

Rookie Seals Blues' Fate

By Gary Mueller
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Other than a roomful of long faces, the Blues weren't quite sure how to take last night's 3-2 loss to the California Golden Seals.

"We played well, I thought," said team captain Barclay Plager. "For the first two periods we played about as well as we've played all year. California just got all the breaks."

The break that ultimately broke the Blues was rookie Fred Ahern's goal, with only 4 minutes 51 seconds remaining in the game, which snapped a 2-2 tie before a stunned crowd of 17,305 at The Arena.

"Can you believe that?" asked Blues coach Gary Young. "Blow them off the ice in the first period and then wind up losing the game."

After the first period, there appeared little chance that the Seals would be in a position for any heroics from Ahern, or anyone else, by game's end. Surely the Blues would have things salted away long before then.

The Blues' Pierre Plante rifled a 35-foot slap shot past goalie Gilles Meloche only 1:11 after the opening faceoff and Chuck Lefley pushed in a backhander on a powerplay at 13:46 for a 2-0 lead.

"It could have been worse, but our goalie came up big," said Seals coach Marshall Johnston, referring to the Blues' 16-5 advantage in shots on goal in the opening period.

The Blues also had a 16-8 edge in the second period, but Meloche turned aside everything that came his way. Meanwhile, the Seals beat Blues goalie John Davidson twice within a 58-second span early in the period.

Joey Johnston flipped a backhander past Davidson at 3:23, only 12 seconds after Bob Gassoff had been penalized for slashing Len Frig and Al MacAdam fooled Davidson on a two-on-one break for the tying goal at 4:21.

"The second goal was all my fault," said Davidson. "I was expecting him to pass to the other guy, but he held it and held it and then shot it in off the post when I moved over anticipating the pass."

Too Much Too Soon

CALIFORNIA	0	2	1-3
BLUES	2	0	0-2

FIRST PERIOD

B—Plante 15 (Unger, Merrick) 1:11
B—(PPG) Lefley 13 (Unger, Hess) 13:47
Penalties—MacAdam (C) 4:37; B. Stewart (C) 6:35; MacAdam (C) 12:27; Socharuk (B) 12:27; Nelson (C) 13:16.

SECOND PERIOD

C—(PPG) Johnston 9 (Ahern, J. Stewart) 3:23.
C—MacAdam 10 (Gardner, Weir) 4:21
Penalties—Gassoff (B) 3:11; Lefley (B) 5:50; Williams (C) 6:48.

THIRD PERIOD

C—Ahern 2 (Patey, J. Stewart) 15:09
Penalties—none.

SHOTS ON GOAL

CALIFORNIA	5	8	11-24
BLUES	16	16	7-39

Goalkeepers—California, Meloche (5-13-7); Blues, Davidson (12-9-4). Attendance—17,305.

The winning goal really couldn't be blamed on anyone. It was one of those harmless little plays on which the puck happened to take a lucky bounce for the Seals.

Larry Patey, at the left point, lofted a high, arching pass in the general direction of the St. Louis net. Ahern, tied up in front of Davidson, took a backhanded swipe as the puck bounced at his feet.

"I couldn't even see him (Ahern), because there was a tangle around him," said Davidson. "I was just trying to cover as much net as I could when the shot hit me."

"I didn't hit it, because I never saw it. Then the puck hit my stick — I guess I had it tilted — because the puck went off the stick into the top of the net."

Ahern was playing in only his second NHL game after being called up from Salt Lake City of the Central Hockey League. Ahern also had scored a goal in the Seals' 5-1 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday and had assisted on California's first goal last night.

"This is a dream come true for me," said Ahern, a South Boston product who attended Bow-

doin College in Brunswick, Me., last year. "In the middle of the summer I had no idea what my future would be. I wanted to play, but I didn't know where I was going to wind up."

"The coach at Harvard (Bill Cleary) called a California scout and got me a tryout at the Seals' training camp. He felt California would be my best bet, because they had two farm clubs and I ought to be able to catch on with one or the other."

"I wasn't too sure how I could adjust to pro hockey. Bowdoin was only a Division II school. We didn't play the top competition and we only had a 24-game schedule."

Ahern, who missed four of Bowdoin's games because of injuries, had 18 goals and 20 assists in 20 games for the Polar Bears.

Although Ahern is from South Boston, he did not attend South Boston High, which has been the center of recent racial strife.

"I went to Boston Tech, but my sister, Nancy, was going to South Boston when they closed it," said Ahern. "She's gone out and found a job."

Her brother seems to have found a job, too.

BLUENOTES—The Blues, who now have lost three straight games for the first time this season, will attempt to bounce back when they take on the New York Rangers in an 8:05 p.m. game Saturday at The Arena. . . . The Blues remained tied with the Chicago Black Hawks for second place in the Conn Smythe Division, 11 points behind the division-leading Vancouver Canucks. . . . The Seals, who were 2-37-0 on the road last season, now are 2-1-2 in their last five road games. They have moved within three points of the Toronto Maple Leafs in the battle for the third and final playoff spot in the Charles F. Adams Division. . . . Last night's game marked the halfway point of the season for the Blues. Their current 16-18-6 record is slightly below their mark of 18-16-6 after 40 games a year ago. Last season, however, the Blues slumped badly in the second half of the season, winning only eight games. . . .

The five teams in the Smythe Division (Vancouver, Chicago, St. Louis, Minnesota and Kansas City) have a combined record of 3-13-0 since Jan. 1.