

Toll the Bell Slowly —Leafs Nearly Gone

A GREAT opportunity is staring us all right in the eye, chaps. I could simply move that poem away down there up to the top of the column and slow-march off home, pausing only to light a taper here and there or drink a solemn draught to the dear departed Toronto Maple Leafs. It's a real temptation, especially since it is very difficult to write about that game last night.

Leafs played pretty well up to the limits of their abilities, I thought.

Their coach says that they gave away this goal, or that, by not doing this, or that. But I felt that the result hinged on the fact that the Canadiens hit the outer limits of their great strength and talent, too.

When they are playing that way, even a good team playing against them is forced into a type of game that creates its own errors—in the sense that nobody can quite handle the Pocket Rocket, Mr. Henri Richard; and no club with three forward lines can quite handle Canadiens' four, when the four are going well; and when one bids farewell to the Pocket Rocket, one is saying hello to Jean Beliveau and Boom Boom Geoffrion.

And when one is resting from all of those, infantry-men named Don Marshall and Phil Goyette are scoring enough goals to win the game.

TIME and again the best Toronto efforts would turn into disaster—or the chance of disaster, a dangerous rush going the other way.

Johnny Bower made two great stops on the Old Rocket, Maurice Richard—and within the minute was fishing out of the nets a puck that had been fired by Goyette after barging in off a face-off beside the net.

Tim Horton ducked a couple of fore-checkers and made a pass that might have left them behind—but Old Rocket was lurking by the blueline to intercept, and carry it in, and pop one at Bower and pick it up again and circle the goal and get out in front and pop it in.

Dick Duff was playing better hockey than he has for weeks, perhaps his best game of this season, skating his hardest, pelling back down his wing to catch his check, squirting out from beside the net like a watermelon seed to leave good men behind. But at the other defense and goal he would be steered aside, into a corner, shot blocked, pass intercepted, the effort lost.

So at the end the Montreal dressing room was relaxed and laughing, as usual.

In the Leafs' room Punch Imlach sat in a corner, coming as close to hanging his head as I've ever seen him.

BRIEFLY: What happened in the fight near the end of the second period? Started with the first Toronto goal, when the puck went in off Johnny Wilson's skates. Canadiens protested vigorously that he had kicked it in on purpose. Jacques Plante skated out to lodge a complaint about this and other matters with the referee, Mr. Frank Udvari. Then the people involved saw it variously. Henri Richard: "Brewer was charging Plante. I went to head him off. Then Baun attacked me from behind." Brewer: "The Pocket took a swing at me and hit me on the throat and then Baun hit him." Baun: "He took a swing at Carl, so I hit him." Baun and the Pocket discussed the matter in the penalty box, during the resultant five-minute rest. "The Pocket said Carl had charged Plante," Baun said, reporting on this conversation. "I didn't think he had."

The other match, without a penalty, was between Dick Moore and Bill Harris.

Moore's version: "Harris jumped on me and then when I went at him, he asked, 'What are you doing?' What am I doing, he asks, when he jumped on me first!"

What did Moore say then? "I said I'd let him up, this time." He had a headlock on Harris, an excellent hockey player who is not noted for belligerence.

POETRY (What, again?) DEPT.: This came by air letter from Mort Greenberg, who wrote it in a ballet studio in Paris, and was going to get out of there for Vienna in a hurry (although I must say that I don't know what league Vienna plays in). Get a lot of terrible doggerel in the mail these days, mostly about hockey. But I like this. And it is nice to know, those of us who would like to be in Paris now that April's here, that someone over there is thinking of US. He didn't send a title, but let's call it—

PLAY BALL!

In the season of the year
When the crowd begins to cheer
The waving pennants high
Above the stand.

And the sun so big and bright
Like a homerun still in flight
Sails by the lunging fielder-
cloud's gloved hand.

And what a sweet surprise
With batter-boxes' eyes
The infield has the aspect
of a grin.

Then the umpire filled with task
Makes a last tug at his mask
And sets himself and signals
"Let's begin."

In the season of the year
It's so good that baseball's here.