

# Caps Destroy Seals' Setup

By JOHN PORTER

What more could the Seals have needed?

The team they're chasing in the standings already had lost and the team they're playing had the worst record in the National Hockey League.

Everything was perfect. Right?

The Seals outshot the opposition two to one. The visitors had played the night before and many of them should have been in bed with thermometers in their mouths rather than on the ice with sticks in their hands.

Just what the Seals ordered. Right?

The Seals were looking forward to setting three club records: longest win streak (5), longest unbeaten string (6) and most wins in a month (8).

The momentum was there. Right?

Something was missing, though. First it was Gary Sabourin, then it was Wayne Merrick and finally it was the Seals' excellent defense as the Washington Capitals absconded with a 4-2 decision before 4,274 at the Arena.

"We had some good chances, but their goalie made the necessary saves," was the way Jack Evans saw it.

What the Seals' coach saw midway through the first period should have told him things would get worse.

Cont. from 1st Sports Page

Referee Alf Lejeune told Wayne Merrick to take the rest of the night off for making an unkind gesture in the direction of Washington's Yvon Labre. The two players had been exchanging punches.

"We missed Merrick, there's no doubt," said Evans. "He's our leading scorer and gets the big goal to give us a lift.

"That took two men off our top line," he said.

Sabourin never made it to the ice for the national anthem. Flu zonked him, so Jim Pappin, he eventually scored, moved into the starboard position.

Pappin later switched to center when Merrick departed and Rick Hampton moved up from defense to play right wing.

"Sorry guys," Merrick, who had showered and changed to street clothes, told those in the press room before the second period started. "I just lost my temper. I didn't know about that rule."

Evans said the referee was obligated to call the game misconduct and that the league office could hand down further punishment after a review of the game report.

"I've never seen a ref give anyone a game misconduct for that," said Bill McCreary. "Why not just give Merrick 10 minutes?"

The Seals general manager knew he was in for a bad night even before the game began. He zipped when he

should have zipped and a warmup puck cut him over the left eye. He took six stitches.

The Seals actually led after Mike Marson scored first in the second period for Washington. Gary Holt tied it with a shot that had too much English on it for goalie Bernie Wolfe and Pappin shot the puck off a defenseman's skate for the lead.

Then the Caps, many of them suffering from colds, scored three times in two minutes and 33 seconds to prevent the Seals from trimming any of Toronto's eight-point lead.