an equestrienne, or was when she was younger and slimmer. But the Mets are a baseball team.

And, under either her maiden or married name, there is no record of a Joan Whitney Payson having played ball for the Bloomer Girls. We've looked it up.

One of these days, hockey will catch on big here as it has almost everywhere else. In places like New York, Chicago and Boston it's standing room only, and in Montreal season tickets for two are a sure-fire, husband-trapping dowry.

You'll see it happening here. Just give it time. Charles O. Finley may not know hockey. But he has the check in his pocket and that beats waiting for it.