

Seal Scores 4 Goals

By JOHN PORTER

Gary Sabourin became the Seals' hottest scorer and Phil Esposito became one of the New York Strangers in the Arena last night.

For Sabourin it was his finest 60 minutes of hockey with the Seals as he scored four times to help California outblast New York, 7-5, and end the team's six-game losing streak.

As for Esposito, the all-star center who joined the unfamiliar Rangers just hours before the game after Boston traded him in a five-man deal, it was his usual offensive night with two goals and an assist.

Defensively, Espo was something else. He was on the ice when five of California's goals zipped into the net.

"It was the best game I've ever seen the Seals play," conceded Esposito. "I was nervous. It was like being in my first



GARY SABOURIN

NHL game. I had to keep asking the other guys where I was supposed to be."

Sabourin, the 32-year-old who

was discarded by Toronto last season because he was supposed to have gimpy knees, knew exactly where to be last night — very close to Ralph Klassen and Bob Girard.

"For first-year kids," Gary said of his linemates, "they're showing a lot of composure out there. Our line seems to be clicking now. We've played together since training camp, but everything doesn't fall into place right away."

Sabourin, who once scored three goals in an NHL game playing for St. Louis, has six goals in his last three games and eight for the season. He scored only five last year and seven the year before.

Sabourin scored the first goal of the game before some of the 7,181 fans seated themselves. He converted Girard's rebound at 1:01 and the Rangers played

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catch-up by alternating goals with the Seals until Rick Hampton banged in a shot in the last minute of the second period for a 5-4 California lead.

Seals goalie Gilles Meloche reportedly broke his toe in the warmup, but played anyway. Billy Fairbairn tipped one past him five minutes after Sabourin's first goal to make it 1-1.

Sabourin picked up No. 2 at 8:20 of the first period, after Hampton, who was one of many Seals skating spectacularly all night, forced goalie John Davidson to leave another rebound in front.

Esposito picked up one of his patented six goals at 18:37 and the period ended 2-2.

Al MacAdam nailed Davidson at 8:37 of the second period when Dennis Maruk sent him down the middle for a 3-2 Seals' lead, but Rick Middleton countered at 9:37 on a rebound after California lost a faceoff in its own zone.

Once again the Seals led, this time Klassen leading Sabourin in alone on Davidson. The veteran right wing gave the goalie a variety of moves then shoveled the puck under him.

Esposito made it 4-4 with a power play goal at 13:36, but Hampton's shot with a good feed to the crease from Jim Pappin put the Seals in front to stay.

Sabourin locked it up with his fourth goal 63 seconds into the third period. Klassen again sending him on a solo against the goalie. That time Gary took the shot from memory.

"I remember a St. Louis training camp when I scored quite a few goals against Davidson. They were low on the stick side. I tried it tonight and sure enough, it went in," said Sabourin.

The Seals twice hit the post in the third period, but Larry Patey made sure of the win when he filched the puck from Gilles Marotte at the New York blue line and walked in alone to score at 9:24 for 7-4.

Rod Gilbert picked up New York's last goal in the final minute, the only significance being that it was Esposito's first assist as a Ranger.

"I had to go out there with a program tonight to check out all the names," joked Seals defenseman Jim Neilson, who can count on one hand the number of Rangers who were on the team with him two seasons ago.

NOTES: Defenseman Carol Vadnais, once a Seals' captain, didn't report to the Rangers with Esposito... His wife has a chronic illness and will have an operation Monday in Montreal... Vad claims he has a no-cut contract, but odds are he'll eventually join the Rangers... Seals play Boston here tomorrow night with Bobby Orr, just off knee surgery, back in the lineup with center Jean Ratelle and defenseman Brad Park, recently of the Rangers.