

More like the Chicago library than the stadium



Mark Spector



I've tried hard to avoid this subject this year, really I have. I know that it is a topic that has been overworked somewhat, but after what I encountered on Friday night at the Coliseum, I can no longer resist.

For the first time this hockey sea-

son, I had a chance to go to an Oiler game the same way that everybody else does. Accepting an invitation from a friend, I sat in a location about seven rows into the blues and just to one side of centre ice.

The view was just as good as from the gondola and the patrons were neither too stuffy, as they tend to be in the private boxes, nor from out of town, like in the expansion seats.

As the fellow across the aisle was quick to inform anyone that would listen, "I've had these seats since the W.H.A." Everyone else in the near vicinity were season ticket holders as well.

So what was it that made my night somewhat uncomfortable even in the comfort of such perfectly located seats?

It was all the noise — or lack of it. We've all heard the Northlands Coliseum described as a morgue, or a library, or some other cute term that brings to mind the ultimate in undisturbed sound.

Well, this place is more tranquil than the world championships of

chess — at 3 a.m. after everyone has gone home.

Have you ever been up in the mountains when it starts to get dark and that eerie silence falls over the area, making it so quiet that you can hear all the wildlife that you can never see?

Well, on Friday night against the Pittsburgh Penguins, I was thinking about staying around to see the stars come out. And I'm not talking about the Molson Cup three stars.

The average age of the fans seated in my area was about 38 years old. Not surprising for a team that sells all but about 250 seats in season tickets.

There's no doubt that if the fans were a little bit younger a noise level would exist in the building.

To my right were two sisters, both of whom were more interested in the appearance of their makeup than what was going on below.

Behind me were two men, each around 28 years of age. They wore scruffy light jackets and trucking caps on a night that sported a blizzard and temperatures around the

-20C mark. "These guys are real hockey fans," I surmised. "The grass roots of Canada, the backbone of the greatest winter sport in the world."

But after 60 minutes of hearing about "The Neighbour" that skipped out on her rent and the cousin who forgot to pick up his wife at work because he was in the "The bar", I began to wonder why I had given up my cozy seat in the press box.

But not to be disturbed, I forged on. At times loudly berating referee Ron Wicks for seemingly obvious calls that he had missed, at times cheering a great save by Gilles Meloche or a Gretzkyan feat.

You see, when you sit upstairs you are expected not to do things like that. Just sit and watch, quietly. Remember that you are working.

Well not 15 minutes of the first period had gone by before I began to feel self-conscious.

I was the only one in the entire section who had anything to say, about the game in progress anyway.

"A bad night," I thought to myself. "Maybe there's a bad case

of laryngitis going around." Because this was not just your everyday Oiler blowout — this was one hell of a hockey game.

Well there was no epidemic, and in actuality it was a good night, noise-wise, compared to many that I have (not) heard over the course of a full 45 game schedule.

It is too bad that the Edmonton Oilers don't have to care about such things as the "Carnival-like atmosphere" that pervades our own U of A sports events courtesy of a hustling Athletics Department.

The Oilers have their seats full. And apparently they're full of people who don't care for a Chicago Stadium type of atmosphere. Perhaps if an attendance crisis was at hand there would be more giveaways to call out Edmonton's younger and, ultimately, more rowdy population.

There's one thing, and one thing only, that could make going to an Oiler game a loud and boisterous affair — it's called BEER.

Until then, I'm staying in the press box, where you're not supposed to cheer.



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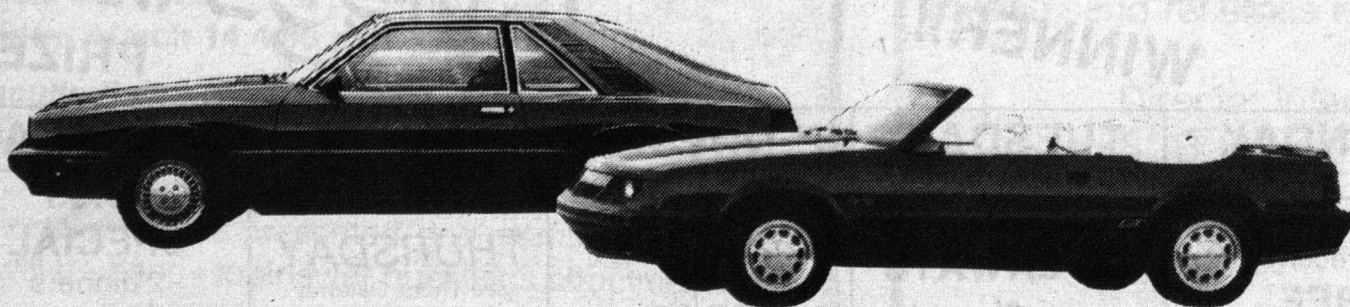
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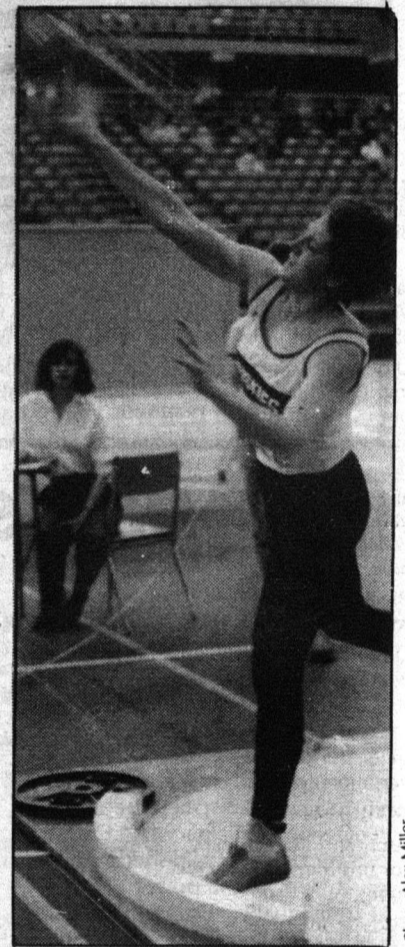


Photo Alex Miller

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