

Hockey PR Like a Punch in the Head

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OSHAWA, Ont. — The public relations of professional hockey is like a punch in the head. It may jar you but it will straighten up your point of view.

What makes it seem so

Lost of a Series

stark, in this day of the coined phrase by glib coaches, is it's so brutally honest. Like hockey.

Imagine a Raider or 45er head coach blasting out:

"McGillicuddy is going to have to make up his mind which league he wants to play in. His biggest problem seems to be courage," or;

"Ferner continues to be very unimpressive. He's destroying the club with his loose play. It was a disgusting show by most of our veterans, in fact. We had a full house and we embarrassed ourselves."

The phrase-makers of pro

football and pro baseball give you the house line, little white lies about some bum they have to keep around because the club owner got stuck on a \$45,000 contract-with-bonus and isn't about to admit he goofed. Little con jobs to hide from the world that a nice old vet isn't getting the job done, that a No. 1 draft choice is a pussy cat.

Hank Bauer had the audacity to blurt out "They quit on me," and Charley Finley fired him. Both of them knew Hank was all through weeks before.

Once you get to understand about hockey, it shapes up as square as a big man's handshake. No messing around with four-bit phrases when four-letter words tell it like it is.

"Lousy goaltending, no hitting and no skating," sunmen up a recent 5-4 exhibition game loss. "We were not in it."

Where the PR men in other sports would cringe if a coach blasted a player and "destroyed our morale," the guys

who play hockey respect a Fred Glover for telling them off — and telling the fans about it.

"There are no corners to hide in," said veteran wing Bill Hicke.

So much the better, then, to judge what Glover sees in his 1969 camp. For instance, a new kid who may not even get into Oakland this season.

"I signed a pro contract today," 20-year-old Neil Nicholson said the other evening on the steps of the homely Genosha Hotel. "It's a big day."

He said it like a farm boy confiding that he'd just become engaged to the town belle, awe-stricken that he hadn't become an instant reject.

"Nicholson was terrific in two games, clearly our best defenseman," the boss said last night. "He has a chance to be a fine hockey player."

These aren't smooth and urbane college kids coming into a pro camp with All-American clippings in hand. Nicholson

describes himself as a "new boy from the Maritimes," which is admitting to bump-knism.

So he's a courageous 5-11, 176-pounder who started skating at 3 and was on his first organized team at 8, both Neil and Glover know it's all uphill from here.

Against their farm club in Providence, when some of the veterans were earning such coachly blasts as "It's tough to have to say it, but we've broken down and it's the veterans who are causing the problems," Nicholson turned up blooded and on the payroll, a sleeper who stuck.

Next day Glover skated them until their tongues were hanging out, a chastisement all underwent whether they'd put out or not the night before, and the honest world of hockey heard this reaction:

"We deserved it. He gave it to us good."

Nicholson had been chal-

The Seals Are Coming

lenged and got into a fist-swinging go with a tough older head in the exhibition game, and the vets had let him take his lumps. He didn't seem to mind but was surprised at the reaction next day.

"Coach Glover apologized to me for the veterans," he said. "Then he said Mr. Selke wanted to see me and they signed me to a contract, my first as a pro. I didn't get all I asked for but I got more than I expected."

For all his hayfield manner, the young kid from St. John, New Brunswick, turned down several college opportunities, including one at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in upstate New York to play hockey. He's strong in mathematics and the physical sciences. Strong, too, in defense.

"We don't know if he'll be with Providence or up here," Glover said. It depends upon

injuries, of which the Seals have had a bunch.

The club is looking at its rookies closely. So far Don O'Donoghue, another 20-year-old, has been most impressive. Tony Featherstone, first round draftee who scored 68 points on 29 goals and 39 assists in the tough Ontario Hockey Association last year, hasn't come off an early injury. Ron Stackhouse is a big 6-3, 190-pound rangy type guy who'll be tough as he fills out.

Glover and the veterans aren't pulling punches about Oakland's chances in the 1969-70 National Hockey League race. They finished a strong second in the Western Division last year, but faded in the playoffs.

"The Western Division is all improved," Glover said. "St. Louis and Minnesota show fine potential. We'll have to work to stay with them. In the East it looks like the Canadiens, the Bruins and the Rangers, just like last year."

"St. Louis has to be consi-

dered carrying a slight edge in our division," he said, and veterans like Capt. Ted Hampson and forward Billy Hicke agree.

Hicke questions that "Saint Lewie," as he pronounces it, can be as strong with goaltender Glenn Hall retired. "If he stays retired," Hicke said.

Carol Vadnais also leans toward Montreal in the East, agrees that New York should be in the playoffs, and says he's "got to pick Detroit" to be coming up to the top in the old division.

"In our division I don't see why we won't finish first or close," he said. "They'll miss Hall. But he might be back," he said of the St. Louis Blues.

St. Louis was 37-25-14 with 204 goals for and 157 goals against last season. Oakland was 29-36-11, with 219 goals for, 251 against.

"If we can cut down one goal every two games, we could hold it to 220 goals against, and that will change a lot of losses to wins," he said. "I'd like to improve my defensive records individual-

ly. I finished minus 18 on the season."

Now a second-year defenseman, Vadnais had a strong first season, 15 goals and 27 assists, while absorbing a lot of pressure from attacking foes.

"I hope we have less three-on-two this year," he said. "We'll have a little more experience with Harry Howell coming to help us and with a year of game experience for others."

"At 6-2, 200, I'm the smallest defenseman on the team. Bert Marshall is 6-3, 205, Stackhouse is 6-3, Doug Roberts is 6-2 and over 200. Howell is 6-1, 200, and one of the best the Rangers ever had."

"We don't have all the size in the forward lines and our forward were backing up a little last season, but we trust each other," he said. "It all went well for me, but it was a team effort. I'm looking forward to another one. I have confidence in myself and in my teammates and we all will play for Fred Glover."