

# Hockey's Doormat

## There's Nothing Golden About the Seals

By DICK BEARDSLEY

Think of something outrageous... Tiny Tim as Pagliacci, say, or Dagwood Bumstead at Harvard Business School.

Now think of the California Golden Seals.

They're a hockey team. And if the National Hockey League was the U.S. Army the Golden Seals would be The Sad Sack.

The California Golden Seals...

Five of their players are trying "mind dynamics"—a 1970s spinoff of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking"—in an effort to reverse their fortunes.

Two others, meanwhile, tried fisticuffs in an effort to settle differences between themselves and their coach a month or so ago.

You got a hockey team in a slump? Wait awhile. The California Golden Seals will come to town before long. They've won just nine games this year, and only one of 23 away from the home ice in Oakland.

The Atlanta Flames used them to snap a three-game losing streak at The Omni Friday. The Flames have since lost, to St. Louis, 3-1, on Sunday. And before the Flames fired a record 40 shots at beleaguered Seals goalie Gilles Meloche in a 6-2 romp, California Coach Fred Glover digressed a bit about his charges.

He had little to say about the report that he and forwards Joey Johnston and Walt McKechnie settled a disagreement with fists at the Island Inn while visiting Long Island to play the New York Islanders not long ago.

"You hear a lot of stories," said Glover when asked if the incident occurred, "lots of stories that aren't true."

Then this one isn't true?

"I have no comment on that one," came the terse reply.

About the "mind dynamics" he was more talkative.

"Some of the players it has helped," he offered. "Some it hasn't. It has particularly helped Ivan Boldirev, not only on the ice but in his attitude toward life off the ice as well."

Boldirev, now in his third full season in the NHL, arrived with a fancy reputation that until this season had failed to be realized. He scored 16 goals two seasons ago and just 11 last season. But this year, after a slow start, he turned to "mind dynamics" and has now scored 15 goals with the season little more than half gone.

"I guess it is," he replied, when asked if what he is trying is the power of positive thinking. "But it's more of a mind-clearing process, not letting little distractions bother you . . ."

"Yeah," hooted an eavesdropping teammate, "they put you on the couch."

"And sometimes Boldi forgets to wake up," added another.

Boldirev smiled.

"It hasn't helped my hockey skills," he continued, "but it has helped me clear my mind of little distractions. Before it could really upset me if I missed a turn, say. Now . . . I still want to play, but I accept it better!"

"I don't let distractions bother me anymore, things like . . ."

"His wife," called out a teammate.

"...like razzing from the guys on the team," he added through a smile. "But I don't think the razzing really ever bothered me."

"Trouble is," yet another teammate suggested, "Boldirev may never wake up."

Because of your own personal success, Ivan, has it occurred to you that it might prove profitable for the entire team?

"Yes," Boldirev answered. Then, raising his voice so it could be heard throughout the dressing room, he added, "Especially a team like this that doesn't win many games."

How does "mind dynamics" work?

"It relaxes you. At first we thought of colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, violet—all the colors of the rainbow, pictured them in our minds, and it would help us to relax. Now we can relax on our own—without the coolers."

"Eleven of us signed up for the course initially, but just five of us took it. I think the \$190 fee scared a lot of them away."

And so, instead of chasing rainbows, the Golden Seals continue to lug a pot filled with lead that drags them deeper into the NHL doldrums.

Why? Well, there's talent—or the lack of it. No less than 21 players who played with the Seals at one time or another have jumped to the rival World Hockey Association.

And dissension?

"No," said Glover. "No more than you'd find on any other club. There are chronic complainers on any club, guys who couldn't get along with Jesus Christ himself."

Glover even suggested some of the trouble might come from players who chase rainbows of a different ilk.

"Some of these guys," he suggested, "fail to make a realistic appraisal of their abilities—think they're better than they really are."

There's also Charles O. Finley. He owns the club. A bonus for the casting director. But the eccentric Chicago insurance executive, who also owns baseball's Oakland Athletics and basketball's Memphis Tams, has shown little inclination toward supporting the hockey franchise with cash.

Neither home nor away games are broadcast; nothing is spent for advertising; the front office staff has just five employees—including one secretary. In a sport where capacity crowds are the rule; the Seals operate in relative anonymity. A crowd of 6,000 is unusual.

But Finley, who has been a burr in the NHL's saddle, is about to become an ex-burr. The league last week reportedly agreed to assume operation of the club in Finley's stead until another buyer can be found. Following an audit, the takeover is expected to be formally announced.

Meanwhile, Boldirev and his fellow mind dynamics enthusiasts can continue chasing their own personal rainbows toward the more serene life, Fred Glover can persevere, and the rest of the Seals content themselves as the NHL punching bag.

Someday, though, in the distant future, there just might come a Stanley Cup championship. And when it comes, they can all go over to the Island Inn and stage a brawl, just to celebrate the good ol' days.