

**LION-HEART . . .** Lee Valley's Bill Watson is the centre of attention but with his jaw wired he can hardly shout for joy. Team-mates Will Fish (right) and Vesa Pennanen (left) give him moral support before he flies back to the States.



Standard Picture: FRANK TEWKESBURY

# Odd-ball iceman

# fighters tooth and nail

IT is safe to assume that when they come to write the history of ice hockey there will be no mention of Bill Watson. Playing for Lee Valley Lions in is the sort of role that begets anonymity.

Even as top scorer with 52 goals this season and despite his efforts to turn the Lions into a moving and irresistible spectacle on ice, Watson's role on the left wing was hardly destined to throw him into the spotlight.

This week, however, Watson finally made the sports pages. But to get him there it took an act that confirmed that the young American, a 23-year-old graduate of the University of Minnesota, is slightly petty.

Early during a first division match against Peterborough Pirates, Watson had the butt end of an opponent's hockey stick in his face. His jaw was broken in three places and he had a mouthful of loose teeth.

Of course, they carted him off to Barts, but against the

advice of the medical staff at the hospital, Watson discharged himself and went back to watch the end of the match.

"You're damn right it hurt, but I had to sign myself out or they wouldn't have let me go. Listen, you guys, I told them, we were only down 2-1 when I did this. I gotta go back to cheer my boys on."

The final score was 11-4 to the Pirates and nobody knows whether Watson will have

## Doug is back on the warpath.

**DOUG MERKOSKY**, the high-scoring Canadian ice hockey forward who left Streatham Redskins at the end of last season, has returned to the club after a spell with Southampton.

The Londoners seek four Heineken League points this weekend, visiting Nottingham Panthers on Saturday and entertaining Durham Wasps on Sunday.

made a difference to the rest of the game. But cheer was the one thing he couldn't do then, and can't do now.

He returned to Barts on Monday, had the loose teeth wired together and six wires inserted on each side of his mouth to keep his jaw set. Now he can't eat solids, he sucks soup through a straw and sounds like a ventriloquist who could only say gottle o'geer.

His career as a Lee Valley

Lion is over. The season ends in March, and Watson will be out until well after that.

In fact, he flies back to Minnesota on Saturday, leaving behind two buddies, Will Fish, also from Minnesota, and a Finn, Vesa Pennanen.

The three of them, brought in to join the Lions last August, are the only overseas players in British ice hockey who are not paid. There simply wasn't any more in the kitty when the Lions were formed last year.

## Return

They don't have work permits either, so they are not employed. Watson had £1000 when he arrived in August. "I made it to Christmas on that. Since then it's been kinda tough. I had my dad sell some stocks for me. And now I'm going back home, so it doesn't make a helluva difference."

Even his return will be somewhat bizarre. "Your doctors have told me I can't fly in a plane if I have my mouth wired. See, I won't be able to yawn if I wanna pop my ears, and if I have a nose bleed it will be difficult to breathe."

"But I don't listen to doctors so well. I'm taking a pair of wire cutters with me, and I'm gonna get on the plane anyway. If anything happens I'll just cut the wires."

He's that sort of young man. On one occasion in the States, when he and Fish were playing for another team, Watson had his left leg in a cast. "I sawed it off, the cast not the leg, so I could play in some play-offs."

"I had blood on the knee-cap. I had a shot of cortisone, played three games in the play-offs and then they put me back in a cast for another eight weeks. But in our family you'd do anything to play and anything in the rules to win."

"I don't care if I'm playing tiddlywinks against my mom, I'm gonna win. See, three days after I arrive home my dad and I are off to Miami to play golf. Me and my dad, we're awful competitive."

"But don't worry about this," he said pointing to his jaw. "I won't get hit unless someone has a real bad swing."



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