



ED LEVITT

Goblins On Ice

Daryle Lamonica and George Blanda stood and cheered. Several youngsters a few rows up waved green and white banners. An elderly woman held up a flag.

People carried signs urging the home team to "Go! Go! Go!" Others hung huge, colorful placards on the walls above the aisles, and each had its own warm identity.

One read, "Hayward Loves You." Another said, "Don't Let Richmond Down." Still another reminded, "Win One for Alameda."

This was not an Oakland Raider football crowd on a Sunday afternoon. This was an Oakland Seal hockey crowd on a Wednesday night.

And, man, was it noisy!

It was a beautiful night for the home team. The Seals beat the Chicago Black Hawks, and you never saw so many happy faces at the Oakland Arena.

It may sound crazy but hockey, finally, seems to have caught on here. Crowds have doubled.

Yes, Virginia, there actually are Eastbay fans who care about something besides the Raiders.

They're not legion, yet. But their ranks are growing.

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The Seals are the lovable underdogs in the sports battle for the Bay bucks. After all, does hockey figure to be as big as football, baseball and basketball in California?

How many hockey players can you name — I mean going back 50 years? If you can reel off as many as 10, you qualify as a hockey historian.

Yet, without knowing the people playing and the rules they must play by, a lot of guys and gals here suddenly have become hooked on hockey.

They dig the action, the excitement. Don't ask them to explain what "icing" means, or what "high sticking" is all about.

But they're learning. And while learning they're enjoying what they see.

And tonight they just may spend Halloween watching Gordie Howe, the Willie Mays of hockey, who after 23 seasons holds more records and has scored more points than any other player in NHL history.

Howe will lead the Detroit Red Wings against the Seals at the Oakland Arena, and if the man considered to be the greatest player of them all doesn't score a goal, or stop Oakland from scoring one, it'll be a rare night for Gordie Howe.

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And speaking of Howe, how do you think the USC Trojans will spend the eve before their game against the Cal Bears?

Watching Gordie Howe play hockey against the Seals, that's how.

The SC players figure they'll be able to relax more at the Oakland Arena than at the Claremont Hotel tonight.

It's not that they're really so uptight at the prospect of facing our big, bad Bears. But every game is a pressure game for an unbeaten team battling for a Rose Bowl bid.

And if the Seals think they've got rough competition for the entertainment dollar, they should compare notes with the Trojans.

In the Los Angeles-San Diego area there are 10 professional teams, four major race tracks, plus beach resorts and a spot called Disneyland.

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Yet, the Trojans average 71,000 customers for their home games.

Last year they had O. J. Simpson and Notre Dame as a home opponent and they sold 45,900 season tickets.

This year, without O. J. and minus Notre Dame as an L.A. attraction, they sold 46,200 season tickets, an increase of 300.

Before the football season opened the Trojans already had \$1 million in the till from ticket sales.

The Seals did somewhat less before the hockey season opened.

"Our business showed a sharp increase over last year," says Bill Torrey, the Seals' vice president.

"There's more enthusiasm now for hockey here and people are talking about it," says Frank Selke, the general manager.

"And when they're talking about it," says Bill Torrey, the Seals' president, "it means we're on our way."

Every sound, every banner, every cheer the other night seemed to drive home that point.

And if you have a pair of football pros such as a Daryle Lamonica and a George Blanda standing to applaud the action, hockey must be some game.

Even on Halloween.