

KING COBRA

By BILL LIBBY

Gary Simmons, a colorful character from Calgary, is not the greatest goal-tender in the game, but one game this season he was as great as a goal-tender can be. That was in November in the Forum against the Kings on one of the most dynamic nights the Kings have had in the current campaign.

The contest wound up in a scoreless tie, but Rogie Vachon was not tested as Simmons was. The Cleveland club never attacked Vachon, nor supported Simmons with any style, but the cat in the cobra mask was magnificent, turning aside various vicious shots with a series of spectacular saves.

It was a game a guy should be able to put in a frame to preserve so he could see it forever.

"I've had games like that before, but not many," Gary grins. "A few years ago in the Western League I had a run of games, about 200 consecutive shutout minutes, that were as good for Phoenix when we won the playoffs. I had 170 straight shutout minutes last season for the Seals.

"You get off to a good start in a game like that and you see it's going to be your night and you know that everything you do is going to be right. You want the shots because you know you can handle them. You go sort of crazy.

"I'm that kind of goaltender. When I'm at my best, no one is better. Unfortunately, when I'm bad, no one is worse. Consistency is what you want, but I seem to run hot and cold. I was hot that night in the Forum," he concluded.

It is ironic, then, that Simmons now has landed in Inglewood along with Jim Moxey in exchange for Juha Widing and Gary Edwards, as of a barter with the Barons the third Friday of January.

Born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in July of 1944, but reared in Lethbridge, Alberta, and later settled in Calgary, the 32-year-old netminder—at 6-2 and 200 pounds by far the biggest the Kings have had—was a late-starter who



NOT YOUR EVERYDAY TATTOOED-COWBOY-GOALTENDER, new netminder Gary Simmons hopes to play as well with the Kings as he did against them.

wasn't supposed to even make the majors. He bounced around before he got a brief shot with San Diego in the old Western League at the age of 28, laid out a year, found himself in Phoenix and made the majors in Oakland at 30. He is in only his third season in the NHL, with a goals-against of around 3.5, but he can be better than that. An active, aggressive goaler, he gets a lot of penalty minutes.

In Oakland, he was with Shep Goldberg, now Laker publicist, and had been bugging his old buddy to get him here. He says, "I'm no Vachon, but I can do a job behind him. I want to be with a winner and I'll give the Kings a lot in whatever games they give me." One thing he gives them is color. For example, he is the first tattooed King. He began when he wanted to be a sailor, but never bothered to join the Navy. He has 10, including a cobra.

An eccentric, he says, "A player called me a cobra for my quickness, so I had one put on me and another painted on my mask, although the idiot added rattles to the tail. I have

my wife's name in a heart, but when she first saw my tattoos she didn't put them high on her list of things she likes.

"She doesn't even see them these days. Neither do I notice them. They're part of me and I'm finished with them. I don't regret doing them. I like to do different things," confesses the proprietor of two northern California pizza parlors.

Simmons calls himself a Calgary cowboy, but he doesn't go around shooting Indians. To the contrary, he is into Indian jewelry and has an alternate mask painted by Indian school kids. He wears cowboy clothes, which are accepted more readily in California than in Cleveland.

He used to rodeo, although he is allergic to horses. His wife and daughter ride, he has bought 20 acres of an existing ranch around Angel's Camp, and the last time I talked to him he was going out to buy a saddle. I mentioned that he didn't have a horse yet.

"That's true, but this way I'll be ready when I get one," he said.