

ED LEVITT

Crying Coach

Vic Stasiuk really broke up. If all the tears he shed were frozen, he'd have a year's supply of salty ice cubes.

Yet, Vic is a tough, hardened old pro. For 13½ years he played in the National Hockey League. He was on three Stanley Cup teams.

He bled on the ice. He suffered a dislocated shoulder, broken hip, fractured ankle, concussions, cuts and bruises that puffed up the size of tomatoes.

But Vic Stasiuk, the old roughneck who used to protect his smaller teammates when he played for the Black Hawks, the Red Wings and the Bruins, turned softer than a pillow the other night in Boston.

It was the night Coach Vic Stasiuk's young Oakland Seals beat the Boston Bruins, 2-0.

"I have cried only a few times in my adult life," said Stasiuk. "Once was last year when I was fired as coach of the Philadelphia Flyers.

"The second time was last week in Boston. It was such an emotional thing. You don't know what it is to beat the Bruins in Boston.

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"Both as a player and a coach, I have known heartache in the Bruins' den. I have been humiliated and annihilated.

"So here I go in there with eight rookies on the team — and a 21-year-old goalie playing only his third pro game and his first one of the year.

"So he stops 34 shots. And we shut out the mighty Bruins.

"After the game I went into our dressing room to congratulate the players. I couldn't stand it. I had to go out in the alley where no one could see me . . . And I cried like a baby."

Why does a grown man become so emotional over one little game?

"It was the circumstances . . . the odds against us . . . the way these kids performed," said the coach.

"I don't know if I was crying because I was so happy for our young goaltender or selfishly for myself. I guess it was for everybody on the team. I needed a towel to dry my face."

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Tonight, Vic Stasiuk's surprising Seals battle the Pittsburgh Penquins at the Oakland Coliseum Arena. Then they return here Friday night to take on the New York Rangers.

As a road show, though, the Seals are the hottest things on ice. They won three in a row for their new coach. That already equals last season's record when they won only three of 39 road games.

"My team is young and explosive," says Stasiuk. "We're quick on offense, but we must improve on defense.

"Hockey is a skillful game that demands perfection. But the fan who hasn't skated really doesn't appreciate the skill involved.

"I've seen coordinated athletes get on that skinny blade and fall apart. I wonder how many people realize that it takes about 20 years to learn how to skate at the National Hockey League level.

"Remember, there are just eight Americans skating in our league and we've got four of them on our club, which has to be a record.

"The Americans on the Seals are Stan Gilbertson, Tommy Williams, Craig Patrick and Bobby Sheehan.

"Sheehan is unbelievable. He's among the top ten scorers and he's only a rookie. He's as fast as Bobby Orr and his shooting is terrific. He already has eight goals. He's our mighty mite from Massachusettes."

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Stasiuk, who is from Canada, thinks his new young goalie from Quebec, Gilles Meloche, the man who tamed the Bruins, is the greatest prospect to come along in the NHL in years.

"He's on the short side, well built, strong and he can handle the stick," says his coach.

"In Boston he looked like a 10-year veteran instead of a rookie with three days experience. If he continues to play as well as he did against the Bruins, he'll be a superstar."

Since he replaced Fred Glover as coach of the Seals a few weeks ago, Stasiuk has emphasized the importance of getting a big home crowd to motivate his players.

"You can sweat and knock yourself out but if no one is there to recognize your talent and skill, it's a terrible feeling," says the coach.

"This is going to be a terrific club. The past management gave away top draft choices in trades. So we had to dig up players other teams have overlooked for one reason or another.

"No team has ever had a wholesale change like this one. Yet in our last four games we've won three and tied one. We're getting better all the time."

The Seals are looking so good, Vic Stasiuk may have to cry again.