

Will the showdown continue? Canada and Russia go for fourth U20 gold medal meeting



A ONE SIDED RIVALRY? It has become a familiar sight at the IIHF World U20 Championship: Canada and Russia meeting in the gold medal game. But in the last three years, Canada has dominated, taking home the gold medal in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Will the teams meet in the golden game again? And will the Russians, or any other team at the championship, be able to put a stop to the Canadian dominance at World Juniors? Tune in on January 5th to learn the answers.

As the great Christmas and New Year's tradition continues of the IIHF World U20 Championship, so does one of the best rivalries in all of sports: Canada vs. Russia. Is their domination bad for the game? Absolutely not.

■ ■ The statistics tell the story: In five of the last six World U20 gold medal games, the two dominant ice hockey nations have faced each other. Canada has won the last three, while the Russians were victorious in 2002-2003. Only the United States managed break the pattern with their first-ever U20 victory in 2004.

RENÉ FASEL EDITORIAL

Now, there are those who say that the Canada - Russia dominance is not good for the championship. I do not agree. Every sport has their leaders, they set the standard and it is up to the others to follow. When they do, this is when we get the total increase in quality. And we want the USA, Sweden, Czech Republic, Finland and the others to follow.

As TSN commentator Pierre McGuire says in this issue, there are fundamental reasons for Canada's and Russia's pre-eminent positions. The Canadians have superior mentality at this age level, while the Russians possess unequalled passion. Combine those intangibles with basic skill and you understand why the two teams dominate.

■ ■ It will be very interesting to follow Slovakia at the 'World Juniors' in Pardubice and Liberec. On pages 6-7 you can read about the Slovak experiment that has their national U20 program play as club team in the highest Slovak professional league.

This plan was initiated to stop the Slovak juniors' migration to the Canadian junior leagues, an exodus that has contributed to nearly ruining the development programs in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The Slovaks somehow managed to avoid relegation at last year's World U20's despite winning just one game, while the Czech Republic, a couple of months later, was relegated to Division I of the World U18 Championship. 2008 is an incredibly important junior season for both those countries as they must stop this negative trend.

■ ■ The European Champions Cup in St. Petersburg has become another great New Year's tradition and just as Canadians and Russians have dominated the U20 event, Russian and Finnish clubs have been the masters of the ECC domain. Every ECC final since the inception in 2005 has featured the Russian against the Finnish champion in the gold medal game and again, Metallurg Magnitogorsk and Kärpät Oulu look to be the favourites.

This ECC, the last one before European club hockey gets its Champions Hockey League for the 2008-2009-season, will have an additional incentive, on top of winning the Silver Stone, emblematic of European club supremacy. The European Champion will play in the Victoria Cup against an NHL challenger in autumn of 2008, as the IIHF and NHL have joined forces in creating an annually awarded trophy for club teams from the best leagues on each side of the Atlantic.

■ ■ Let me take this opportunity to wish the entire hockey family a successful 2008, the centennial year of the IIHF.

René Fasel
IIHF President

ASSOCIATION NEWS

■ ■ The Israel Ice Hockey Federation named **Sidney Greenberg** its new Chairman. Greenberg is involved with numerous boards including the Toronto Raptors Foundation and the Canadian Olympic Association. He is a past President of both Maccabi Canada and Basketball Canada and is an elected member of the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

■ ■ The Finnish Ice Hockey Hall of Fame inducted five new members, including two women for the first time. The inductees include: **Marianne Ihalainen, Janne Laukkanen, Antti Törmänen, Riikka Väilä** and **Anssi Koskinen**.

■ ■ The Swedish Ice Hockey Association named **Jörgen Lindgren** as its new General Secretary. Lindgren is a former referee/linesman, with six year's experience in the Sweden top league. He has been the CEO for a company producing car windshields and hails from Södertälje.

IIHF STAFF APPOINTMENTS

■ ■ **Regine Spinedi** is the new Assistant for President Rene Fasel and General Secretary Horst Lichtner. Spinedi will work as a part of the Administration Department and will be responsible for keeping the minutes at all Council Meetings and IIHF Congresses. Spinedi is Swiss and comes to the IIHF after working as an event manager at the Zurich Airport.



■ ■ **Martin Merk** is the new webmaster and editor of IIHF.com. The Swiss native will be responsible for the content of the re-launched website. He comes to the IIHF with extensive hockey writing experience, specifically with Hockeyfans.ch, a Swiss hockey website. He also writes for the Mittelland-Zeitung group, which serves northwest Switzerland.



■ ■ **Tim Broadbent** is the new IIHF Marketing Manager. The Great Britain native will be responsible for the Supplier Pool contracts and creating new marketing opportunities for the IIHF. Broadbent comes to the IIHF after spending the last three years working for International Sports & Entertainment AG in Switzerland.



2008 IIHF World U20 Championship Official Media Guide
For the first time, the IIHF has produced a media guide for the World U20 Championship. If you are interested in receiving a copy, please send an email to media@iihf.com. Please be advised that the media guide supplies are limited and all requests for copies may not be fulfilled.



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IIHF.com relaunches with a new look

■ ■ The International Ice Hockey Federation unveiled its new and improved website in conjunction with the kick-off of the 100-Year Anniversary celebrations and the opening of the centennial ice rink at the Zurich headquarters. The site will feature a group of global correspondents who will contribute from all around the world to bring a fresh look on the game in all nations. Also new are individual country pages, where you can check up on your favorite country or league.



A NEW LOOK: IIHF.com gets a complete facelift

The new IIHF.com has a complete new look and feel and will feature more photographic and video content. Still on the site is the complete coverage for all of the IIHF World Championships and Olympic tournaments and all news and information concerning international hockey.

IIHF.com also has many plans for the near future, including video streaming, photo galleries and a new state-of-the-art statistical system. Please be sure to check back to IIHF.com regularly as these new aspects are implemented.

Up, up & away! New IIHF travel office opens

■ ■ In light of the international scope of the IIHF, the areas of travel and event management, including their professional organization and set up, have taken on an new and increased significance, not only for the IIHF, but all affiliated national associations as well.

It is the IIHF's goal to establish a professional travel structure to ease the organizational work of the IIHF member national associations, to help improve cost efficiency and provide a professional and efficient service.



Since September 3, the new in-house travel agency is operating under the name of *IIHF Travel & Events*. Anikó Fekete is the on-site contact person, for all interested nations. Nicole Rosset will be supporting the IIHF events department and will have a focus on the group travel associated with the various IIHF events. Both bring a strong travel agency and event management background to their positions.

For additional information on the new IIHF Travel & Events office, please email: travel@iihf.com.

Update on Canada 2008

■ ■ The first-ever IIHF World Championship to be played in Canada is a mere five months away and the host nation is well ahead of schedule with their preparations for the IIHF's flagship event.



The Canadian organizers recently announced several ticket packages for fans that are available for sale in both Halifax and Quebec City. There are approximately 10 different packages between the two host cities. For more information on the various packages, please visit Hockey Canada's website at www.hockeycanada.ca

With a break from World Championship tradition, the host nation will play in the second site of Halifax. Should the Canadians make it to the semi-final, they would move to Quebec City for the end of the championship.

■ ■ The Canadians will be busy as a host nation this year as the country also signed to the host the inaugural IIHF World Women's U18 Championship.

The championship will be played in Calgary on January 7-13 and will feature eight squads: Finland, Sweden, USA, Canada, Germany, Czech Republic, Switzerland and Russia. The top four teams from the preliminary round will move onto the medal round, while the bottom four will play placement games.

The Canadian organizers recently unveiled the official logo for the event (shown above).



IIHF NEWS

■ ■ The IIHF Council decided to use North American markings and zone proportions for all upcoming IIHF tournaments in Canada the United States. The IIHF earlier decided that the 2008 IIHF World Championship in Quebec City and Halifax will be played on the existing North American-sized rinks. The international sized rink measures 61 x 30 metres as opposed to the North American size of 61 x 26 metres.

The next decision was whether to implement the international zone proportions within the North American sized rinks or to stay with the existing ones. At the IIHF Council meeting in Zurich on November 29, the IIHF's executive body decided to go with the North American size. The length of an international end-zone is 17.3 metres, while the North American is 19.51 metres.

OBITUARIES

■ ■ **Edwyn "Bob" Owen**, a player on the 1960 U.S. men's Olympic hockey team that won the first Olympic gold medal for the Americans, died in a car crash on October 8th. He was 71. Owen played on the team that won the gold in Squaw Valley, Calif. He did not play pro hockey after the Olympics. He supported minor league hockey teams in Kansas over the years. Owen grew up in St. Louis Park, Minn., and graduated from Harvard in 1958, where he played hockey.

■ ■ **Bill Warwick**, one of the most talented and colourful players on the 1955 IIHF World Champion Pentiction Vees, passed away on October 2, 2007 in Edmonton, Canada, due to heart complications. Bill Warwick, the second oldest of the three Warwick brothers who all starred for the Vees, was 82. Warwick played in one NHL-game, with New York Rangers in 1942-43.

IIHF 100-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Seven days, seven nights & one ice rink



November 15



November 16



November 17



November 18



November 19



November 20



November 21



November 22

■ ■ You only get one chance to turn 100. And the IIHF is making that chance as memorable as possible. With the start of the 100th season of international hockey just weeks away, the centennial celebration was officially kicked off when dignitaries from all around the globe converged on Zurich to open the official 100-year ice rink at the IIHF Headquarters.

Of all of the planned 100-year projects, it was perhaps the Zurich ice rink that represents best the 100 years of ice hockey. After all, it is on the ice rinks around the globe where the great moments of the game have been played out, and it will be on the ice rink in Zurich where fans of all ages will get a chance to create memories of their own on a one-of-a-kind rink.

Under sunny skies and perfect crisp weather, the IIHF kicked-off its 100-year celebrations in grand style as it hosted the rink's opening.

As the legendary Bob Johnson once said, "Today is a great day for hockey." And indeed the transformed garden of the IIHF headquarters proved to be the perfect setting for the much-anticipated opening.

■ ■ On hand for the festivities were several key hockey and Swiss government personalities. Bundersrat (Swiss Parliament member) Hans-Rudolf Merz helped IIHF President Rene Fasel along with Swiss Ice Hockey President Fredy Egli, cut the ceremonial ribbon to open the rink. Zurich Mayor Elmar Ledergerber was also on the ice for the grand opening.

Fasel thanked everyone involved in the ice rink project acknowledging, "it is no easy task to get a ice rink built in the middle of a city, but thanks to the cooperation and enthusiasm of everybody involved, we were able to achieve our goals."

After the ribbon cutting, players from local Swiss club EHC Seewen were the lucky ones to be the first to skate on the new ice. They ushered in the new century of hockey in a ceremony that paid tribute to the past decades of the game. IIHF Hall of Fame member Jakob Kölliker was on hand to drop the ceremonial first puck. The ice rink will be open for a little over three months and will host numerous local schools and youth hockey clubs during that time. The



LET THE GAMES BEGIN: Above, the IIHF Rink is officially opened. Below From left: Hans-Rudolf Merz (Swiss Federal Council member), Jakob Kölliker (IIHF Hall of Famer), Elmar Ledergerber (Mayor of Zurich), Fredy Egli (President Swiss Ice Hockey Association), and René Fasel (President IIHF)

rink, smaller than a regulation-sized North American ice, is complete with a scoreboard, skate rental, and even lights for evening and nighttime games.

■ ■ The IIHF also took the occasion of its Zurich rink opening to debut the official commemorative Swiss stamp and the commemorative Swiss coin. Both were designed to pay tribute to the centennial celebration and will be available for the upcoming year.

The ice rink is just the first of many centennial activities that the IIHF has planned in the upcoming season. A Global Skills Challenge is already underway in participating nations, in addition to a Top 100 Ice Hockey Story countdown. The celebrations will culminate at the 2008 IIHF World Championship this May in Canada.

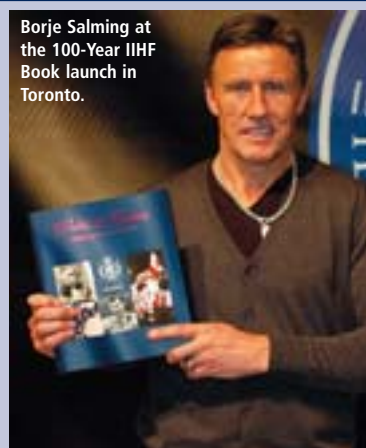
IIHF LAUNCHES 100-YEAR BOOK

■ ■ Never before has the history of ice hockey been described like in the IIHF's 100 Year Anniversary book; *World of Hockey, Celebrating a Century of the IIHF*. The beautiful 228-page coffee-table book, which provides both the European as well as the North American perspective, takes the readers back to the Victoria Skating Rink in Montreal, where the first organized game was played in 1875, to Canada's early dominance, through the years of Soviet supremacy to today's evened field. All the greatest events in the international game are described by some of the most recognized hockey historians and journalists. The book also includes history of each of IIHF's 65 member national associations and also a statistical part.

The book, co-edited by Szymon Szemberg and Andrew Podnieks, is wonderfully illustrated and a must for every hockey fan. Some of the photos have never earlier been published. *World of Hockey* was officially launched at a special ceremony at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto on November 13

Go to www.chapters.indigo.ca and order your copy today for the lowest possible price, only 29.40 Canadian dollars, a discount of 34%. Enter keyword IIHF into the search function.

Borje Salming at the 100-Year IIHF Book launch in Toronto.



Six teams feel the heat of

Will Russia stay red hot at the European Champions Cup?

By Szymon Szemberg

■ ■ Metallurg Magnitogorsk feels the heat. Will they follow in the footsteps of Avangard Omsk, Dynamo Moscow and Ak Bars Kazan or will they become the first Russian club not to make the ECC final?

All fans who have followed the IIHF European Champions Cup since its inception in 2005, know very well that each ECC final has featured a Russia vs. Finland match-up:

2005: Avangard - Kärpät Oulu, 2-1 in overtime

2006: Dynamo - Kärpät Oulu, 5-4 in a shootout

2007: Ak Bars - HPK, 6-0

Considering the results in the three finals, the conclusion is simple. The Russian Superleague must count as the best in Europe with the Finnish league just behind.

■ ■ Russian champions Metallurg Magnitogorsk feel the pressure not to break the Russian streak of consecutive ECC triumphs. And if there is one team that should be used to the heat, it's Metallurg. The city of Magnitogorsk (population 420,000) is totally dominated by the iron and steel plant which also is the main sponsor of the hockey club.

So when earlier this autumn the IIHF paid a visit to the "Steel City" the IIHF delegation and the Silver Stone were invited to the plant by the club's general manager Gennadi Velichkin and president Viktor Rashnikov, who also is the owner of the colossal plant.

■ ■ The Silver Stone trophy, emblematic of European club supremacy since the days of the defunct European Hockey League, has seen many places during its travel around Europe but being held by a steelworker with the flames bursting from a huge steel oven just a few meters behind was a first.

As if the Metallurg people wanted to be very clear to both the IIHF guests and the other five ECC teams: "If we couldn't stand the heat, we would get out of the kitchen".

On the other hand, there is no other club among the 2008 ECC participants that is as comfortable with dealing with the Silver Stone as "Magnitka". Those who know their European club hockey history, recall that the Russian Steelers owned the trophy in 1999 and 2000, when they won the European Hockey League in consecutive years.

■ ■ The Silver Stone was also the trophy of the old EHL before it was slightly redesigned in 2005 and brought back to active duty for the ECC.



HOT & COLD Russia's Metallurg hopes to keep the fire alive by giving the nation its fourth straight ECC title. Meanwhile Finland looks to put an end to its cold streak as Kärpät head coach Kari Jalonen (pictured right) hopes that the third time is a charm.

Metallurg has been playing well in the Russian league this autumn and as this is written in early December, the club is in third place in the 20-team circuit. They were a whopping 14 points behind sensational leader Salavat Yulayev, but the club seems very comfortable with their position. It's as if they say to Salavat: "Go ahead, just run away. See you in the playoffs."

2008 ECC ALEXANDER RAGULIN DIVISION

METALLURG MAGNITOGORSK	RUS	SLOVAN BRATISLAVA	SVK	MODO HOCKEY	SWE
<p>Founded: 1955 Championships: 3 1999, 2001, 2007 Notable players: G Andrey Mezin; D Martin Strbak; F Maxim Mamin, Yuri Babenko, Jan Marek, Nikolai Kulemin Coach: Fedor Kanareykin (since 2006) League record as of Dec. 10: 22W-12L, position: 3rd Notes: The pressure is on Metallurg to become the fourth straight Russian champion of the ECC. One of the team's top producers is also one of its youngest, Nikolai Kulemin</p> 		<p>Founded: 1929 Championships: 7 1979, '98, '00, '02, '03, '05, '07 Notable players: G Sasu Hovi; D Petr Pavlas; F Marek Uram, Martin Kulha, Martin Hujsa Coach: Zdeno Ciger (since 2006) League record as of Dec 10: 25W-7L, position: 1st Notes: Marek Uram, is the team's top scorer, despite the fact that he is not on the top line which includes Miroslav Lazo, Robert Dome and Michal Hreus.</p> 		<p>Founded: 1921 Championships: 2 1979, 2007 Notable players: G Karol Krizan; D Mattias Timander. F Niklas Sundstrom, Per Age Skroder, Andreas Salomonsson Coach: Harald Luckner (since 2005) League record as of Dec 10: 12W-2T-14L, position: 7th Notes: MODO has two players Victor Hedman and Tobias Forsberg who are eligible for the Swedish U20 team. Goaltender Karol Krizan has four shutouts thus far.</p> 	

the Silver Stone



Regardless of the Russian club dominance on home ice in St. Petersburg since 2005, the 'ECC club' is Kärpät Oulu. They will be at their third ECC out of four possible and once again the team from the northern part of Finland is a bastion of stability.

Going into December, Kärpät had eight wins in their last 10 games and was nursing a seven-point lead in the league. The black and white club is truly impressive. In the last five years they have won three national championships, one silver and one bronze. Add to this the two ECC finals.

There is no club in Europe that is even close to this record. "The secret is hard work by a lot of people, a true team spirit and a feeling of working together for a good cause," says Juha Junno, the CEO of the club.

It must be something with the team spirit. Since Kärpät's first ECC-final in 2005, Juha Junno has seen basically half the team disappear to the NHL and other leagues, but season after season coach Kari Jalonen puts a competitive team on the ice.

■ ■ If Metallurg is the favourite in the Alexander Ragulin Division (with MODO, Sweden and Slovan Bratislava, Slovakia), Kärpät is once again in pole-posi-

tion in the Ivan Hlinka Division.

Both of Kärpät's rivals have had tough seasons in their domestic leagues. After a fine start, HC Davos went into a November tail-spin where they lost six consecutive games and seven out of eight. But in all fairness, the Swiss champion has been hit by injuries to key players. Forwards Robin Leblanc, Michel Riesen and Sandro Rizzi have been out indefinitely.

Sparta Prague was in fifth place in early December, but the Czech champions were trailing leader and local rival Slavia by 13 points. Sparta had an impressive start with six wins in the first eight games, but since then has not been able to play above 50 percent.

■ ■ Metallurg is challenged by Sweden's MODO Örnsköldsvik and Slovan Bratislava in the Alexander Ragulin group. The Slovak champion is having an excellent campaign as they were leading the Extraliga by 12 points in December. They had an unbelievable streak of ten consecutive wins between October 19 and November 17. In the last 20 games when this was written, Slovan had just four defeats.

Things were not as comfortable in northern Sweden. Suffering injuries to players like Mattias Timander, Niklas Sundström, Ronald Petrovicky and Per Svartvadet the team has been struggling to keep a playoff position, hovering just above the magic line. After a nice streak of five consecutive wins in late October early November, MODO slumped to six losses in the next seven games.

■ ■ As the Silver Stone returns to St. Petersburg after its travels around Europe, many things point towards yet another Russia vs. Finland final in the European Champions Cup.



MAKING FRIENDS The ECC Silver Stone also traveled to Davos (above) and MODO Örnsköldsvik (below)



Victory at ECC means a trip to the Victoria Cup

■ ■ As the old saying goes 'to the victor goes the spoils.' That sentiment rings particularly true for this year's European Champions Cup winner. Not only will the top team in St. Petersburg take home the Silver Stone, but they will also earn the right to play in the first-ever Victoria Cup.

So just what is the Victoria Cup?

■ ■ The tournament is a milestone for international ice hockey. This is the first competition where a European club champion will compete against an NHL challenger in a tournament for an annually awarded trophy.

The first Victoria Cup, which also will be one of the highlights of the IIHF's 100 Year Anniversary celebrations, will be played in a yet to be determined European city in September 2008. The winner of the 2008 European Champions Cup is guaranteed participation in the inaugural Victoria Cup. The date and format of the Victoria Cup will be announced later.

"The Victoria Cup will be a joined venture between the IIHF and the NHL and it will be the first annual world club competition for a trophy endorsed by both the IIHF and the NHL. This competition will also carry a substantial financial reward," said René Fasel, the president of the IIHF.

■ ■ The trophy is named after the Victoria Skating Rink in Montreal. The event wants to commemorate the birthplace of modern ice hockey and will be organised every year in autumn thereafter.

The European Champions Cup will be replaced with the new Champions Hockey League. This will consist of a series of stages among the top European club teams beginning in 2008 and will be the basis for determining which teams will be eligible to compete in the Victoria Cup Event. The CHL is modelled after soccer's successful UEFA Champions League.

■ ■ The IIHF has chosen Ovation AG in Zug, Switzerland as the agency to develop the commercial aspects of the Champions Hockey League. René Fasel said of the partnership: "We are very fortunate to have an agency with the integrity and experience of Ovation to lead the marketing and commercial development. The agency is led by Craig Thompson, one of the founding fathers of the UEFA Champions League, who has all the experience necessary to deliver the Champions Hockey League."



2008 ECC IVAN HLINKA DIVISION

KÄRPÄT OULU

FIN

Founded: 1946
Championships: 4
1981 '04, '05, '07

Notable players:

G Jaakko Suomalainen;
D Mikko Lehtonen,

Jukka-Pekka Laamanen; F Janne Pesonen, Michal Bros

Coach: Kari Jalonen (since 2004)

League record as of Dec 10: 24W-8L, position: 1st

Notes: Jan Novak was added to the roster. He played last season with ECC winner Ak Bars Kazan. This is Kärpät's third appearance in the ECC, the most of any team.



HC DAVOS

SUI

Founded: 1921
Championships: 28
most recent 1984, '85,
'02, '04, '05, '07

Notable players:

D Jan von Arx; F

Andres Ambuhl, Reto von Arx, Alexandre Daigle

Coach: Arno Del Curto (since 1996)

League record as of Dec 10: 17W-14L, position: 4th

Notes: HC Davos has the youngest goaltenders in the Swiss league, Reto Berra and Leonardo Genoni, both born 1987. It is the second ECC appearance for HC Davos.



SPARTA PRAGUE

CZE

Founded: 1903
Championships: 8
1953, '54, '90, '93,
'00, '02, '06, '07

Notable players:

G Tomas Duba;

D, Jan Hanzlik; F Petr Nedved, Petr Ton, Martin Strbak

Coach: Frantisek Vyborny (since 2005)

League record as of Dec 10: 16W-14L, position: 4th

Notes: After a strong start to the season in September, Sparta has only won two straight games twice. It is Sparta's second trip to the ECC in St. Petersburg.



Slovakia's U20 team faces the best

■ ■ Regardless of the outcome at the upcoming U20 World Championship in the Czech Republic, no one will be able to claim Team Slovakia was unprepared. After narrowly averting relegation at last year's tournament, the Slovaks have taken a bold, innovative approach to preparing the U20 squad to successfully defend its spot at the elite level.

By Bill Meltzer

The Slovakian Hockey Association has taken the unprecedented step of admitting the national U20 team to the Slovak Extraliga in order to help the junior team prepare for the 2008 U20 World Championship in Pardubice and Liberec. Junior-aged players affiliated with the various Slovak Extraliga clubs have been combined into a single team, playing a slate of 22 games against Extraliga competitors.

■ ■ Slovakia is the first country to give its national junior team access to play against top-level adult competition. While other countries have staged similar experiments, it's always been done on a smaller-scale. In Finland, for example, a U20 team has played against second-tier Mestis opponents, while Switzerland has had its juniors play a short slate of matches against National League B teams.

The Slovaks are the first to have their junior talent face off against the likes of longtime NHL and national team standout Zigmund Palffy (now with HK 36 Skalica) and former wunderkind Robert Döme (Slovan Bratislava). It has been a baptism by fire, to be sure. U20 team goal-tenders Tomas Hladovsky (4.59 goals against average, 88.8 save percentage in 10 appearances) and Julius Hudacek (4.29 GAA, 88.8 save percentage in eight games) have been peppered with shots in most games.

The U20 team's games do not count in the Extraliga standings, because winning is not the objective. The purpose is to provide the young players valuable experience and much-needed time to come together as a team. That takes time, and there has been progress over the course of the autumn, even if the on-ice results seem modest to casual observers.

■ ■ In 20 matches played to date, the U20 team has won twice, lost 17 times in regulation and were defeated once in a shootout. But the team has become increasingly unified and competitive.

In their earlier games, the juniors routinely lost by lopsided margins, including defeats by 7-1 (Kezmarok), 6-0 (Skalica) and 10-1 (MHC Martin) scores. More recently, the majority of results have been closer. But even when the

juniors fall short, there are valuable lessons to be taken away by U20 head coach Stefan Mikes and his squad.

For instance, in a recent 0-4 loss to Skalica, veterans Palffy and Richard Hartmann schooled the kids with a goal and two assists apiece. But afterwards, Mikes was also able to point to several instances in which the U20 players made good defensive stops. That's something from which the young players can gain confidence.

■ ■ Simply gaining the experience of having played against a luminary like Palffy or a championship pro team like Slovan Bratislava removes some the intimidation factor going up against even the most formidable of junior opponents.



FROM BOYS TO MEN: Slovakian U20 goalie Tomas Hladovsky penalty shoot-out. Playing the juniors in the Slovakian professional

■ ■ By Mikes' account, the projected Slovak roster for this year's World Juniors is a bit thin on high-end talent relative to past entries. What's more, the gap in international hockey narrows with each passing year. There's a fine line between the lower reaches of the elite level and the upper echelon of Division I.

The Slovak juniors recently downed Switzerland 3-1 on their way to winning a four-nation World Junior Championship preparation tournament on their home ice. Division I teams Germany and Norway were the other two participants. While the Slovaks were concerned by a 2-7 loss against Germany, the game against the Swiss was the one the Slovaks were most focused on winning. Switzerland, along with Denmark and Kazakhstan, will be the Slovaks most likely opposition in the relegation round of the 2008 U20 Worlds.

■ ■ In the preliminary round of the U20 Worlds, Slovakia will be playing in the same preliminary round pool as Canada, Sweden, the Czech Republic and recently promoted Denmark. Slovak coach Mikes readily admits that the odds are against the Slovaks reaching the medal round. Two relegation round teams will remain in the elite tournament for 2009, the other two will be demoted to Division I.

As of now, the Slovaks and Swiss are the most likely to retain their spots. But as the recent lopsided loss to Germany demonstrates, the Slovaks simply cannot afford to take anything for granted.

"It looks like we have had modest classes [at the U20 level]," he said in an interview. "On the other hand, I wouldn't like to rate it as a total decay. For sure I wouldn't. There are younger classes which seem to be stronger."

■ ■ One of the main reasons why Slovakia has slipped at the junior level is the fact that so many of its top junior players leave home early to pursue their NHL dreams in North American junior hockey. The Czechs have had similar problems staying competitive at the junior level – and the Slovaks' former countrymen have a deeper pool of talent with which to work.

"There aren't as many players leaving [Slovakia] now but still it's a pity," Mikes said. "They are forced to assimilate [to a different] style of play than we use."

■ ■ One Slovak player selected in the 2007 NHL Entry Draft, defenceman Juraj Mikus (a fifth-round Toronto Maple Leafs pick), has opted to play with the Slovak U20 team this season. Additionally, two players who were in the CHL last year – right wingers Milan Jurik and Erik Caladi – are with the U20 team this fall. During the U20

SLOVAKIA U20 TOUR RESULTS

Dec. 2	vs. Zvolen	L, 2-7
Nov. 30	vs. Poprad	L, 1-4
Nov. 25	vs. Mikulas	W, 2-1
Nov. 23	vs. Nitra	L, 1-5
Nov. 17	vs. Slovan Bratislava	L, 2-5
Nov. 16	vs. Kezmarok	W 3-2 SO
Oct. 28	vs. Martin	L, 1-10
Oct. 26	vs. Zvolen	L, 0-4
Oct. 14	vs. Skalica	L, 0-4
Oct. 7	vs. Kosice	L, 0-1
Oct. 5	vs. Zilina	L, 1-5
Oct. 2	vs. Poprad	L, 3-5
Sept. 30	vs. Dukla Trencin	L, 3-5
Sept. 28	vs. Martin	L, 0-2
Sept. 21	vs. Mikulas	L, 4-7
Sept. 16	vs. Nitra	L, 1-2 SO
Sept. 14	vs. vs. Skalica	L, 0-6
Sept. 12	vs. Slovan Bratislava	L, 2-5
Sept. 9	vs. Kezmarok	L, 1-7
Sept. 7	vs. Kosice	L, 1-3

Slovak Tour Record: 2 wins-1 SO loss -17 losses

the nation has to offer



Photo: JAN SUKUP

...makes a save in the team's top league game against Nitra. The junior national team tied this game 1-1 after regulation and lost only in the league has been a great success for the U20 program, one that they are hoping will benefit the squad in December.

squad's preparation schedule in the Extraliga, Caladi has tallied a team-high five goals in 16 games. Centre Marek Slovak (one goal, five assists) leads the U20 team in overall scoring,

Mikes reported seeing encouraging signs from his team, but readily admits the squad is still a work in progress.

"The [forward lines] and defence stagnate, we have to work on passing to attack and, last but not least, we suffer from not [converting] chances into goals. There are lots of restraints, but we can see progress in some aspects," he said.

■ ■ Shortly before the World Junior Championship, the Slovak U20 squad will likely welcome several additions from the Canadian junior leagues. But there will probably not be large-scale roster changes from the squad that has been playing the Extraliga teams.

For the Extraliga experiment to be deemed a success, the Slovak U20 team will have to show greater cohesion at the World Juniors than some of their recent entries. If they play like a team and match the effort of their opponents, the Slovaks stand a good chance of retaining their spot at the 2009 tournament.

FINLAND U20 TOUR RESULTS

Nov. 26	vs. Jokipojat	W, 3-2
Nov. 25	vs. Hokki	W, 5-3
Nov. 18	vs. TuTo	L, 1-6
Oct. 29	vs. LeKi	L, 3-4 OT
Oct. 28	vs. Vaasa Sport	W, 4-1
Oct. 7	vs. SaPKo	L, 1-4
Oct. 1	vs. Salamat	W, 5-2
Sept. 30	vs. HeKi	L, 2-4
Sept. 24	vs. KooKoo	L, 1-4
Sept. 23	vs. Titaanit	W, 5-4

Finnish Tour Record: 5 wins-1 OT loss -5 losses

SWISS U20 TOUR RESULTS

Nov. 29	vs. Visp	L, 1-4
Nov. 22	vs. Chur	W, 8-2
Nov. 15	vs. Ajoie	L, 1-4
Oct. 31	vs. Olten	L, 2-4
Oct. 25	vs. La Chaux-de-Fonds	L, 3-7
Oct. 18	vs. GCK Lions	L, 1-3
Oct. 11	vs. Thurgau	L, 4-5 OT
Oct. 4	vs. Neuchatel	W, 9-6
Sept. 27	vs. Langenthal	L, 4-6
Sept. 20	vs. Biel	W, 3-0
Sept. 13	vs. Lausanne	L, 4-8
Sept. 11	vs. Martigny	L, 3-4

Swiss Tour Record: 3 wins -1 OT Loss - 8 Losses

U20 Championship returns to Pardubice

□ □ Most of this year's U20 players were barely teenagers the last time a World Junior Championship was played in the Czech Republic. But for those annual fans of the World U20 Championship, 2002 seems like just yesterday when the event was held in Pardubice and Hradec Kralove.

Yes, that's right, it is the same Pardubice that produced Czech goaltender sensation Dominik Hasek and the same Pardubice that is home to one of the more successful teams in the Czech premiere league. But most importantly, it is the same Pardubice that hosted one of the most memorable IIHF World U20 Championships in the last decade. A few of the more memorable highlights from the 2002 event:

□ □ While the gold medal game is the highlight of any championship, the one played on January 4, 2002 between Canada and Russia was extraordinary. Canada owned a 2-1 lead at the end of the first period, only to have it completely erased by the Russians, who netted three goals in the second period and held on for the 5-4 gold medal victory.

□ □ The gold medal game in Pardubice launched what has become the most heated rivalry at the World Juniors. Canada and Russia have gone on to face off in all but one of the gold medal games since 2002. Russia had the early advantage, winning in '02 and '03, but Canada has the recent edge with the last three golds.

□ □ On the other end of the standings spectrum was the Relegation Round game between France and Belarus. It was a best of two series in 2002, with only one team getting relegated. France won the first game, 3-2, and went into the second relegation game in Pardubice with the upper hand. Only a few hundred hard-core fans were on hand for the seemingly throw away game, but what a treat these fans received as the squads skated in a marathon shootout that saw more than 20 shooters take their chance. France lost in regulation, 3-2, creating the need for the overtime and shootout to determine the unlucky loser. Back and forth the shooters went until at last Belarus was able to hold off the final French shooter for the shootout win. France has never returned to the top division at U20s since.

□ □ 2002 was also the last year that Switzerland appeared in a U20 semi-final. The Swiss earned the right to face Canada in the semi's after a dramatic 3-2 quarter-final win against Slovakia in Pardubice. The Swiss went on to lose against Canada, 4-0, in the semi-final, and also lost the bronze medal game, 5-1, against Finland, but the fourth-place finish is the best the nation has earned since Pardubice. Ironically, since that quarterfinal meeting, it has been Switzerland and Slovakia meeting virtually every year -- to play for 7th place.

□ □ Pardubice also marked the beginning of another period: The Finnish bronze medal era. It was with the 5-1 win against Switzerland in front of more than 7,000 fans in Pardubice, that the Finns staked their claim on the third-place U20 slot. After 2002, Finland skated onto two more consecutive bronze medals, and added a fourth in 2006.

□ □ While Pardubice was memorable for so many nations, it is ironically, the host country that would like to forget the event. The Czechs entered 2002 looking for a three-peat of gold medals, instead, they finished a very disappointing seventh, and have only returned to the medal podium once since then (in 2005, bronze). Perhaps the Czechs are hoping Pardubice will, once again, reverse their fortune.

2008 IIHF WORLD U20 CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

The record book tells the story of U20 past, present and future

IN THE NUMBERS: Some milestones to look for when the teams start playing in Pardubice & Liberec include:

■ After winning only one game at last year's U20s, Slovakia dropped one spot in the total points column as Switzerland, with three wins last year, surpassed them.

■ With three points awarded for a win, the battle for second place in the standings between Finland and Sweden is sure to heat up, with a only five points separating the nations.

■ Canada will go for its 4th straight gold medal for the second time in U20 history.

■ Six nations have played in each of the 31 IIHF World U20 Championships.

ALL TIME IIHF WORLD U20 STANDINGS

Country	Years	Games	Wins	Ties	Losses	GF	GA	Points	Gold	Silver	Brz.
Canada	31	203	143	21	39	1044	500	313	13	6	4
Finland	31	206	114	16	76	923	643	246	2	4	6
Sweden	31	206	113	14	79	922	600	241	1	6	4
United States	31	206	95	11	100	845	802	205	1	1	3
Soviet Union	15	99	79	5	15	645	250	163	9	3	2
Russia	16	106	74	8	24	451	223	161	3	6	3
Czechoslovakia	16	106	61	12	32	565	342	134	0	5	6
Czech Republic	15	100	49	9	42	357	283	110	2	0	1
Switzerland	21	136	32	8	96	338	748	75	0	0	1
Slovakia	12	85	30	9	37	217	231	70	0	0	1
Germany	22	141	24	3	114	314	865	54	0	0	0
Belarus	6	36	5	2	29	68	195	14	0	0	0
Kazakhstan	4	25	4	2	20	49	140	10	0	0	0
Ukraine	4	26	3	1	17	37	132	7	0	0	0
Poland	6	41	2	2	37	69	361	6	0	0	0
Norway	6	39	3	0	36	72	331	6	0	0	0
France	1	6	1	0	5	6	42	2	0	0	0
Norway	1	6	1	0	5	14	30	2	0	0	0
Austria	2	11	0	1	10	14	99	1	0	0	0
Japan	1	7	0	0	7	9	83	0	0	0	0



MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE FLOOR:

The reflection tells the tale of the last three seasons as Canada will go for the four-peat at this year's U20 World Championship. But the tale goes beyond the last three seasons as Canada also owns the longest gold-medal streak at U20s (5), the most gold medals (13), and the most goals (1044). Ironically though, no individual Canadian player tops any of the all-time U20 scoring lists.

IIHF World U20 Championship
All-Time Record Book

U20 All Time Leading Scorers:

	GP	G	A	PTS
1. Peter Forsberg (SWE)	14	10	32	42
2. Robert Reichel (TCH)	21	18	22	40
3. Pavel Bure (URS)	21	27	12	39
4. Alexander Mogilny(URS)	21	18	17	35
5. Esa Tikkanen (FIN)	21	17	18	35
6. Vladimir Ruzicka(TCH)	19	25	9	34
7. Markus Naslund (SWE)	14	21	13	34
8. Niklas Sundström (SWE)	21	18	15	33
9. Esa Keskinen (FIN)	14	10	22	32
10. Erik Lindros (CAN)	21	12	19	31

U20 All-Time Goal Scorers:

1. Pavel Bure (URS)	27 goals	1989-91
2. Vladimir Ruzicka (TCH)	25 goals	1981-83
3. Markus Naslund (SWE)	21 goals	1992-93
4. Robert Reichel (TCH)	18 goals	1988-90
Petr Rosol (TCH)	18 goals	1982-84
Alexander Ovechkin (RUS)	18 goals	2003-05

U20 All-Time Assist Leaders

1. Peter Forsberg (SWE)	32 assists	1992-93
2. Robert Reichel (TCH)	22 assists	1988-90
Esa Keskinen(FIN)	22 assists	1984-85
4. Eric Lindros (CAN)	19 assists	1990-92
5. Esa Tikkanen (FIN)	18 assists	1983-85
Raimo Helminen (FIN)	18 assists	1983-83

Single Season Points Leaders:

	PTS	G	A
1. Peter Forsberg (SWE)	31	7	24
2. Markus Naslund (SWE)	24	13	11
Raimo Helminen (FIN)	24	11	13
4. Robert Reichel (TCH)	21	11	10
5. Vladimir Ruzicka (TCH)	20	12	8

Single Season Goal Leaders:

1. Markus Naslund (SWE)	13 goals	1993
2. Pavel Bure (URS)	12 goals	1991
Vladimir Ruzicka (TCH)	12 goals	1983
4. Several tied with 11		

Single Season Assists Leaders:

1. Peter Forsberg (SWE)	24 assists	1993
2. Doug Weight (USA)	14 assists	1991
Esa Keskinen (FIN)	14 assists	1985
4. Jaromir Jagr (TCH)	13 assists	1990
Raimo Helminen (FIN)	13 assists	1984

IIHF World U20 Championships

Year	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Venue
1974*	Soviet Union	Finland	Canada	Leningrad
1975*	Soviet Union	Canada	Sweden	Winnipeg/Brandon
1976*	Soviet Union	Canada	Czechoslovakia	Turku
1977	Soviet Union	Canada	Czechoslovakia	B. Bystrica/Zvolen
1978	Soviet Union	Sweden	Canada	Montreal
1979	Soviet Union	Czechoslovakia	Sweden	Karlstad
1980	Soviet Union	Finland	Sweden	Helsinki
1981	Sweden	Finland	Soviet Union	Fussen
1982	Canada	Czechoslovakia	Finland	Minnesota
1983	Soviet Union	Czechoslovakia	Canada	Leningrad
1984	Soviet Union	Finland	Czechoslovakia	Norrkoping/Nykoping
1985	Canada	Czechoslovakia	Soviet Union	Helsinki/Turku
1986	Soviet Union	Canada	USA	Hamilton
1987	Finland	Czechoslovakia	Sweden	Piestany
1988	Canada	Soviet Union	Finland	Moscow
1989	Soviet Union	Sweden	Czechoslovakia	Anchorage
1990	Canada	Soviet Union	Czechoslovakia	Helsinki/Turku
1991	Canada	Soviet Union	Czechoslovakia	Saskatoon
1992	Soviet Union	Sweden	USA	Fussen/Kaufbeuren
1993	Canada	Sweden	Czechoslovakia	Gavle
1994	Canada	Sweden	Russia	Ostrava/Frydek Mistek
1995	Canada	Russia	Sweden	Alberta
1996	Canada	Sweden	Russia	Boston
1997	Canada	USA	Russia	Geneva/Morges
1998	Finland	Russia	Switzerland	Helsinki/Hameenlinna
1999	Russia	Canada	Slovakia	Winnipeg
2000	Czech Republic	Russia	Canada	Skelleftea/Umea
2001	Czech Republic	Finland	Canada	Moscow/Podolsk
2002	Russia	Canada	Finland	Pardubice/Hradec Kral.
2003	Russia	Canada	Finland	Halifax/Sydney
2004	USA	Canada	Finland	Helsinki/Hameenlinna
2005	Canada	Russia	Czech Republic	Grand Forks/Thief River Falls
2006	Canada	Russia	Finland	Vancouver, Kamloops, Kelowna
2007	Canada	Russia	United States	Mora, Leksand

*denotes unofficial tournament

IIHF 100-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

The IIHF Top 100 Stories: A look at the first 26

■ ■ As part of its 100-Year Anniversary celebration, the IIHF has determined the Top 100 Stories in the last 100 years of International Ice Hockey. The stories are being revealed week-by-week on IIHF.com. For a glimpse at stories 75-100, read on.

100 Jonathan Toews scores three shootout goals - in one game!
The budding Canadian star was the first-ever player to take advantage of a new rule that allows players to shoot multiple times in a sudden death shootout. Toews third and final goal in the 2007 final against Russia sealed Canada's third straight U20 gold and solidified his place in international hockey history.

99 Broden's feat will see no repeat
Connie Broden accomplished the unique double of winning the World Championship gold medal and the Stanley Cup in the spring of 1958. As a forward on Canada's Whitby Dunlops, he won the World Championship in Oslo. Later, Broden joined the Montreal Canadiens and won the Stanley Cup.

98 Bobrov, a two-sport Olympian
Vsevolod Bobrov represented the Soviet Union internationally in both hockey and soccer. As a soccer player, he represented the Soviet national soccer team at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki and won the Olympic hockey gold medal in Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956.

97 USA wins Olympic silver in 1972
At the 1971 World Championship, Team USA finished last of six teams and was relegated to B Pool. One year later the squad netted a silver at the Olympics, as the only B Pool squad ever to win an Olympic medal.

96 Wickenheiser scores in men's pro game
It was the 2002-03 season when Wickenheiser joined Kirkkonummen Salamat, a Division 2 team in Finland. She made her debut on January 11, and three weeks later scored her first goal, the first woman to score in a men's pro league.

95 '88 Olympic silver a Finnish first
Finland had been a serious contender in international hockey since the mid-1960s, but could never win a medal at the World Championship or Olympics. On February 28, 1988, the streak ended with a 2-1 win against the Soviets and silver.

94 Pentiction Vees defeat Soviets for World Championship gold
When the 1955 World Championship started the Pentiction Vees, Canada's representatives, were expected to win gold and restore pride after being humiliated the previous year in a loss against the Soviets. The Vees came through with a 5-0 win.

93 Tie games are history
With a unanimous 'yes' by the Congress delegates in 2006, tie games in IIHF competition were gone and the 'three-point system' was in. Regulation-winners now receive three points; overtime (either in sudden death or shootout) winners earn two points; and, the OT loser gets one point.

92 '80 team lights the 2002 Caldron
The climax of every Olympic opening ceremony is the lighting of the torch. In 2002, the honor went to The golden 1980 'Miracle on Ice Team', who, as one, lit the torch to open the games.

91 U20 Championship introduced
During the early 70s, it was clear that young players and true amateurs were being pushed out of top international competition in favour of pros. As a result, an invitational tournament that began in 1974 received full IIHF status in December 1976. Thus was born the World U20 Championships.

90 Chelios plays in Olympics at 44
A 22-year old University of Wisconsin collegian Chris Chelios played in his first Olympic game on February 7, 1984, against Canada in Sarajevo and played his most recent game in February 2006 in Torino, 22 years after his debut.

89 Finally, a final game
In 1990, the IIHF decided to change to a playing format whereby a champion is determined through a one-on-one final instead of the long-standing, and often anti-climactic, round-robin.

88 Danes send USA to relegation round
The Americans opened the 2003 World Championship with a 5-2 loss against Denmark, a newcomer to the top division of the IIHF Worlds. The Americans never recovered from the loss and went to the relegation round.

87 Paul di Pietro beats his own country, Canada, at the Olympics
Canadian Paul di Pietro scored twice for his adopted Switzerland in the 2006 Olympic match-up against heavily favored Canada. The game was the turning point for both teams in '06.

86 Gretzky heads south to L.A. Kings
For years Edmonton and Wayne Gretzky were like peanut butter and jelly, so when on August 10, 1988, his trade to Los Angeles was announced it left the hockey world asking 'why'. Of course it helped expansion but not the hearts of the fans.

85 Drobny wins Worlds & Wimbledon
Jaroslav Drobny won the gold medal at the 1947 World Championships with Czechoslovakia. In 1954, far from the ice, he defeated the legendary Ken Rosewall at grassy Centre Court to win the hallowed Wimbledon title.

84 Les Avants hosts first-ever event
The European Championship in the Swiss village of Les Avants, was the first official hockey tournament. Great Britain, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland were the official participants.

83 First woman to score two OT goals for gold is Drolet
In 1997 and in 2000, Canadian Nancy Drolet scored in overtime of the gold medal game to give Canada the championship titles.

82 Two U.S. teams go to '48 Olympics
In what turned into a political hot potato, the Americans sent two teams to the 1948 Olympics and as a result, nullified its participation.

81 Czechoslovakia snaps Soviets' six-year streak
Entering the 1968 Olympics in Grenoble the Soviets had played 32 consecutive championship games without a loss, until the Czechs came along earning a stunning 5-4 win.

80 WHA recruits Europeans
In 1974 the World Hockey Association started to systematically sign Europeans, mostly Swedes and Finns. It didn't take long for the North American hockey establishment to realize that players from the other side of the pond could play dominating roles for North American teams.

79 Scotty Bowman forms NHL's first-ever 'Russian five'
Detroit was one of the most successful NHL teams of the 90s thanks in large part to the Russian fivesome of defencemen Vyacheslav Fetisov and Vladimir Konstantinov and forwards Igor Larionov, Sergei Fedorov, and Slava Kozlov.

78 USA wins worlds in 1933
The United States is still looking to repeat its magic of 1933 when it won its only World Championship gold after defeating Canada for the title, winning in overtime, 2-1.

77 Newly separated Czechs & Slovaks meet in golden game
The Czechs, considered the big brother of the two hockey nations following the political separation, jumped to a 3-0-lead against smaller Slovakia in the first period, had a 4-1 lead at the start of the third, and skated to a 5-3-victory.

76 Priakhin first legal Soviet in NHL
The first Soviet player to come to the NHL with the approval of the Soviet Ice Hockey Federation was Sergei Priakhin. He joined Calgary on March 31, 1989 and remained with the Flames for two more seasons, playing a total of 44 games and scoring 11 points.

75 Stastny, 39, moves Slovaks to A Pool
Slovakia may now be a mainstay in the top division of the World Championship, but the nation had to battle its way up through the ranks. Slovakia made the jump to the A Pool thanks in large part to Peter Stastny playing at the age of 39 in the 1995 B Pool event that the Slovaks won on home ice.

ABOUT THE IIHF TOP 100 STORIES

As part of the IIHF's 100th anniversary celebrations, www.IIHF.com is featuring the 100 top international hockey stories from the past century (1908-2008). Starting now and continuing through the 2008 IIHF World Championships in Canada, the IIHF will bring you approximately three stories a week counting down from Number 100 to Number 11.

The Final Top 10 Countdown will be one of the highlights of the IIHF's Centennial Gala Evening in Quebec City on May 17, the day prior to the Gold Medal Game of the 2008 World Championship.

These are the criteria for inclusion on this list: First, the story has to have had a considerable influence on international hockey. Second, it has to have had either a major immediate impact or a long-lasting significance on the game. Third, although it doesn't necessarily have to be about the top players, the story does have to pertain to the highest level of play, notably Olympics, World Championships, and the like. The story can be about a single moment – a goal, a great save, a referee's call – or about an historic event of longer duration – a game, series, tournament, or rule change.

2008 IIHF WORLD U20 CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

McGuire: It's all about passion & mentality at U20s

By Andrew Podnieks

■ ■ There are two extraordinary facts about the World Junior Championships. One, in the 31 tournaments to date (1977-2007), Canada and Russia have won the gold medal 25 times (Canada 13, Soviet Union/Russia 12). Two, either Canada or Russia has



2007, SWEDEN: Three first period goals was the difference between the Russians and Canadians as Canada earned the 4-2 three-peat

won a medal every single year with one exception, 1987, when the two teams were disqualified after the brawl in Piestany, Czechoslovakia.

But as longtime coach and analyst Pierre McGuire of TSN sees it, this domination should come as no surprise. "It's impossible to say too much about Bob Nicholson and the Program of Excellence he started with Hockey Canada," said McGuire, who won Stanley Cups with Pittsburgh in 1991 and 1992 as an assistant coach. "They use a coaching-based approach and they do a phenomenal job of identifying the skilled players."

■ ■ That Russia has proved to be Canada's longtime and consistent nemesis should also be expected. "Russians have a passion to play and they have a huge population," McGuire pointed out. He has been an analyst with The Sports Network (TSN) in Canada. "They have excellent training programs and a true hockey culture there that gives them a wealth of talent."

Several other factors, however, contribute to the domination of these two giant hockey powers. First and foremost, teenagers from these countries mature physically and emotionally much faster than from other countries. Take Sweden, for instance. That hoc-

key nation has had almost as much success as Canada and Russia at the senior level, but the juniors have managed just one gold medal in 31 years. Still, many Swedes are among the superstars of the NHL, from Peter Forsberg to Mats Sundin, the Sedin twins, and Markus Naslund. As Mats Naslund said once after playing Canada at the WJC, "We were boys playing men." Nonetheless, Naslund went on to have one of the finest NHL careers by a Swede in league history.

The Americans have had to take another tack to improve their performance at a tournament they used to disappoint regularly but one at which they have performed increasingly well in recent years. "USA Hockey had to take a drastic approach and identify their best young players and bring them together," said McGuire. "They lose so many young kids to baseball, football,

hostile fans. Players from European countries who come to Canada for the tournament are often shell-shocked simply from the sight of 18,000 red-and-white fans.

■ ■ As well, the globalization of the NHL has been a boon for young players in Europe. For many years, Canadians in particular saw the WJC as the most important stepping-stone to the Entry Draft and played with greater intensity and emotion. A good tournament meant being drafted higher and greater recognition; a bad performance meant loss of first-round status. That is no longer a factor. "Tuukka Rask is a great example of a kid who actually used the tournament to get drafted first overall," McGuire noted of the Finnish goalie and his stellar performance in 2006. "Today, players from every country realize the importance of the tournament and so many of them want to play in the NHL, so they bring their level of play up. The draft used to be a factor, but not any more."

McGuire sees the Swedes becoming a junior power in the near future and believes there is only one reason that the Czechs and Slovaks haven't had much success, either. "They lose too many players to junior clubs in Canada," he opined. "If they could keep more of their young players at home, I think the Czechs and Slovaks could be far more effective at the World Junior Championships."



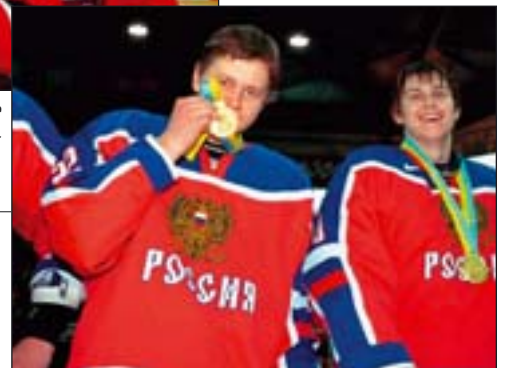
2006, CANADA Home ice was nice for the 06 Canada team as they blanked the Russians 5-0 in the golden game in Vancouver.

and basketball that they need to focus on a small group and develop them into the best players. And they've been very successful. I think they're the sleeping giants of the Vancouver Olympics with players like Jack Johnson, Patrick Kane, Erik Johnson."

■ ■ Another reason for the Canada-Russia dominance is the fact that teenagers from these countries experience early in their careers playing in front of large arenas before large, loud, and often



2005, USA: Sid the Kid starts the new era of Canadian U20 dominance. Crosby leading Canada to a 6-1 gold medal win against... Russia.



2003, CANADA: The Russians silenced Canada on home ice in 2004, the last time the nation won gold at U20s in a tight 3-2 win.

Who has the edge at World Juniors Russia or Canada?



There's no doubt that in recent years, Canada has emerged as the team to beat at the World Junior Championship, outscoring the Russians* 15-3 in the last three gold medals games.

But looking at the overall history between the nations, there's more than meets the Canadian 'Three-Peat' eye.

Canada has the slight edge in the gold medal department, with a 13-12 lead over their top rivals. But Russia has won three more total medals through the years edging Canada with three additional silver medals and one more bronze.

Both teams have played in all 31 editions of the World Junior Championship, in all that time a mere ten wins separates the two nations, with Russia owning 153-143 lead.

But Canada holds the longer medal-winning streak, which spans from 1999. The Russians missed the podium in 2001 on home ice in Moscow.

Finally it is the Canadians that own the longest gold-medal streak with five straight titles from 1993-1997. Russia's best was four straight titles in the tournament's beginning from 1977-1980.

* Russia & Soviet Union results were combined for this story.

Alexandre Daigle: From the top of the NHL draft, to the top of the Swiss Alps



By Martin Merk

■ ■ The year was 1993, and teenager Alexandre Daigle was on top of the world. The forward had officially become hockey's 'next big thing' after being selected number one overall in the NHL Draft by Ottawa. But over a decade later, Daigle had yet to find his niche in the NHL, bouncing between the minor leagues and top teams, and even taking a two-year Hollywood hiatus. Daigle seemed destined to join the long list of top pick busts, until an unlikely small mountain town in the Swiss Alps revived Daigle's career and his outlook on his future in the sport.

Now with HC Davos, Daigle will play in his first European Champion's Cup in January and looks forward to the experience. Ice Times sat down with the Canadian to talk about his past, present, and future.

You were once quoted in Canada that you were not completely passionate about hockey and played the sport because of your talent. Has this attitude changed?

I was misquoted and never said it like this. As a young man you are just playing, exploring. That's why I decided to leave hockey for two years, to check back a later age if I really was on the right track. And now I am. I just wanted to live more, to see other things than hockey.

You were considered a top player in the NHL but still re-signed with Davos until 2011. What motivates you so much up there in the mountains?

I love the city, the atmosphere with the skiers, the team, Arno (Del Curto, the head coach), the management is also fine. Many players have long contracts there and it's also in my favour. I want to stay at the same place, to enjoy hockey, to have fun. Switzerland resembles Canada, especially in the way of life. I don't want to finish my career with the fear of being sent down, moving all the time, etc.

It will be a very busy season for you with three additional tournaments during the Swiss championship. What are you looking forward to most this season with so many events to choose from?

The European Champions Cup, definitely! To go there after winning the championship is great. We now have the opportunity to play against other champions, which is motivating. It's also nice to go back there. I was only once in Russia, when there was the IMG Tour in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the NHL lockout. It's a great arena.

What are your expectations for this year's European Champions Cup?

We want to win our games. We had some success at the Spengler Cup but it will be challenging. Nobody goes there just to show up.

Until now, in all three European Champions Cups, the Russian champions won the Silver Stone Trophy and the Finns were runner-up. Do you think it's possible to snap this two-country domination?

It won't be easy of course. Russia and also Finland produce many good players, some of them even become NHL super stars.

Let's move over to the NHL: At the European Champions Cup you have the possibility to qualify for the Victoria Cup; to face an NHL opponent at this new event. How special is this for you as an ex-NHLer?



Photo: ANDY METTLER/SWISS-IMAGE.CH
CHASING AWAY THOSE HOCKEY BLUES : Alexandre Daigle is all smiles after winning the Swiss National League Championship last year with Davos. Daigle and the mountain village team will now go up against Europe's best club hockey teams at the 2008 European Champion's Cup.

Playing against the champions of the European Leagues at the ECC will already be tough. To play an NHL team afterwards would be very special of course, but more for the younger guys than for me. I have already played there and know how it is, but they can see where their skill level is and how they have to improve.

So, will you finish your career in Davos when your contract expires?

I will definitely finish my career in Davos but when it will be - we'll see.

You have had an eventful career, not only as a hockey player. Are there decisions in your life you regret, or some you would consider your best ones?

I don't regret anything. It's normal to make bad decisions, especially when you are young. You have to learn from that and not do it again. Hockey is for sure a good decision and coming to Europe after having been in North America so long.

Alexandre Daigle Fact File

- Born: February 7, 1975 in Laval, Quebec, Canada
- Drafted #1 by Ottawa in 1993.
- Ranked higher than Chris Pronger, Paul Kariya and Saku Koivu that year.
- Received a record first-year contract (five years, US\$12.25m)
- Played 628 NHL games scoring 129 goals and 200 assists with Ottawa, Philadelphia, Tampa Bay, the N.Y. Rangers, Pittsburgh, and Minnesota
- Tried his luck in Hollywood in 2000.
- Played in Switzerland during the NHL lockout with Forward Morges
- Won two U20 Championships ('93, '95)