

continued

Meagher happy to be with Blues

By ADY VOS
Sports Staff

By National Hockey League standards Rick Meagher is too small and too old to play the game effectively

Intelligencer - June 19, 1986.

but don't say that to the Belleville native.

Meagher just completed his sixth full NHL season and he says he feels like he can play another three or four years. If he lasts that long he could well be among the oldest players in the league when he retires.

Already he is among the elder statesman in the 21-team league although he won't hit his 33rd birthday until early next season.

In a game where teenage players are on the increase and players past 30 are becoming a rarity Meagher is fitting in quite nicely.

While 'old' age hasn't seemed to hamper his play neither has his size, or lack of it.

Average height in the National Hockey League last year was 6-feet while players weighed in at an average of 195 pounds.

Meagher falls short in both instances. At 5'8" tall Meagher tips the scales at about 175 pounds making him one of the smaller players in the league.

"They've always said I was too small to play," says Meagher. "When I went to a Junior A camp they told me to come back after I grew six inches and gained 40 pounds."

That was over a dozen years ago. When the juniors thought he was too small Meagher took the college route like brothers Terry and Tony. It proved to be a smart move.

In four years at Boston University Meagher established himself as one of the top college hockey players in the U.S. while twice being named an All-American.

Meagher says during his junior year at Boston he thought perhaps he would have a shot at the pro game. After scoring 34 goals and assisting on 46 others for 80 points in 34 games in his final year at Boston he signed as a free agent with Montreal Canadiens in 1977.

The Canadiens were deep in talent and in the process of winning four consecutive Stanley Cups so Meagher spent two years in the AHL with Nova Scotia. In 1979-80 Meagher finally got to play two games with Montreal but then he was sent back to Nova Scotia.

The next year he was dealt to Hartford and split that year between the NHL club and the minor affiliate in Binghamton.

The following season Meagher stuck with the Whalers and he has been in the NHL (except for a 10 game stint in the minors) ever since.

After a couple of years in Hartford Meagher spent three years with New Jersey Devils until he was dealt to St. Louis prior to the just completed season.

"The game is getting more enjoyable," says Meagher. "This past

season had to be the most gratifying all around."

While with Hartford and New Jersey losing was almost a forgone conclusion but with the Blues that was not the case.

"We knew going into a game we had a chance of winning it. We won more games in St. Louis this year than we did in two years at New Jersey," he says.

For the first time in his career Meagher was involved in the playoffs as the Blues were not eliminated this year until the seventh game of the Stanley Cup semi-finals.

The success of the club plus the return to a skating style of play by most clubs is something Meagher enjoys.

"The game has been changing the past few years. There's more skating and less cheap shots. Intimidation isn't so much a part of the game as it was about five years ago," he says.

"In the last couple of years I've been feeling stronger and been doing less skating. Maybe it's because I know the game better now. After this season I feel I can play another three or four years. I'd like to get in 10 years if I could."

Prior to hitting the NHL Meagher was known as a point producer as well as a defensive star but that changed since he made it to the big leagues.

In the NHL Meagher, especially in the last few years, has been known as a defensive specialist. His assignment is more often than not to check the opposing teams' top centre.

When St. Louis knocked off Minnesota in the opening playoff round this past season Meagher got plenty of credit for keeping Minnesota ace Neil Broten under control.

Meagher says he enjoying it in St. Louis but if he had to end his career elsewhere Los Angeles and Edmonton look inviting.

L.A. he favors because of the weather while Edmonton is popular because "they still have the best shot at winning the Cup. You won't see upsets like this year again. It would be nice to have my name on the Cup," he says.

Right now though he's happy in St. Louis and expects to sign a contract this summer as he heads into his option season.

NOTES-Although St. Louis coach Jacques Demers has left for Detroit to a \$1.1 million contract Meagher says he's not worried about job security. "I can't blame him for going to Detroit for that much money. You've got to take care of yourself." He said the Blues would have to trade almost an entire team if they tried to change the defensive approach currently employed by the Blues.