

NHL Chief Hits Seals' Ownership

By RICH GOHLKE

OAKLAND — National Hockey League president Clarence Campbell made it clear yesterday that it is his thinking, and by implication the NHL's policy, that the failure at the gate of Big League hockey thus far in the Bay Area is the fault of problems with current Oakland Seals' ownership, rather than with the game or the area.

In Oakland as part of a tour of the new west coast expansion clubs and exploration of new expansion sites, Campbell was quick to separate "Seals management" from "Seals ownership."

"Seals management" got unqualified praise from Campbell for its efforts in improving the club from last place at the end of last season to second place at this juncture this year.

But the owners didn't get any such pat on the back from Campbell, who stated a league expansion committee is actively recruiting potential new owners with local money to keep the club in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area.

Campbell made it plain the league feels that if current Seals' owners have lost some \$2½ million thus far, as reliable

estimates indicate, that is strictly their problem.

"I always believed these are two things anyone can do on their own. One is to go to hell in your own way. The other is to go broke in your own way. And anybody who tries to give them advice is a fool," Campbell illustrates.

"What does a store do if it is having financial problems? Say move to another corner and everything will be OK?", Campbell adds to his hardline policy.

"Right now, the Seals have an exciting hockey club and a very competent one. I feel very

strongly if or its successor will be perpetuated in this area . . . As for the franchise, the league doesn't care what side of water it is on. That is the free will of the owners, but it will stay in the Bay Area." Campbell left open strong rumors on a Seals' move back to San Francisco.

Ownership of the Seals' split between Puck, Inc. and the old San Francisco Seals, Ltd., a 53-partner combine which originally purchased the franchise, was directly blamed for the bulk of the Seals' problems. To complicate matters, the owners have accepted money from two sources in exchange for pur-

chase and franchise switch options.

In explaining the ownership problems of the Seals, Campbell explained an attempt to streamline the chain of ownership never was completed and, "that is typical of the operation."

It is the policy of the league that the franchise should . . . remain in this area . . . the expansion committee is trying right now to arrange some type of change of ownership so the team will remain in this area," the NHL presy expands.

Campbell states there have been no firm offers, but several possibilities which "wouldn't be

proper for me to discuss at this time" have been explored. "We don't think the solution to the Seals' problems is to move away. I don't think there is anyone in the NHL who doesn't think hockey will flourish in the San Francisco Bay Area if properly promoted."

"It takes more than dollars to run a hockey club. Local ownership is needed. No sports promotion can be successful unless the public can identify with teams. What we have to do is present some firm direction into staying in this area and then get ownership that is willing to

put money into it until it is successful.

"The Seals' problems arise from the nature of the present organization. It is very difficult to get a consensus of 53 people," Campbell concludes.

Queried if it is correct that the NHL is unhappy that present Seals' owners were just trying to make a fast buck as speculators rather than willing to build a franchise and is now letting the present owners "stew in their own juice," Campbell firmly replies, "you're not going to get me to confirm that."