



Along the... *Sport* CIRCUIT

With ALLAN COATES

Off to Holland

By most standards of refereeing, Ray Thomas' formal training period has been incredibly short. Three years ago, at the age of 19, he started tooting his whistle in the Capreol minor hockey system and stayed at it for two seasons. Last year, he moved into the Northern Ontario Hockey Association ranks under the direction of referee-in-chief Gerry Wallace and was regarded as one of the more competent members of Wallace's crew.

Now, at the ripe old age of 22, Thomas is packing his bags for Holland to become referee-in-chief of that country's national hockey association.


He will leave for Holland sometime within the current week, abandoning the NOHA ship for a shot at what he hopes will be an eventual career in the National Hockey

League. The overseas job is simply a means to an end.

Nonetheless, it's an impressive way to go and he can thank Vern Buffey for the opportunity. Buffey, a former NHL referee and now a scout for Vancouver Canucks, watched Thomas at work at a national referee's school he conducted during the summer at Haliburton.

Buffey was informed of the Holland posting and asked if anyone would like to go. Thomas thought it over for a week, said yes, and was interviewed, along with a number of other candidates.

He learned of his selection Sunday when Buffey phoned. Now all he has to do is learn how to referee under the rules of international hockey, since part of his duties as referee-in-chief includes handling a number of the senior level games in Holland.



Good shot at NHL

"I'm certain I'm going to have to change my style a bit," he was saying over the telephone last night. "I expect it will be easier, since there's less physical contact under international rules, but I haven't even seen the rule book yet. I'll get it tomorrow with the contract."

Thomas, according to at least one very reputable source, NHL referee-in-chief Scotty Morrison, has everything going for him if he intends to jump into the National Hockey League bear-pits some day.

Morrison told NOHA referee-in-chief Wallace that Thomas has fantastic potential and a great future as an NHL official if he wants it. He's already done three NHL exhibition games, albeit as a linesman, this autumn, in Brantford, Rouyn, Que. and here in Sudbury.

"I guess getting the job in Holland is just one of the breaks you get along the line," Thomas said. "I really can't say what are my strong points as a referee, but my

size (six feet, 180 pounds) doesn't hurt and my skating is fairly good. I like to think my interpretation of the rules is pretty good, but some people may want to disagree with that."

A lot of the credit for his quick jump up the officiating ladder, he feels, must go to Wallace.

"There's no doubt that I got most of my real training last year in the NOHA," Thomas said. "I couldn't help but learn. Gerry was a tremendous help to me, especially in my attitude towards refereeing and in showing me the correct positioning on the ice."

As yet, Thomas is uncertain where he will be stationed in Holland, but expects it to be either in Amsterdam or Tilburg. Aside from his function as referee, his other duties will include the supervision of officials as well as organizing a number of referees' clinics. Naturally enough, he has no idea of the calibre of either that country's officiating or its hockey.

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A tight NOHA ship

He'll operate on a year-to-year basis insofar as his tenure there is concerned, thus putting himself into the position of not being tied down by a lengthy contract if he decides to attempt the hike into the NHL under Morrison's wing. If and when he does seek NHL employment, Thomas will join two other Sudbury-area natives, Ron Wicks and Dave Newell, on the league's officiating crew.

Both of them were recommended to the NHL by Wallace, whose handling of NOHA officials can be compared, on a lesser scale, to that of Morrison.

"The Northern Ontario Hockey Association is the only one in the country to use the National Hockey League methods in the handling of its referees," Wallace said. "Our referees dress similarly, subscribe to a similar conditioning plan, attempt to interpret the rules in a similar manner — the whole ball game. If I have my way, with the help

of a lot of people, we're going to be a hotbed for NHL officials."

Part of that attempt becomes obvious later this month. Wallace will be the chief instructor at three refereeing clinics in the district, two of them, at Blind River and Chelmsford, sponsored by Hockey Canada through the NOHA. The other, at Coniston Oct. 30, will be sponsored by that municipality's minor hockey people.

Chelmsford will be the locale of the first clinic, Oct. 16 with Blind River's going exactly one week later on Oct. 23. In all three cases, they are open to anyone who wants to try his hand at officiating, and, for Wallace, will serve as a step towards standardizing both the methods and calibre of Northern Ontario referees.

"There has to be some respect shown hockey officials," Wallace said, "but they've got to get away from demanding it and start to earn it. Then it will come."