

Seals jeopardizing NHL

PITTSBURGH (UPI) — The National Hockey League is in financial trouble but not only because of the multi-million dollar bidding war with the World Hockey Association.

NHL president Clarence Campbell says the league is being bled to death because "we were stupid enough to give a franchise to a schoolboy who played good golf and wore a Princeton tie."

He said Wednesday night the NHL's takeover of the Oakland Seals franchise has cost the league \$2.9 million the past two years in legal fees alone. The internal problem, he said, far

outweighs the NHL's economic struggle with the WHA.

"The WHA isn't going to be with us very long," Campbell said. "We just have to weather the storm a little longer. It's a matter of economics. Where will they get the money to pay those people. We've got to resolve the Oakland situation or we will bleed to death."

The Oakland team entered the NHL with five other expansion teams in 1967 under the direction of Barend Van Gerbig and "50 backers," Campbell said. "We were mesmerized by all of them, but none of them put their name on pa-

per. When money was needed, they wouldn't come up with it."

Van Gerbig "threatened the Oakland fans with moving if they didn't turn out," according to Campbell, then asked for league permission to move to Vancouver, where he intended to unload the franchise.

The move would have bucked NHL tradition of never moving a franchise under fire. The league rejected the request. Gerbig filed suit when the NHL placed the Canucks franchise in Vancouver, claiming he could have retained the

franchise if he had received permission to move.

"In the past two years, we've spent \$4,000 per day on our own litigation," he said. "We're in this trouble because we were stupid enough to give a franchise to a schoolboy who played good golf and wore a Princeton tie."

An Oakland court ruled last summer in favor of the league, but Campbell said the case is still a thorn in the league's side because "we're still waiting to see if he'll appeal."

In the interim, the club changed hands several

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Campbell claims Seals bleeding NHL to death

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times and finally went to Oakland A's owner Charles Finley for about \$8 million. Finley unloaded the poorly drawing Seals on the league this summer for a sum of \$9 million.

"The Seals had been a good club," Pittsburgh Penguins owner Tad Potter said. "But Finley's relations with Athletes is history and when the WHA came about, some of their best jumped leagues."

Campbell said he believes the salary battle between the NHL and WHA has levelled off.

"Economics have dictated a peak in salaries," he said. "Agents are an enormous problem. But they can only sell what they've got and we can only buy what we can afford."

Campbell said after the initial expansion in 1967, the average team needed \$1 million per year to operate. "The expansion brought the cost up to \$1.5 million. An arena holding 12,500

people was more than ample to support a team. But with the WHA even if the arenas are full every night, it isn't enough."

"Economically, there's no way they (WHA) can survive. We're going to have hundreds of unemployed hockey players."