

'System' gives Seals new look



Seals' Al McAdam, moving puck, is hooked by Harold Snepsts — penalty coming up

Examiner Photo by Bill Nichols

By Ken Miller

For the last five years, you could have brought forth some perplexed looks from Gilles Meloche and Bobby Stewart asking them about the "system" of the California Golden Seals.

As far as they were concerned, a system was a method to pick two straight winners at Bay Meadows by studying the moon.

Now, of course, the post-game victory bleats concern the success of the "system," or the way rookie coach Jack Evans emphasizes to his skaters the importance of positional play and organization on the ice.

No longer are the Seals skating around, appearing to search for the nearest exit, trying to get out of the arena alive. Oh, yes, there is organization.

And if the paying customer isn't impressed by blackboard-perfect execution, he can be impressed by positive results. There have been lots of those.

"Things are a lot different around here," said Stewart after the Seals had defeated—and outplayed—the Vancouver Canucks last night at the Oakland Coliseum Arena, 2-1. "We've got a lot of new guys, and they're adjusting. We know what we're supposed to do, we wait for the opportunities, and then we take advantage of them."

The Seals? The California Golden Seals? The National Hockey League's ugly stepsisters? The same.

• They love that Dennis Maruk — see Wells Twombly, Page 90.

Last year it was the "system" teams, the defensive, checking-oriented clubs like the Los Angeles Kings, New York Islanders and the Canucks who used to throttle the Seals by superior organization and the ability to capitalize on disorganization. That isn't the case in 1975-76. The new faces and the old alike are willing to learn, and performing what they have learned.

"Now this is a two-way hockey club," said Meloche, who has been tattooed by pucks throughout his career, but is finally enjoying a successful season (seven wins and a tie in 12 starts and a 2.77 goals against average). "I haven't been under as much pressure this year.

"The difference is the help I get from the defenseman, and that makes my job a lot easier. The defensemen know that the forwards are going to be coming back down the ice and helping out, so they don't have to go out so far when the other club comes back. They can stand up and help out.

"A game like tonight, I wanted to shut Vancouver out (the Canucks scored with just 32 seconds left), but what the hell. It's still a win. That's what's important."

Absolutely. If the Seals hope to do anything about catching the

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Snappy win gives Seals confidence

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Toronto Maple Leafs in the Adams Division and making the playoffs, they need the consistency. Coming off one of their best road trips, and now sporting a 1-0-0 record at the beginning of a 12-game home stand, the confidence is there.

"We're all playing with a little more excitement this year," said Stewart. "I like to get a good body check in early in the game, and that helps get us stirred up. We aren't goons, we're just playing tough hockey."

Historically, the toughest. The Canucks owned a 21-5-0 lifetime record against California, but that meant nothing last night. The Seals outshot their intimidators, 29-18, over the first two periods and took a 1-0 lead when Dennis Maruk whipped Vancouver goalie Ken Lockett on a high drive 6:52 into the second period.

Then it was checking and more checking until Wayne Merrick, playing his first game since coming to Oakland for Larry Patey, made a brilliant move around the Canuck defense and made it 2-0 3:26 into the third period. Which was enough to win.

Now that's a system.

