

Fans deserve winning team, say ex-Toronto players

# No quick fix for Leafs

By PAUL SVOBODA  
Herald Sports Editor

They used to say Ron Ellis had special skates that fit into slots cut along the right wing ice in Maple Leaf Gardens.

Rather than a potshot at old No. 6, that summation best described the hardworking up-and-down style of one of the Toronto Maple Leafs' steadiest wingers.

During a lengthy Leaf career Ellis patrolled his wing with a solid, if unspectacular, work ethic. He was a steady 20-goal-a-year man and his defensive work was top notch.

Today a successful businessman with sporting goods outlets in the Brampton area, Ellis admits to still being, "a Leaf, through and through," and the current sad sack state of the club near the bottom of the NHL standings doesn't please him one bit.

"I spent 20 years in the Leaf chain and it's very discouraging to see the disintegration of the franchise," said Ellis at the Hockey Heritage dinner on Mar. 6. "There's no simple solution, the Leafs still should be one of the greatest franchises. It's very hard now with 21 teams but I'm confident that in due time it'll turn around."

Ellis says there's no single problem with the Leaf organization today but he does acknowledge the weight that off-meddling owner Harold Ballard must bear on his shoulders. "Harold has to take some major responsibility, that's where the buck stops," said Ellis. "The Leafs have had some bad drafting, made some bad trades and some bad decisions. The Sittler situation, the Lanny McDonald situation, they all had an impact. Once they dismantled the team after Roger Neilson was coach it was hard to get back."

Darryl Sittler, Leaf captain and leader up until the end of the Neilson era in the late '70s, was caught in the middle of the power struggle that destroyed an upwardly mobile Leaf team that had upended the New York Islanders in the playoffs and had just missed doing the same to the Philadelphia Flyers - both Stanley Cup squads at that time.

"We went from a very strong hockey team to a very weak hockey team," said Sittler, the guest speaker at the Mar. 6 Hockey Heritage gathering. "I don't know if it (the situation with Leafs to-

day) hurts (personally) but for Leaf fans, they deserve a more competitive hockey team. To be down as long as they've been, they've got to be disheartened."

One of the moves made when an aging Punch Imlach was brought back to Toronto as general manager by Ballard was the actual trading of Sittler. That move, which sent Sittler to Philadelphia for Rich Costello and a draft choice, was akin to the Edmonton Oilers moving Wayne Gretzky.



Ron Ellis

"I was expecting to get traded," said Sittler, who had removed his captain's C weeks prior to the trade in protest of some of Imlach's moves. "What was more disappointing was being traded to Detroit from Philly on the day the Flyers were going to make me captain." Sittler ended his career in Detroit while Philadelphia received Murray Craven, a 30-goal scorer who's still with the Flyers. "It was a good trade for both clubs," said Sittler.



Darryl Sittler

Like Ellis, Sittler says there's no short term answer to the current Leaf problems. "They're not going to do it overnight," he said. He also admitted nothing is likely to happen as long as Ballard exerts major control over hockey operations. "That's not going to change a lot," he admitted.

Ellis says the Leafs need a franchise player although he acknowledged that Wendel Clark, recently returned from a nagging back problem, may go a long way in that respect. "He's a tremendous player," said Ellis. "They need people like Clark to build

around."

The Leafs recent trade of Ken Wreggett to Philadelphia for two first round draft choices may not be an immediate answer either, according to Ellis. "Unfortunately this is not a banner year for the draft," he said.

Meanwhile, Ellis agrees with several hockey people who say the Leafs need to call upon their heritage more than is being done currently at Maple Leaf Gardens. There are no past championship banners hanging at the Gardens and no Leaf alumni club there.

"It's one of those little things that helps to create that snowball effect," said Ellis. He added that younger players can often miss out on learning about the winning Maple Leaf legacy by not rubbing elbows occasionally with the older players from past championship teams.

That situation may change, however, as Ellis said the NHL players alumni association, a group headed up by ex-NHLer Larry Regan, is hoping to work closely with the Gardens in the future.

While Ellis is busy with his sports stores, Sittler keeps busy with public relations work including that with Puroator Courier which sees him work closely with the Canadian bantam hockey championships.

Unlike former Hab Hall of Famer Guy Lafleur, who is enjoying a successful comeback with the New York Rangers at the age of 37 and after being out of the NHL for four years, the 39-year-old Sittler says he never had the itch to return to the big league wars once he hung up his blades.

"When I retired, I was ready to retire," he said.

As for any further association with hockey, particularly at the management level, Sittler says he's never had the opportunity, although he would have to consider anything that came along.

Are you listening Mr. Ballard?



On the block

A United Rent-Alls defenseman got a piece of the puck as he went down for a block during the championship game in the Halton Hills Hockey League last Sunday at Alcott Arena. The league couldn't have asked for a more thrilling finish to its 1988-89 campaign as it took two overtime periods to decide a winner. The McGibbon Hotel eventually prevailed, edging United by a 3-2 score. (Herald photo)

## HAVE YOUR SMALL CHANGE READY.



### 1989 Nissan Micra

3 Door Hatch

- 5 Speed O.D. Transmission
- Reclining Seats
- Tinted Glass
- Power Brakes
- 1200 cc O.H.C. Engine
- Up to 61 M.P.G. Highway

1 ONLY IN STOCK SO HURRY!

CASH PRICE

\$7,995<sup>00</sup> \*

OR

\$189<sup>95</sup> \*

PER MONTH

\*PLUS P.S.T., FRT. & P.D.I.

COME ON DOWN TO MILTON

We're Just South of The 401 on Hwy. 25

## NORTH END NISSAN

610 MARTIN ST., MILTON - 878-4137



NISSAN

3 Yr. 60,000 Km. Full Coverage  
6 Yr. 100,000 Km. Power Train  
6 Yr. Unlimited Corrosion Protection  
No Charge - No Deductible

### Bridge winners

Doris Barber and Adele Gladick teamed up to take first-place honors in duplicate bridge play at the Georgetown Legion on Apr. 10.

Harry Arbie and Jack Kaarsemaker combined for second place and Lorena Norris and George Farrow played to a third-place finish.

It's the "Real" Thing at  
**FLETCHER SPORTS**  
853-1807

Custom Rod & Reel Repairs  
Parts, Sales & Service  
— Fishing Licences —  
**R.R. 2, ACTON**  
118 Mile North of Hwy. 7  
On 4th Line, Halton Hills

SAVE  
SAVE  
SAVE

**10% OFF**  
ALL MODELS  
IN STOCK

**Georgetown Hobby & Toy Inc.** 310 Queen Street  
877-6988

SHOP LOCALLY & WIN!

## LUCKY LICENCE NUMBER

HERE'S HOW TO WIN:

Each week the Herald will select a licence number from the parking lot of a different Halton Hills retailer and publish that number in this feature. The owner of that vehicle then has seven (7) days to claim his/her prize of a FREE Lube, Oil and Filter.

THIS WEEK'S NUMBER

**430 FYM**

PLAY THE GAME!  
WIN A LUBE, OIL & FILTER FROM



**SUPER LUBE**  
AND COMPLETE CAR CLEANING

6 Armstrong Ave.  
(Armstrong & Mountbatten St.)

Prize Includes:



- UP TO 5 LITRES OF 10W30 OIL
- OIL FILTER
- LUBE (IF REQ'D)

the HERALD

Home Newspaper of Halton Hills - Established 1968