

"We got eighteen players and each will fight for the other seventeen. And if someone gets taken out and can't get the bastard that did him in, then someone else'll pick up the banner." DEREK SANDERSON

winners. Bobby became the national hero, and Eagleson became the most powerful force in Hockey since Conn Smyth of the Toronto Maple Leafs banned whiskey drinking during the games.

The time was ripe for everyone to move up and Bobby had shown the way. The National Hockey League had started in 1917 with four Canadian teams (the word National then clearly meant Canadian) and it grew and evolved into the "old six" — the Boston Bruins, the Montreal Canadians, the Toronto Maple Leafs, the New York Rangers, the Chicago Black Hawks and the Detroit Red Wings. It continued to grow, slowly, but nothing much changed. The owners, men of wealth and prestige, were disinclined to bid against each other for the services of the players. The players were modest men who behaved themselves everywhere except on the rink. They dressed neatly and quietly, like young businessmen. But the NHL was expanding—which meant windfalls for the owners who would sell new franchises for over \$5 million each. In 1968, teams were added in Los Angeles, Minnesota, California, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and St. Louis. The accepted wage structure began to crack. More "big league" teams meant more "big league" players and the competition for the best took on an added edge. In 1972, the World Hockey Association began, and the WHA started bidding for the stars of the NHL. In Cleveland a gentleman named Nick Mileti, who had been denied an NHL franchise in the planned 1974 expansion, got a WHA one instead (at a saving of \$5.7 million); and he went after the services of some of the best New York Rangers—he offered Brad Park, Rod Gilbert and Vic Hadfield long-term

contracts for over \$30,000 a year each. Mr. Mileti didn't get what he wanted, but in the process the Ranger's payroll doubled.

The WHA, which had been dismissed by some NHL owners as a cloud on the horizon no bigger than a puck (three inches across, one inch thick), kept the bidding up. Then Bobby Hull (a Bobby second only to Orr) signed with Winnipeg. Gary Davidson, the WHA President, said, "Once Bobby signed, we figured that a lot of big name players would follow him pretty quickly." They did. Gerry Cheevers went to Cleveland, J. C. Tremblay went to Quebec City (where Maurice "Rocket" Richard would coach), and Bernie Parent and Johnny McKenzie went to the Philadelphia Blazers (now the Vancouver Blazers).

The cash returns were also splendid for those who stayed behind.

Alan Eagleson, while remaining firmly linked to Bobby Orr, was also moving across the League. As President of the National Hockey League Players Association, he soon represented 150 of the League's 320 players and the average salary of NHL players went from about \$15,000 a year to \$40,000.

The rise to affluence changed more than the players' bankrolls. It produced, for example, Derek Sanderson, the playboy of the northern world. "I had only one blue suit when I came into the NHL," Derek told writer Tom Dowling in an article in *Atlantic Magazine*. "I see the players come into the dressing room in three-button suits, dark grey, pointed black shoes and thin black ties. Man, they were like machines marching in . . . I said to myself, 'it's got to change.' I kept the blue suit all my rookie year. Then I

