

# Now Seals Are Loving It

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Three-hundred and sixty-five days ago the Oakland Seals lost their love for hockey.

There aren't many of those players left on the club now, but Norm Ferguson remembers what it was like and so does Ernie Hicke.

"No one even wanted to go to practice," recalled Fergie. "Hockey was a job. We had nothing to accomplish. Ernie

and Hex (Dennis Hextall) had good years, but the team was down in the basement."

The basement was supposed to be reserved for the Seals this season, according to most of the pre-season prognosticators, but after yesterday's game in Vancouver the positive things going for Oakland could add up to much more. Even love for the game.

Before 15,570 fans, 86 of them Seals Boosters on a holiday, Oakland overcame the

Pacific Coliseum jinx in Vancouver with a 2-0 shutout over the Canucks yesterday.

The game demonstrated several points:

1. Gilles Meloche is just about the hottest goaltender in the National Hockey League right now.

2. Walt McKechnie's line, which accounted for both goals, is back on the offensive track.

3. The Seals can win on the road, as such, and have an ex-

cellent shot at the playoffs with one-third of the season remaining.

"We were out of it by Christmas last year," said Hicke, whose shot in the first period came close to saving Meloche a lot of worry. "At that time we didn't feel like doing anything. Everybody was working for himself."

Yesterday the Seals worked for each other.

Stan Gilbertson, left wing on McKechnie's line, scored

when the game was barely two minutes old, and McKechnie netted the crusher little more than two minutes from the end.

"This game was worse than all the other shutouts," said Meloche. "With just a one-goal lead, all those shots in the third period were driving me crazy."

Vancouver trailed 1-0 at the start of the third and the Canucks swarmed around Meloche and drilled 16 shots on

goal to make the 20 minutes a time for sweat.

All that might have been avoided when Hicke took a Bobby Sheehan pass just after Gilbertson's goal and fired a screamer that whimperped off the goal post. The Canucks were still breathing.

"We did steal one here or what?" said coach Vic Stasiuk after the Seals won their first in Vancouver after six games in two years. "As soon as we

Continued Page 39, Col. 3

## Seals Solidify Third Place By Breaking Vancouver Hex

Continued from 1st Sports Page got that first goal, we went on the defensive. Don't get me wrong, though, I'm not complaining."

Meloche really wasn't complaining, either. He had his fourth shutout of the season — his second straight — and has won five, lost one and tied one in his last seven games. His goals-against average for the span is 1.00.

"Gilles gets better with every game, doesn't he?" said Gilbertson. "In the third period I saw a shot go towards the lower left hand corner and I guess he got a skate on-it or something. I thought it was a tie game. I already had the red light on."

The Canucks may have owned the puck most of the last period, but Meloche owned them.

"They had two or three shots that were deflected from the point, that I just got my skate on," said Meloche.

"You have to be lucky to stop some of those."

Oakland was outshot, 29-17, partly because the Seals were held to just two shots at Canucks goalie Dunc Wilson in the third period.

The first was a back-hander right in front of the net, but Wayne Carleton's shot plunked off Wilson's mask. The netminder wasn't so fortunate on the second one.

Gilbertson intercepted a Greg Boddy pass intended for Orland Kurtenbach at center ice and poked the puck forward for a three on two break.

McKechnie took the puck on the left side and whipped a 35-foot shot as Gilbertson and Ferguson cut in for a possible deflection in front of the net.

There was no deflection for the wingers. The puck rippled the net at 17:48 and McKechnie has his 11th goal of the season and the Seals had a 2-0 lead.

From that point, Vancouver stepped up the tempo to deprive Meloche of his \$300 bonus for a shutout. The Canucks even emptied their net to get another attacker on the ice in the final minute.

It was all to no avail. Gilles got the bonus.

Gilbertson got his 11th goal of the season at 2:08 of the first period on a second chance.

McKechnie fed him on the left side and Gilbertson shot the puck off Wilson's pads. On the next rush, started by Paul Shmyr, Ferguson set up Gilbertson in an identical manner and that time the shot caught the far side of the net for a 1-0 lead.

On the first one I was shooting for the short side," said Gilbertson. "The one that went in was low into the far corner."

After Gilbertson's goal and Hicke's near miss, the teams played evenly until the third period when Meloche proved to be the difference.

"You can play tough without taking a lot of penalties," said Stasiuk. "Today we played tough even though we were outshot in the third period."

Toughness, great goaltending, more scoring or whatever the reason, the Seals are enjoying their jobs again.

"This year is like a new life," said Ferguson. "It's great, just great. If you don't win, hockey isn't fun."

NOTES: The Seals have won three straight and are 2-3 this season with Vancouver . . . The Canucks play at the Arena Wednesday night and a win for the Seals would tie the team's record for consecutive wins . . . The Seals have 44 points, one short of their season total last year and have won six road games, twice as many as last year . . . Oakland is three points ahead of fourth-place St. Louis in the West Division.