

Tough Assignment

Can Leafs Keep Habs in Check? Punch Thinks So

By REX MacLEOD

A major problem confronting Maple Leafs' leader George Imlach in the Stanley Cup final which starts in Montreal tonight is devising a way to reduce Canadiens' brutal scoring power.

This is an onerous task that many shinny engineers regard as hopeless, a negative attitude that enrages Imlach and makes him more determined than ever to end Canadiens' domination.

Imlach's plan to stop Canadiens is a simple one — just check them into a state of confusion. He thinks he has the players to perform this tedious chore—and perhaps he has. But other teams have tried to apply this system against Canadiens—and failed.

Boston Bruins tried it two years ago and they performed their duties exceptionally well but they lost the series, 4-2. Chicago Black Hawks tried it in this year's semi-final and didn't win a game.

Canadiens, just in case anybody has forgotten, can play a mighty frustrating defensive game themselves if they are inclined that way. If they feel especially ornery they won't even give the puck away. Their last game in Chicago was an eloquent example.

Also, Canadiens' scoring power is so generously distributed that containing it for any length of time is an agonizing task that calls for complete concentration and dedication. Even one mistake will usually result in a goal by Canadiens.

Canadiens have three 30-goal scorers in Jean Beliveau (34), Henri Richard (30) and Bernie Geoffrion (30). Dickie Moore scored 22 and Phil Goyette 21. Maurice Richard scored 19 in 51 games and Marcel Bonin 17 in 59 games. Then there is Donnie Marshall, a part-time employee, who scored 16.

Obviously, any defensive system that could thwart this scoring prowess would have to be fiendishly efficient and should be augmented by pill-boxes and barbed wire with an occasional hand grenade hurled from the bench.

In their series with Detroit Red Wings, Leafs devoted much of their energy to shadowing Gordie Howe because they believed that Howe made Wings run. They did a thorough job on Howe, restricting him to one goal but they ran into unexpected difficulties from Wings Nothing Line of Len P'aley, Val Fonteyne and Jerry Melnyk — a line that scored only 15 goals during the season.

That raises the interesting point of where to begin in checking Canadiens—and keeping something in reserve to score a goal or two of your own. It has been characteristic of Canadiens that if you blank Beliveau, Henri Richard goes on a spree. Or Moore, or Bonin, or Goyette or Geoffrion or the venerable Maurice.

And that versatile defenseman Doug Harvey, who normally is quite content to evict trespassers over the Canadiens' blue line, often gets the urge in a playoff game to execute a solo for a goal. He did it in the only overtime game against Chicago.

And even if it were possible to repel those Canadiens' shooters, goal-keeper Jacques Plante might consider it his big moment and waddle the length of the ice to score a goal. He has made it as far as the blue line a few times.

Notes: Leafs flew to Montreal last night, their first experiment in jet travel. . . . They held a light shooting drill in the Gardens yesterday. . . . Canadiens have recalled defenseman Jean Claude Tremblay and left-winger Gilles Tremblay (not related) from Hull-Ottawa Canadiens of the Eastern Pro League as stand-bys for the series. . . . Defenseman Reg Fleming, of the Kingston EPL team, will also be with Canadiens in a similar capacity. . . . Plante is quoted in a CP dispatch from Montreal as saying: "If—and remember I said IF—we play against Toronto as we did against Chicago Black Hawks, we will beat Toronto also in four successive games." . . . Canadiens' coach Toe Blake observed: "If we get as many scoring chances against the Leafs as Detroit got in the semi-final, we'll score more goals than the Wings did."