

# No blushing by Seals in tie with Caps

By Ken Miller

The people concerned with the success of the California Golden Seals, other than the players themselves, can look at a tie with the woebegone Washington Capitals and howl in dismay.

Of course then there are the players themselves, who were most decidedly undismayed after rookie Gary Holt's goal with 1:23 to play last night at the Oakland Coliseum Arena produced a 3-3 result.

The Caps may have a career road record of 1-4-1 in their brief National Hockey League history, but off what they showed last night in the Seals' home opener before a raucous crowd of 7,866, they are no longer laughingstocks. In fact, California was lucky to get a tie.

"That was a hell of a game," said Seal goalie Gilles Meloche, who was forced to make only 15 saves but enjoyed a lead for only a minute and 36 seconds all night.

"It wasn't a disgrace to tie them, and you just can't really be too disappointed not to win. There

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was a lot of good skating, hustling and hitting. I thought we played well enough to win, but I never thought we were supposed to. They've only been beaten bad once this year."

There was certainly no danger Washington would be beaten bad last night. Despite being outshot on the evening, 18-29, they were checking and also not backing off checks. The game won't be compared to any seventh games of Stanley Cup finals, but it won't be compared, either, to some of those truly abominable outings the Seals had last year.

And for now, it seems the Seals are willing to take on every opponent with respect. It was really remarkable how unaware they were of Washington's futility away from Landover, Md.

"I didn't even know about it at all," said Holt. "They didn't seem so bad to me. You just have to work hard playing against anybody."

And Holt, certainly, was working hard. Right until the end, too, when he took advantage of Cap defenseman Jack Lynch's failure to clear the puck by pushing it through goalie Michel Belhumeur's legs.

"I guess it was sort of a fluke goal," he acknowledged quietly. "I just saw the center zone was open and cut to my left. When he (Lynch) tried to pull the puck away, I just poked at it and sort of got a good little shot away. I'd say next to scoring the tying and winning goals last year against in the finals of the (Central League) playoffs for Salt Lake, it was my biggest thrill in hockey."

Added Dave Gardner, who set up California's first goal on a feed to Dave Hrechkosy, "I know you can't say it was a bad game for us."

If it was a good game for anybody, it was great game for Belhumeur, who still has never had a victory in the NHL. He kept the Caps in the game long enough so that Holt's goal was only good for a tie.

The fans didn't really seem to mind. There were no outraged choruses of boos, as there were last season when the Seals were busy disgracing themselves in defeats to clubs like Kansas City and Minnesota. Rather, there seems to be at least a festive aura now that there is no danger of watching a lame duck franchise.

"There hasn't been a sign of any letdown in spirit," said new coach Jack Evans, making his Oakland debut.