

Herb's Hockey Picks

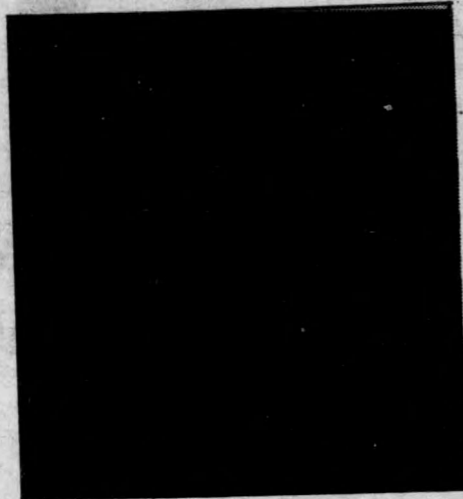
By HERB BARTON

Interest in the NHL has taken a back seat to the Olympics for the last couple of weeks, but with the end of the games fans will again focus on NHL hockey. The disappointing fourth place finish shouldn't keep Dave King from getting a number of NHL coaching offers.

The race for the Art Ross is starting to turn into a runaway. With 15 games to go Lemieux has opened up a lead even a healthy Gretzky would have difficulty surmounting. Since Gretzky is sidelined again, it looks like Mario has dethroned him. Gretzky has missed more games this season than his whole career combined.

Mike Stapleton, of Chicago, made a creative statement after teammate Bob Mason stopped 39 shots in a 1-1 tie with Winnipeg. He said, "He saw more rubber than a dead cat on the Trans-Canada Highway." Team Canada goalies Sean Burke and Andy Moog know that feeling well. Nyet, Nyet Soviet!

The Calgary Flames have cooled off recently allowing a Gretzky-less Edmonton to stay close. Recently they lost to the Islanders 9-0. Not a good sign for a team used to running the score up on other clubs. The loan of Captain Jim Peplinski to Team Canada has been costly. The team seems to lack desire without him.



The Leafs have been playing well since Ballard returned from Florida. In the battle for 4th place in the Norris division they have a five point lead over Minnesota. No great achievement but the Leafs don't deserve to make the playoffs nor the North Stars. One of these pathetic excuses for

hockey clubs has to though. Go Leafs!

Ballard has given Leaf Co-Managers permission to trade. Though he warns, "They had better be the right ones or they are headed to the unemployment line." Nothing like a little pressure to make your job more exciting.

Remember last fall when the Flyers couldn't buy a win and couldn't put the puck in the net. Well they can't seem to help scoring lately. They scored 11 goals against Detroit. Then last weekend they got eight against L.A. Not bad for a team that is still missing its top sniper in person of one Tim Kerr.

Notice the number of shutouts lately? Looks like the quality of the defensive game is improving throughout the league. The leader of the recent barrage is Clint Malarchuk. Malarchuk (Woodchuk) has three shutouts in two weeks. Pretty hot net minding. His team, the Capitals, don't mind a bit seeing as their other goaltender, Pete Peeters, has the best Goals Against Average in the league. Anyways, it's nice to see the puck stop before it's in the net for a change.

Sports Speaks

The Winter Olympics are over and needless to say it was disappointing as a Canadian to see that we did not do as well as we had all hoped. One must realize though that the only pressure in these Olympics for us to do well was thrust upon by ourselves. We did not fail in the eyes of the world and that is what we must always remember. All Canadians should be proud of the fact that we have held one of the best winter Olympics ever, with the best facilities in the world for ski jumping, skating and hockey. It is a tribute to our innovation, heritage and imagination that we are able to do this, and this is what the rest of the world is seeing. They are seeing a winter games run as a smooth as could be possible, and a winter games as exciting as previous with world records being broken in practically every sport due to improved competition and facilities.

For this I feel every Canadian should feel proud and should not dwell on the fact we only won 5 medals. That was a very good showing for Canada.

If you are still feeling badly, think of how the United States must feel. They are ten times larger but only received one more medal than us.

Just something to think about and be proud of

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