

# Offsider

The NHL's recent expansion into Orange County, California, and Miami, Florida, is not a good move for hockey. The two teams were granted entry into the league because of money; the Disney Corporation owns the Anaheim franchise, and Wayne Huizenga and Blockbuster Video own the Miami. Sure, the NHL needs money, but expansion is not the only money-making option open to the league. Obviously, though, it is the only option the American-controlled league desires to pursue.

The fact that both of the teams are owned by money is important. The NHL seems reluctant to expand into Canada because of the lack of money and big business found north of the border. Hamilton, Ontario has been bidding for a franchise for several years, but it is always turned down. Why? Economics. Everything goes back to money.

The NHL will not be able to sell hockey to Americans if it continues with the expansion kick. In order for expansion to work, it has to be offered because the fans want it and not because the banks need it. Expansion teams bring down the image of hockey for several reasons. The pool of eligible talent dwindles, which makes junior and minor leagues suffer. Rookies are forced into NHL play before they are ready and that takes away from their performance. Weaker yet established teams are forced into relinquishing players they have spent much time developing, which makes the struggling teams weaker. The new Collective Bargaining Agreement guarantees that salaries will escalate because the new money teams are able to wheedle non-star free-agents from poorer teams for star prices.

Counting the two new American teams, the NHL has eight teams in Canada and eighteen in the United States. If the NHL were to put a team in a Canadian city, the new team would be guaranteed fans because of hockey's position in Canada. An American team is not given that. Fans of American expansion teams grow with the team; people pay money because of the novelty, not because of desire. NHL hockey is turning into an elitist business where money is put before the fans. If the league is not careful with expansion, it may lose all of Canada because Canada cannot afford to keep up with the trend.

If the NHL really wanted to increase hockey's popularity in the States, it would curb

expansion for a few years. Give Ottawa, Tampa Bay, and San Jose a few seasons to develop. Allow older yet established teams like Hartford and the New York Islanders time to get everything together. Market the game for the game and not for the money. If the NHL continues to alienate the fans for the reason of expansion-generated revenue, it will be harder to market the sport. Fans turn a sport into a sport before money does. It is no fun when it is a business.

The Panthers have played four games at home since the time of the last issue of the paper. I have to apologize for having screwed up dates and writing that the Universite de Moncton was playing here on the 24th. Actually the St. F. X. X-Men were in town and the referee's over-exuberance in calling penalties allowed the X-Men to go home two points richer.

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On Saturday, the 23rd, the Panthers won a hard game against the University College of Cape Breton Capers. The Capers started the game aggressively and forced the Panthers into working for the 5-2 win. The Panthers killed off Max Mazur's major cross-checking penalty early in the first period and tied the game at 2-2 early in the third. After that, the Capers' organization and aggressive hockey could not get the puck past Jamie Blanchard. K.J. White was named the player of the game with his three goals and one assist. It is funny that defensive guys are never considered the game's best players. Although White's offense helped the Panthers win, defenseman Greg Webber helped cause the Capers to lose. Webber played the best individual defense Panther fans have seen in a long time.

On the afternoon of the 24th the Panthers

started out okay against the X-Men. A plethora of penalties and a combined six power-play goals allowed the X-Men to win 8-4. The Panthers played an inspired game, especially in the third period when trailing 5-3, but X-Men goaltender Anders Hogberg's brilliant saves and the solid goalposts kept the Panthers from capitalizing.

On the 29th, the Mount Allison Mounties took their vocal team to town. Cory Power was ejected from the game early in the first; the Mounties scored twice on his five-minute major penalty to go up 2-0 before the end of ten minutes of play. All seemed lost then, but the Panthers, working through a maze of bad penalties and aided by Jamie Blanchard's good goaltending and Greg Webber's excellent defensive play, tied the game at 3-3 near the end of the second. A roughing incident early in the overtime period cut down Panther offense and forced acting-coach Scott Blanchard to juggle his lines around. Blanchard produced the exciting line of Jim Somnez, Paul Crabbe, and Donald MacDonald which scored the goal to win the game 2:32 into overtime. Greg Webber was named the player of the game with three assists and a great save when Jamie Blanchard was caught out of the net; Webber deserved it not only for that but also for the great, hard game he played.

The Panther/Universite de Moncton Blue Eagles rivalry continued Sunday afternoon. The Blue Eagles scored six goals in the second period to win 7-4. Panther offense just could not match that sort of game, especially with all of the penalties called. Obviously the referee was trying to avoid the hockey adaptation of the boy who cried wolf story; it seemed that every time Moncton forward Serge Pepin hit the ice, the referee called a Panther penalty. Pepin is a better diver than the renowned New Jersey Devils forward Claude Lemieux. The AUAA needs to adapt or enforce the NHL rule of giving an obvious diver the two minute penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct. It would have changed the outcome of this game.

This coming weekend will be the Panthers' last two games at home before the playoffs. The University of New Brunswick Red Devils will play two games against the Panthers: Saturday night at 7:00 and Sunday afternoon at 2:00. Try a game. ●