

# Fast-Skating Girard Proves Gem for Seals

By **JOE DeLOACH**

With players like Bob Girard, the California Seals appear headed towards a prosperous and secure future.

Forget for the moment that the 26-year-old Girard is a talented rookie in the National Hockey League. Certainly, Girard has the physical ability; but more than anything else, his attitude towards the game epitomizes the type of player who is performing these days for the young Seals.

"When we lose a game," Girard says, "no guys on the team are happy, and that is a good sign. We try too hard to lose. We came here to win, and not to lose."

In the vernacular of the sport, the dark-haired Girard plays the left wing position. His scoring statistics will not impress you, but his overall play will. Even in his rookie season, Girard already has demonstrated the ability that someday will make him a complete player in the NHL.

"I am proud of the fact that I have made the NHL in just three years," Girard says, who makes his hockey-season home in Hayward. "I worked hard in training camp and it is a challenge for me to be on this team. It doesn't concern me that this has been a last-place team."

Girard is the type of forward that the Seals have lacked for sometime. It is a cliché, of course, but the 6-0 and 175-pound athlete is very unselfish when he is performing on the ice.

Girard will consistently go into the corners and battle an opposing player for possession of the puck. Once he does control the puck, he'll pass it to a teammate, who will be in position to take a solid shot on goal. What Girard does is not a job that most players like. It is, however, a prerequisite if a team wants to consistently score goals.

"I really love the corners," Girard says facetiously. "It is a good place to be. I have trouble scoring, so I like to set up my linemates with the puck because they have a better chance to score."

Girard, who is a native of Montreal, and thus his nickname "Frenchy," openly admits that his shooting technique needs more refinement.

"If I want to stay up here," he says, "I will have to improve my shot. I know my game is defense because I am a good skater. If I score a lot, that is a bonus. I just have to learn to shoot more. Then, I'll be all right."

Girard is one of the finest skaters on the Seals. In his first year for the Seals' Salt

Lake City club, Girard played defense. But at the start of last season, Golden Eagles' coach Jack Evans, who is now the Seals' coach, moved Girard to left wing.

"We had seven defensemen on the team," Girard recalls, "and they need a wing. It was a good break for me because I don't have the weight to play defense in the NHL. They are just too big for me."

While playing a fine checking game, Girard scored 13 goals and added 32 assists last year to help Salt Lake win the Central Hockey League championship. He says he didn't have any trouble adjusting to the new position.

"When I played seniors in Quebec," Girard says, "I was a center and had my best scoring year. That helped me to develop my shot. But I like defense better because you can control the game more and you also can hit people. I like to do that, too."

Despite their present last-place standing in the Adams Division, the Seals are in a good position to challenge Toronto for a playoff spot. Girard is confident and optimistic about his team's chances.

"We have a good chance for the playoffs," Girard says. "We have good skaters who play a system. Our coach makes us play defense and we have the speed to play that way. We are improving all of the time."

Since they have been getting strong goaltending and playing adequate defense this year, the only thing that has prevented the Seals from putting together a solid winning streak has been a lack of scoring.

"We're starting to score the important goals," Girard says. "Since Christmas, we have been a lot better. The team is playing good on the road and we're going to win more games at home."

The way Girard thinks about it, even if the Seals don't make the playoffs, the season will be far from a disappointment.

"What happened to this team last year is over with," Girard says. "There is a new owner, and a future for the players. We are starting all over. The young players on the team don't know how to lose, and they don't want, too. We all want to win and that is what is important."



**SHEER JOY**—Bob Girard greets linemate Gary Sabourin after scoring another goal for the Seals. —Photo by Bill Fox

**CELEBRATION**—Bob Girard scores against Rangers and raises his stick to signify the goal. The fast-skating rookie left winger has been a major addition to the Seals this season. —Photo by Bill Fox