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SPORTS SLANTS

- By Ray Shank

Well what do you know about that - Montreal Canadiens picked up six out of six points on their last western jaunt of the NHL schedule and managed to clinch second place in the east division standings?

That was kind of a surprise, I might point out, but at least a pleasant surprise.

The big deal in the NHL, though, was the fact that Atlanta Flames made it into the west division playoffs - a fine effort indeed, for a second-year club.

At this writing, the schedule isn't quite over so it's hard to say whether the Flames wound up third or fourth in the standings. But, from the look of things last Tuesday, it appeared the Flames were quite happy with a fourth place finish.

The Flames sort of backed into the playoffs. They dropped a 4-2 decision to Pittsburgh Penguins Sunday, March 31st, but Minnesota North Stars, the only other team who had a chance to catch them, also lost, by a 6-1 count to Buffalo Sabres.

The previous night (March 30), the Flames

displayed the drive that's gotten them this far. In what could be called a four-point game, they dumped the North Stars 4-1 in the Georgia city. Had they lost that game, they might not have made it.

Boom Boom Geoffrion's club had a fine rookie season last year, but folded near the end of the season and had to settle for a seventh place finish.

But with the Boomer rooting them on, they didn't have a repeat performance this season. The Flames had four tough opponents in the five games prior to that 4-1 victory over Minnesota Saturday, March 30. They came through with flying colors.

First they tied the rough, tough Philadelphia Flyers 3-3, then they lost a 6-4 decision to the lowly New York Islanders. They picked up their socks again and went on to beat the mighty Boston Bruins 4-3 right in Boston, tied New York Rangers 5-5 and tied Chicago Black Hawks 3-3.

Their second last week of the schedule was not easy!

For a second year club, Geoffrion's boys had a tremendous record against the big clubs.

The Flames won three out of five against Montreal; they won two out of five (the last two, when it counted most) against Boston; they beat the Rangers once and tied them twice in five games; they split against Philadelphia, winning two, losing two and tying two; and won one, tied two and lost two to Chicago.

The only team the Flames couldn't handle was Toronto. They managed only a tie in the five meetings with the Leafs. Oh, I almost forgot. They also had their troubles against Los Angeles, losing four out of five to the Kings.

The Kings, meanwhile, started off slowly and finished like a house on fire to make the playoffs. They were the hottest club in the league during the last month of the schedule, winning 10, tying two and losing two of 14 games.

The Kings, unlike the Flames, didn't fare as well as the Flames against the big clubs like Montreal, Boston and Chicago. They were satisfied on picking on the mediocre clubs like California, New York, Pittsburgh, etc. to rack up points.

They did win two and tie two in five games against Philadelphia, but it was tough going against the Bruins, the Hawks (whom they'll likely meet in the quarter-finals) and the Habs.

In six games against the Black Hawks, the
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