

LIFE IN THE U.S.

SPORTS

Watch Boston and Montreal in NHL playoffs

By Gary Kulik

WELL HOCKEY FANS, THE Stanley Cup playoffs are underway and we'll be lucky if they end before June. Don't worry if you missed the first games. The opening round will have little to do with deciding the National Hockey League's new champion. Dismayed in recent years by falling attendance and the uneven distribution of talent, NHL owners have devised a playoff formula that includes more teams than it eliminates.

Twelve of the league's 18 teams will see post-season action. Among the likely luminaries will be the pathetic Vancouver Canucks, a team that has lost more than 40 games this season. By contrast, the Montreal Canadiens, hockey's premier team, have lost fewer than 20 games in the last two years.

So don't expect good, competitive hockey in the first round, and don't get your hopes too high for the quarterfinals. The purpose of the first two rounds is to hype attendance in the waning days of the season, to provide otherwise hopeless teams with a path to the playoffs and the promise of a few fat crowds before the ice melts into summer.

Hockey's troubles are complex. Expansion and the emergence of a rival pro league, the World Hockey Association, have diluted the quality of NHL play. With its market largely limited to Canada and the northern U.S., pro hockey has consistently failed to maintain national TV contracts. Ruled by a clique of selfish and cantankerous owners, with the approach of 19th-century robber barons, the NHL has never had the kind of "progressive" leadership necessary to navigate the troubled financial waters of post-World War II pro sports. The most recent result has been a widening gap between the teams that have and the teams that have not.

For the last five years or so, the league has been dominated by five teams—Montreal, Boston, Philadelphia, Buffalo, and the New York Islanders—the only teams to return significant profits in 1976-77. The once strong New York Rangers have collapsed. The Chicago Black Hawks have faded. This year, only Toronto has shown sufficient improvement to rate inclusion among the league's elite. Nobody else is close.

So there are six good teams. Four of them will meet in the semi-finals—you can bet your yearly beer budget on it. Montreal and Boston will be two of these teams—you can bet your beer budget for two years on it. The other two teams will be the Islanders, who will beat Toronto in the quarterfinals, and the Philly Flyers, who will beat the Buffalo Sabres, the team most likely to disappoint its fans once again.

In late April we'll finally get down to it. The Canadiens, the classiest, most talented team in hockey, will meet the Flyers—and win, in five games. The Boston Bruins, the league's most consistently hard-working team, will meet the Islanders—and win, in six games.

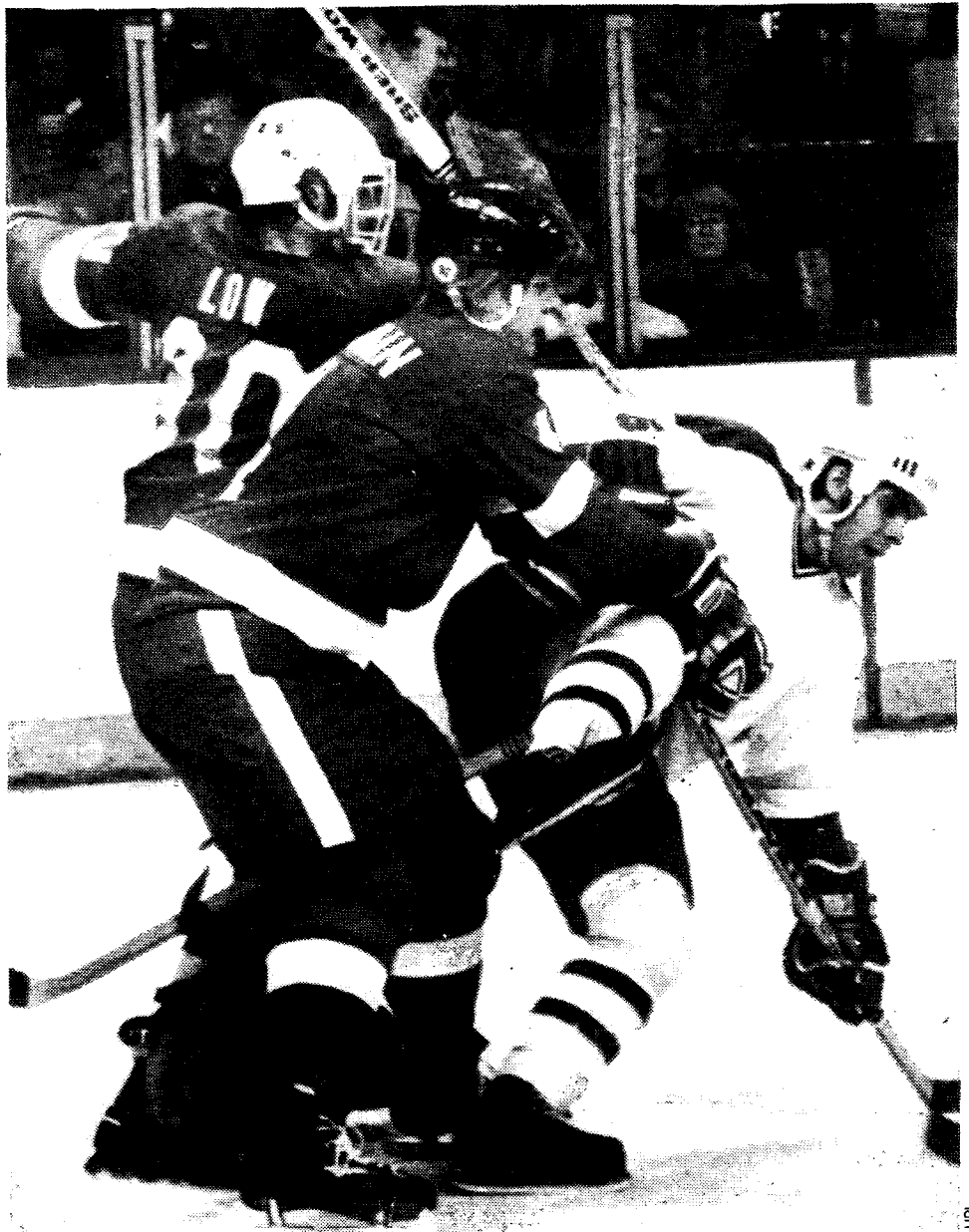
It will be the Bruins and the Canadiens in the finals—just like last year. A classic match—the swift, explosive Canadiens against the workmanlike, hard-checking Bruins. Once again, the issue will be

It will be the Canadiens and the Bruins in the finals—just like last year. Expect a classic match—the swift, explosive Canadiens vs. the Hard-checking Bruins.

whether the Bruins' rugged forechecking can contain Montreal's wide-open attack, whether Boston's well-balanced offense can crack the league's best defense. Last year, it was no contest. The Canadiens won in four straight.

This year, the Canadiens' defense is deeper, and Guy Lafleur is still the finest player in hockey. Only the second player in NHL history to score 50 or more goals in four consecutive seasons, Lafleur will be this year's scoring champ for the third season in a row.

The Bruins, meanwhile, have improved their defense and their goaltending. They are led by Terry O'Reilly, the hustling rightwing who entered the league in the early '70s as one of the worst skaters and shooters in pro hockey. A former Canadiens' coach once said, with sardonic cruel-



Red Wings goalie Ron Low and defenseman Thommie Bergman take out Canadien's Rejean Houle in first period action in the first game of the Stanley Cup quarter finals.

ty, "He seems to have trouble standing up." Well, O'Reilly is standing up, knocking people down, leading the team in points—leading the Boston Bruins in points, the team once led by the likes of Orr and Esposito.

The Canadiens still will win, but in five games rather than four. They will win be-

cause they are quicker, deeper, more talented, and because they carry the public burden of French-Canadian nationalism on their shoulders. They are not about to disappoint their fans, the most critical and intelligent in pro sports.

Gary Kulik follows hockey for IN THESE TIMES.

MEDIA

Chicago's Voice of Labor is no more

By Paul Gregor and Jack Burden

RADIO STATION WCFL, FOR 52 years the Chicago Federation of Labor's "Voice of Labor" and the only labor-owned station in the country, has been sold to the Mutual Broadcasting System for an estimated \$12 million, pending FCC approval. Mutual was itself recently purchased by Richard DeVos and Jay Van Andel of Amway Cosmetics, and if the new owners have their way, WCFL may become the anti-union "Voice of God."

WCFL was the inspiration of John Fitzpatrick, the innovative president of the CFL in the teens and '20s. Through the station and the federation's paper, *The New Majority*, Fitzpatrick hoped to promote independent labor politics, expand labor's role in society and resist the reactionary wave that followed the 1919 Red Scare. But, while the station was used in organizing campaigns during the '20s and '30s, commercial success and revenue came to dominate its programming orientation in later years.

The new owners, by contrast, represent various pro-business political-action groups. A close friend of former President Gerald Ford, Van Andel is chairman of Citizen's Choice, a heavily funded right-wing lobbying organization that has taken swipes at workers' compensation and calls for the "prohibition of public employees' strikes."

DeVos speaks the same tongue as his

partner, with more religious fervor. A major contributor to the George Wallace-founded American party, DeVos is also a board member of the National Association of Manufacturers, whose long-standing anti-union activities have escalated recently with the establishment of the organization's "Council for a Union-Free Environment." DeVos' heaven-sent greenbacks also support Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ and the Christian Freedom Foundation. The CFF, which conducts widespread lobbying for the election of born-again Christians, boasts a "Christian Embassy" in Washington, campaign coffers of over \$30 million, and collection plate stuffers like Adolph Coors and Nelson Bunker Hunt.

The station's sale was approved at a special CFL meeting on Friday, April 7. Despite the short notice and unannounced purpose of the "special session," and a tradition of low attendance, the meeting hall was filled. As one delegate observed, "Bill Lee [CFL president] was concerned that there might be opposition, so he called in the troops.... I never saw it so packed. When the Building Trade Delegates are there, you know something's up."

It took just a few minutes for the delegates to discover the reason for the meeting, nod their affirmation, and recess. Tom Faul, CFL secretary-treasurer, briefly mentioned the station's operating difficulties and reported that the executive board recommended the station's sale. A motion to support the board's recommendation was passed without debate and without a single dissenting vote.

Eighty-two-year-old president Lee then took the floor to explain the sale, mentioning a meeting with George Meany in which Meany told him that "labor should not be in any business." Lee carefully avoided any mention of either the new owners or the purchase price. In fact, the 15 minute meeting contained no reference whatsoever to the principals involved in the sale.

Although the new owners told the *Chicago Sun-Times* that the "decision to purchase WCFL was based solely on business considerations," they have previously expressed the intention to start an "alternative network" to "restore balance" to the "slanted" media. With their recent \$18 million purchase of the Mutual Broadcasting System and its 800 affiliates, they seem to be well on their way to achieving that goal.

As for WCFL, programming changes have not been mentioned or discussed. Station manager Jim Frank expressed the confusion of many when he moaned, "Don't ask me. I don't know what's going on here!"

WCFL, the "Voice of Labor" since 1925, may have never realized Fitzpatrick's dream or the vision of many Chicago labor radicals as it broadcast Country-Western, Top 40 Rock, and finally Beautiful Music in its desperate attempt to keep commercial revenue coming in. Nevertheless, few thought that WCFL would ever become a voice of the past.

Paul Gregor and Jack Burden are writers in Chicago.

MUSIC

Punk Folk Rock & All That Jazz

WOMEN'S JAZZ FESTIVAL IN K.C. NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY

Something new was to be heard in Charlie Parker's old town last March—the sound of women musicians coming together at the First Women's Jazz Festival.

The event was put together by Women's Jazz Festival, Inc., a "non-profit, non-political organization" that sees its role on the one hand as "promoting the female jazz musician, who has, as they put it, "been somewhat stigmatized by her choice of profession" and, on the other hand, more generally promoting jazz itself.

The festival's organizers were careful not to identify themselves with feminism. Consequently, while the quality of the music was high, putting to rest once and for all the myth that women can't play jazz, the level of feminist consciousness was narrowly defined around career issues.

The festival combined music clinics, jams and a full evening of well-known artists in performance. While many male jazz musicians appeared on the bill, it was the women who were featured.

Appropriately, the festival was dedicated to Bettye Miller, the vocalist, who was a Kansas City legend until her death in 1977.

The Marian McPartland duo opened the concert. In addition to her talents as a pianist, McPartland owns her own record company, Halcyon, an independent label that features women jazz artists, and she is presently writing a book on women in jazz.

(McPartland's 58th birthday, which fell on the day following, was celebrated later in the evening's program with a musical tribute from her sister performers.)

Next, the commanding presence of vocalist Betty Carter held the audience spellbound through her performance of a wide range of tunes. She shifts suddenly from ballads to up tempo, scatting with ease and without sacrificing her intensity in either idiom. Like McPartland, Carter records for her own label, Bet-Car Records.

The first half of the concert ended on an up note with the appearance of the Women's Jazz Festival All Stars: Dottie Dodgion (drums), Mary Osborne (guitar), Janice Robinson (trombone), Lynn Milano (bass), Mary Fetting Park (tenor saxophone and flute) and Marian McPartland (piano). The band, which had rehearsed together for the first time the night before, played mostly standards. (I particularly liked Janice Robinson's muted trombone solo on an Ellington piece.) The powerful visual impact of a jazz band composed entirely of women was matched by the calibre of their music.

The legendary pianist, Mary Lou Williams, who comes out of the Kansas City jazz tradition, led off the second half of the program. Williams had played earlier in the day at Kansas City's Immaculate Conception Cathedral, with her trio and a choir, in a performance of her own composition, "Mary Lou's Mass."

A recent convert to Catholicism, Williams had talked to reporters the previous day about her feeling that "music is healing to the soul." In her mass, she illustrated it on piano before a full church. In addition, she preceeded the mass with an oral history of jazz, tracing the roots of the music from the spiritual to the rag, then to the blues, to Kansas City and finally to boogie woogie.

Williams presently teaches jazz and jazz history at Duke University. She recently played a much-publicized piano duet with modernist Cecil Taylor in New York. While her own musical tastes are rooted in the swing and bebop eras, she continues to break new ground.

The closing artist of the concert was Toshiko Akiyoshi, who was accompanied by her big band that features her husband, Lew Tabackin, on tenor saxophone and flute. The band is all-male, but the compositions are all Akiyoshi's. As she said to women in the audience that night, "The band would not exist without my music." By the time they had finished playing their set, people were dancing in the aisles—a testimony to the vitality of Akiyoshi's talent.

While all the performers in the concert were established artists, many young women musicians

had traveled from other parts of the country for the event, and many of them were up late into the night on Saturday, jamming with the festival's stars.

One such woman is 23-year-old Jane Ira Bloom, a saxophonist composer from New Haven, Conn. She plays soprano and alto in a variety of musical groupings, has written for duet, quartet and big band, and hopes to record this summer for the first time.

Creative young artists like Bloom are a part of the women's jazz scene that the festival should do more to showcase next year. Also, it would be nice if the \$500 jazz scholarship was given to a woman instead of a man next time around.

Despite the emphasis of jazz culture rather than women's culture and on established talent rather than up and coming young artists, the first Women's Jazz Festival was an important beginning in a field where much remains to be done in the future.

—Ron Sakolsky

Ron Sakolsky teaches at Sangamon State University in Springfield, Ill., and writes regularly on jazz for IN THESE TIMES.

People interested in having a group representing the Women's Jazz Festival perform and/or do clinics and workshops in their community should write Women's Jazz Festival, Inc., P.O. Box 22321, Kansas City, MO 64113.

STARSHIP IN ORBIT WITH A NEW CREW ON EARTH

EARTH
Jefferson Starship
(Grunt Records)

The Jefferson Starship is more than a rock'n'roll band; they are a musical institution that has, in various incarnations, been a dominant musical force since the mid-1960s.

Always San Francisco-based, they were originally the Jefferson Airplane, with whom more than any other group we associate both the acid-laced summers of love and the angry years of direct confrontation. The Airplane faded from prominence after the Wood-

stock Festival in 1969. Their last album, *Volunteers*, seemed an anachronism in the "Me Decade," and although various solo and collaborative efforts emerged during the next six years out of the Airplane nexus, none seemed to capture the earlier magic.

Reorganized as the Jefferson Starship, the group has been making a serious comeback. The center continues to be the original core members of the Airplane: Paul Kantner, Marty Balin and Grace Slick. But they have found a stable and competent band around which to build a new sound: drummer Johnny Barbata (ex-Turtles), bass/keyboards David Freiberg (ex-Quicksilver) and Pete Sears, and guitarist Craig Chaquico.

Their *Red Octopus* album (1975) sold well over a million copies. Their latest release, *Earth*, is one of the most exciting records from the Airplane-Starship in years.

Marty Balin sings the upbeat "Crazy Feelin'" and the light rocker "Count on Me" with the same AM-hit potential that made "Miracles" such a smash. Grace Slick continues to contribute distinctive vocals. On "Love Too Good," which opens the album, her soaring voice rescues a slightly overlong and overproduced set. "Take Your Time" and "Show Yourself" are patented Slick com-

positions, overtly political and somewhat obvious. The former tries to say too much with too little musical development, but the latter is a fine hymn to post-bicentennial America.

Starship founder Paul Kantner has faded into the background for this commercially minded album. His lone effort is the celestially anthemic "All Nite Long," which features the finest harmonies of the record. Guitarist Chaquico adds a driving rocker about his favorite sport, "Skateboard," which has nice harmonies but pretentious lyrics.

As a confirmed supergroup, Jefferson Starship is composed of a number of exceptional talents. In the past their records have often been a collection of disparate parts with the stars contributing their individual talents and the rest of the band providing a predictable backup.

The band is solid now, and the stars subordinate much of their individual talent to the effort of the whole. At times *Earth* still is a conglomerate of individual turns. At other times, the Starship forms a musical whole that delights the ear and promises much for the future.

—Michael S. Kimmel

Michael S. Kimmel is a free-lance writer in Berkeley who reviews records regularly for IN THESE TIMES.



Betty Carter at Women's Jazz Festival