

Finley Should Suit Up for Seals' Contest

By Nelson Cullenward
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When the California Golden Seals went winless for the ninth straight time the other evening, coach and general manager Fred Glover threatened to put on his livery and go out and show his charges the whys and where-fors of hockey during practice sessions.

We have a better idea.

Why not make Charles O. Finley, the absentee owner who apparently could care less about his hockey team, put on the pads and take Gilles Meloche's place in the nets tonight when the Seals take on that "French connection" known as the Buffalo Sabres at the Oakland Arena?

It might give the missing Finley an idea of what his

goalie has to face, night after night, with the stripped-down Seals, reduced to dog-meat for the rest of the National Hockey League because Finley's penny-pinching tactics cost him eight players to the new World Hockey Association.

Evidently, Finley doesn't care about his fans, who are disappearing in droves over at the Coliseum complex. For the Minnesota game Wednesday evening, a paltry 3194 were in attendance. That same Wednesday night 18,050 were at St. Louis, (another expansion team) 17,000 at Philadelphia, 16,067 at Montreal, 15,668 at Buffalo, 12,590 at Atlanta (another newcomer), and 11,209 at Detroit.

And Finley is supposed to be a business man.

Only the Seals' owner knows, but his lack of promotion of the Seals, the lack of talent on his team, and his general parsimonious approach to the local hockey franchise, makes one wonder if Finley isn't trying to force the National Hockey League to let him move his Seals out of this area. That was tried before, by other owners, but the franchise was sold to Finley with the understanding that the team must stay in the Bay Area to "keep balance in the league."

Evidently, Finley finds it hard to make a trade and, when he does, it is generally to give up good talent and a healthy salary for something not quite as good, but cheaper.

It isn't fair to the players themselves, or to coach Glover, one of the fairest, toughest and most dedicated hockey men in the game, and most of all to the fans who go out to the arena and suffer, night after night.

However, all isn't lost. The Seals do have their good nights and tonight's opponents, the Sabres provided the hapless Seals with one of the paltry few (four) victories they have achieved this year.

This occurred here on Nov. 17, when the Walt McKechnie line derailed the "French Connection," 5-1. Since then, the injury-ridden Seals have won only once, beating Detroit, 6-4.

Buffalo is making a solid bid for a playoff berth in the Eastern Division of the NHL and is only five points out of first place and 12 points ahead of 5th place Detroit.

If Finley can't get out here in time for tonight's game, maybe he can get here on Christmas Eve when the hated Los Angeles Kings arrive on the scene.

Gilles could use a night off, before he gets shell-shocked.