

Gary Croteau Lives Up to Name

By Ken Rudnick

A Member of the Sports Staff

Jack Kent Cooke, the multi-millionaire whose empire includes the Los Angeles Kings and the Los Angeles Lakers, has a press agent's love for nicknames.

Thus, one former member of the Kings, Eddie Joyal, became Eddie (The Jet) Joyal, was soon to become Gary proving that Cooke's large-sized ego far outstripped his flair for creativity. When Gary Croteau joined the Kings in February of 1969, he was soon to become Gary (Bull) Croteau. Not much imagination there, either.

Croteau's style was straightforward, dedicated wholeheartedly to the proposition that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. If someone in a different-colored uniform got



GARY CROTEAU
... promise fulfilled

in the way, there were always 205 pounds on a 6-foot frame to deal with the obstacle.

Three N.H.L. teams and one expansion draft later Croteau, now a Kansas City Scout, hasn't changed.

"I guess I've always been told to stay on my wing," he said. "It probably grooved me to stay on the boards, go up and down. There're defense-men who want to stop you, so you're bound to collide once in a while."

The approach demands a minimum regard for bodily well-being but, as much as anything else, it has kept him in Kansas City while fainter hearts with greater talent have departed. It has allowed the Scouts' management to overlook the purely statistical aspects of his performance.

"He's a bear for work," said Bep Guidolin, the Scouts' coach, watching Croteau grit his way through a recent

practice. "That's what a hockey club needs—a bunch of guys who're willing to work."

Until last Thursday night the only tangible result of Croteau's labor this season was a single goal. He had never beten much of a goal-scorer before. His single-season high in the N.H.L. is 15, a modest total he achieved with California in 1970-71. But one for the first 41 games?

"It had to be the worst start of my career," Croteau said. "When you start going 10, 15, 20, 25 games with ut a goal. . . if you go five games without a goal, you start to worry. When I was pressing, I was coming close, hitting a lot of posts. That made it more frustrating."

Croteau had scored his only goal of the season Nov. 3 in

Washington. His wilting dry spell ended after 34 games when he muscled past Bobby Orr for the eventual game-winner in a stunning, 3-2 upset in Boston.

"I felt 100 per cent better," he said. "I started getting some of my confidence back."

More of it returned Wednesday night with his third goal, a deflection of a shot by Jim McElmury in a 4-4 tie against Atlanta.

While Croteau was agonizing over his scoring drought, he could cling to his sanity by recognizing his defensive contribution. Since being paired regularly approximately the first of the year, Croteau and Ed Gilbert have looked like anything but expansion-type penalty-killers. Croteau's persistence and Gilbert's more artful style have been a good mixture.