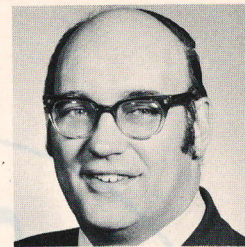


HOCKEY NIGHT IN CALIFORNIA



WITH RON McGRATH



Seals Have Hockey's Best System

The California Seals continue to demonstrate how you build a hockey organization that not only will last, but will become competitive and stay that way through something known as internal strength, a substance which has unfortunately become a rarity among many sports franchises.

This past week, the Seals pulled off another headline-making episode with the signing of Jim Warden, a man who became a household word throughout America for his goalkeeping heroics in the late, great Winter Games at Innsbruck, Austria.

In adding Warden, whom U.S. Olympic coach Bob Johnson rates as having "all the tools to be a big league goalie", the Seals are simply stockpiling talent and augmenting their store of potential NHLers.

It has to be remembered that the Seals operate the strongest "farm system" in hockey in an age when the troubled economics of most major league teams have dictated pullouts from sponsorships, or, at best, the "sharing" of minor league affiliates with other teams.

California has carefully, without fanfare, developed a farm system that has to rival the best of the old networks that once helped certain NHL teams become powerhouses. It's been ages since an NHL club could point to a farm system where all hands went out and won championships . . . but that's the kind of system the Seals have built. Last season, two teams whose players are wholly-owned by the Seals — the Salt Lake City Golden Eagles of the Central League and the Toledo Goaldiggers of the International League, went out and won their respective titles. The charm even rubbed off on Springfield of the American League, where the Seals had a few players on loan . . . the Indians nabbed the AHL crown.

Seals Development System Paying Off

This system, which few other major league clubs even attempt to emulate, has already started to pay off for the parent club. Seals' coach Jack "Tex" Evans, who piloted the Eagles to

their title last season and was the CHL coach-of-the-Year, is deriving the benefits of the California development system that has been masterminded and nurtured by club president Munson Campbell and general manager Bill McCreary.

With Warden, the Seals have bolstered their hand considerably. Johnson, who also coached Leaf's Wayne Thomas, rates big Jim in the same major league category. "He's a fine athlete, and he has confidence in his ability," says Johnson.

Warden was credited with a big part in spearheading the efforts of the American kids, and justly so. He was brilliant against the Russians with 60 saves. It was almost too much to hope for, but there were those precious moments when the U.S. checked the Czechs and rushed the Russians, and visions of upsets danced in their heads.

Although the U.S. Olympic team didn't win a medal, the whole country was pulling for Johnson's gutsy band of youngsters. They won three out of six games over there (Yugoslavia, Poland and Finland), and came within a whisker of winning the bronze before being stopped by a tough West German crew.

Since being drafted fifth by the Seals in 1974, Warden has done almost a 180-degree turn in his thoughts about the Seals. "I'm really optimistic now," he says, "my opinion of the Seals has drastically changed. Back then, when I was drafted, I told myself I'd just have to reserve judgment. But the Seals have improved so greatly, I see nothing but good things ahead."

The Real Bernie Parent Didn't Stand Up

Poor Bernie Parent. The famed Flyer finally made it back into the Philly lineup recently, but it was a rough experience with the Washington Caps shocking the champs with a 5-5 tie.

"It felt good to be back, but I know I'm not in condition now and not really ready to play." The Flyers protected Bernie as much as possible, allowing Caps only 19 shots on goal.

"It's been 10 months since I last played and now it's a matter of getting my timing back up to snuff," said Parent. "I have no pain, my biggest problem is losing my balance after I make quick moves. I hope it doesn't take too long to get back in shape. I hate the thought of losing games trying to get my conditioning back."

With Philadelphia locked in a tight race with Montreal for most points in the league, you can bet that Fred Shero doesn't like the thought, either.

SIGNED AND SEALED — Seals outstanding success story this season includes record accomplishments on and off the ice . . . there were 10 individual and team marks broken and seven more tied at this writing, with at least a dozen more records in danger of falling . . . at the gate, Seals are headed for their highest attendance in history, both in total and game average . . . the old marks were 246,879 for a season and 6,225 per game, and Seals will sail past those . . . don't forget that Wednesday is student night . . . see you then when the Detroit Red Wings will be the visitors on Seals' ice.

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