

Goaltender to Bartender

By JOHN PORTER

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You walk into the dimly lit bar, haul yourself upon a stool and order a tall, cool one from the Seals goaltender.

"Life's boring, and I'm going crazy," says Gilles Meloche as he sets the drink on the counter with his left hand. "I'm ready to play right now, but the doctors don't want me to move a finger on the right hand."

The goalie's right hand hangs limply by his side. The bandages cover the wound opened by Reggie Leach's skate in an accident two weeks ago.

Gilles Meloche was making a substantial living flying around in jets and stopping at cities in two countries to repel 100 m.p.h. pucks inside jammed arenas.

Now he's been slowed to a ho-hum existence, filling in as a parttime bartender in Hayward to pass the time.

"I don't know what to do with myself," says Meloche. "I only can use the one hand. Tomorrow I'll go to Reno and try to lose a little money."

The exciting break in tedium this week will be Friday night's game at the Arena, according to Meloche. The Seals play in Long Island tonight and Pittsburgh tomorrow night.

But the club will be home to match skating with the Stanley Cup champion Montreal Canadiens Friday night. It will be the first time the Flying Frenchmen won't be shooting at Gilles since he joined the club.

And Gilles, a native of Montreal, prefers playing against the Canadiens more than any other team.

"I never cheered for Canadiens when I was a kid," says Meloche. "The rest of my family did, but I wanted to do just the opposite. I was for whichever team came in to play Montreal so I could argue with my family."

"We never had enough money in those days to pay for tickets to see Montreal play,"



Tribune photo by RON NIESTERER

Gilles Meloche blocks Derek Sanderson's shot before cut hand benched him

says Gilles. "I used to go with a couple of my buddies and we'd sneak in and hide in a dark corner until the game started."

Gilles says there is a large grocery store chain in Montreal that gives coupons to youngsters to attend — now, get this — a Canadiens' practice.

"The kids never get a chance to go to an NHL game in Montreal because all the seats are season tickets. I went to one of those practices when I was young and there were at least 15,000 kids there. For one of us, talking to one of the Canadiens was like talking to a god."

But Gilles grew up and turned the gods into mortals. It may not sound impressive, but Meloche has played five ties against Montreal.

Against the New York Islanders, that's unimpressive. Against the Canadiens, that's impressive.

Meloche says the doctors plan to check his hand Thursday. Although the operation was termed a success, the big fear now is infection, which means the goalie must avoid any activity that would cause him to perspire.

"I don't know when I can play again. I've put a few

pounds on, so I'll be happy if I'm 180 when I come back," he says. His playing weight is 170.

"Maybe I'll call Marv Edwards (knee ligaments) and Terry Murray (broken leg) and we'll have a party. We've got to do something. I'm going nuts."