

Seals hit new low in 9-2 loss to Pittsburgh

By Ken Miller

Whatever other bad games the California Golden Seals figure to play this season, they can't be expected to reach the nadir of last night's effort. And "bad" last night was two-years-ago "bad," with most of the bodies in California uniforms looking unable to outrace a glacier.

"We haven't played a poorer game this year," losing Coach Jack Evans pointed out sourly after he had watched the Pittsburgh Penguins, who had won only once in eight starts coming in, dominate the Seals, 9-2, before a stifled crowd of 3,857 at the Oakland Coliseum Arena.

"I've never seen a night where so many players were off. We played well at no position. Sometimes a couple of different guys will be off, or even a whole line, but that was an embarrassment."

And for those on hand other than the score-crazy Penguins, it was a yawner. But for every losing coach who is ready to bemoan a failure, there is a winning coach willing to claim a success. Voila, Marc Boileau.

"I knew we were ready for a

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game like this," said the Penguin boss. "Yesterday we had our best practice of the year and tonight we had the most commotion in the dressing room before any game this year."

And likely after any game, too. The Penguins started early against the Seals, Syl Apps knocking in two goals in the first six minutes and Battleship Kelly adding two more by the end of the opening 20. Both completed hat tricks, and also a thorough ruining of Seal netminder Gilles Meloche's goals against average.

Meloche had entered the game with a log of 2.61, fifth best in the National Hockey League, and came out at 2.95. It wasn't his

grandest game of the year, as once again he was beaten by the long shot. Apps, who also had two assists, was the benefactor twice.

"It might have been a bad night for Meloche," said Kelly, who hit the post twice in addition to his three goals, "but we were primed to beat anybody. The whole team had a meeting yesterday and we said, 'Hey, we've got to get our heads together.' The only thing beating us was mental lapses.

"It also helped us to have three days out here and a practice on the Seals' ice. We got to know the ice and the bounces off the boards, and with our bodies adjusting to the time change, we were ready."

Added Apps: "We haven't had a game all year where we controlled the puck more. Instead of our defensemen whipping the puck all around, our plays were working."

It certainly helped that the Seals had no desire to control the puck themselves. Only in the meaningless third period, when California outshot Pittsburgh, 19-10, did there seem to be life in the losers' attack.

"You can never get a reading on a game like this," said Evans. "It was our first really bad one this year."

With all respect to Pittsburgh, the worst.