



IceTimes

May 2018 / Vol. 22, No. 3

Denmark welcomes World

World Championship preview >

Great Britain returns to elite >



From the IIHF President

Time for Denmark!

By René Fasel

It is a great honour and a sincere pleasure to bring...for the first time ever...the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship to Denmark!

This has been a long time coming, and I want to congratulate the Danish Ice Hockey Association and the Denmark 2018 organizing committee for their hard work building and promoting this tournament.

With the World Championship taking place in Copenhagen and Herning, we want to show the best of ice hockey to all Danes and inspire a new generation of young men and women to pick up sticks and hit the ice.

It is great to see that Denmark is already making headlines in the ice hockey world. More Danish players than ever before are competing in the world's best ice hockey leagues, and Denmark's national team has been challenging some of the top nations in both the IIHF World Championship and the World Junior Championship.

The 2018 World Championship will also see some new faces participating in the tournament. Fresh off hosting the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang, Korea's men's national team will take to the ice at a World Championship for the very first time in history.

The 2018 World Championship will wrap up the international hockey season, one that saw new champions at the U20 (Canada men), Olympic (OAR men and USA women), and U18 (Finland men) level.

There have also been some excellent tournaments in the lower divisions, starting first and foremost with a wildly entertaining Division I Group A tournament in Budapest, Hungary. Congratulations to Team Great Britain, which will make its return to the World Championship for the first time in 24 years!

With Korea competing in Denmark this year and the Brits hitting the ice in Slovakia 2019, it is great to see new countries moving up to the elite level. We will also have at the 2019 Women's Worlds Team France joining the top women's teams in the world for the first time in history. These developments in the international ice hockey world are very encouraging, and will hopefully become new milestones in the continued development of our game.

But for now, we turn to Denmark for what should be a very exciting and unique tournament.

Putting a World Championship together isn't easy. Since they were named as hosts four years ago the 2018 Organizing Committee has been hard at work building the venues, recruiting volunteers, and promoting the event around the country.

Now, with the tournament set to begin, I would like to thank the Organizing Committee, the Danish Ice Hockey Association, and all the staff and volunteers whose hard work will no doubt yield a spectacular World Championship.

We will also gather together over 200 of our hockey friends together in Copenhagen, with the 2018 IIHF Annual Congress set to take place on the last week of the World Championship.

There is much to talk about and an eventful year to review. I look forward to some positive discussions in Denmark.

And to the hockey fans: get ready to see some great action on the ice! The heroes have come!



News and Notes

IIHF

During its spring meeting on 20 March, the IIHF Council agreed to keep the Coach's Challenge in place for the upcoming 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship

The IIHF Office will implement at the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship technology (either a handheld tablet or a television or computer monitor) that will allow On-ice Officials, in conjunction with the IIHF Video Goal Judge Booth Operations (IIHF RS and Operators), to review replays if, and only to extent, a formal Coach's Challenge has been initiated.

Once a Coach's Challenge has been initiated by the Head Coach, the review will be conducted by the on-ice officials at ice level and by the IIHF VGJ Booth Operations using any and all replays at their disposal. After reviewing the play and consulting with the IIHF VGJ Booth Operations, the appropriate On-Ice Officials will then make the "final" decision on whether to uphold or overturn the original call on the ice

RUSSIA

The Ice Hockey Federation of Russia has appointed **Ilya Vorobyov** (pictured, on left) as new head coach of the men's national team, replacing long-time coach Oleg Znarok (on right).



Vorobyov was named "interim head coach" and will be assisted by Alexei Zhamnov, Igor Nikitin, Rashit Davydov and Anvar Gatiyatulin. Previous head coach Oleg Znarok was offered the position of the men's national team coach consultant.

Znarok took over four years ago and led the Olympic Athletes from Russia to gold recently while winning four medals in four IIHF Ice Hockey World Championships: gold in 2014, silver in 2015 and bronze in the last two years. Therefore the sudden change came as a surprise to the Russian hockey community.

Vorobyov has been one of the assistant coaches since the 2016 Worlds. The same year the 43-year-old celebrated his biggest success as a head coach by winning the KHL with Metallurg Magnitogorsk where he was working until being replaced last November. He was born in 1975 in Riga where his father Pyotr Vorobyov was playing and coaching for 20 years.

USA

David Quinn has been named head coach of the 2019 U.S. National Junior Team that will compete at the 2019 IIHF World Junior Championship.



Quinn, while making his debut as a head coach for Team USA at an IIHF event, has been part of the coaching staff of seven previous U.S. teams in IIHF world championship play.

A defenceman on the 1986 U.S. National Junior Team that claimed the country's first-ever medal in IIHF World Junior Championship tournament history (bronze), Quinn previously served as an assistant coach for the 2005 U.S. National Junior Team.

He also filled the same capacity for a pair of silver medal-winning U.S. Women's National Teams (1999, 2000), three U.S. Men's National Teams (2007, 2012, 2016) and the 2003 U.S. Under-18 Men's National Team.

Quinn also led the Boston University Terriers to four straight appearances in the NCAA tournament (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) and a NCAA national championship game berth.

BERDI SABRI

In Indonesia, one of the newest IIHF member countries, he was considered the father of Indonesian ice hockey. On 9 April, at the age of just 42, Indonesia Ice Hockey Federation (FHEI) President Berdi Sabri passed away after suffering a heart attack.



Sabri became involved in hockey in the '90s when inline hockey became popular in his country and founded the Batavia Demons, the oldest hockey club that is still active in the Asian country. When ice skating became available in Indonesia, they started to play ice hockey and join amateur tournaments.

Within a decade the sport had grown with more players, tournaments and sponsors getting involved. When Sabri retired as a player he got involved off the ice to help grow the sport. In 2016 he was appointed FHEI President, and soon after Indonesia became a member of the National Olympic Committee and of the IIHF the same year. He recruited young people to help him for his vision: establishing a national team and participating in the 2017 Asian Winter Games in Sapporo and the first-ever ice hockey tournament of the Southeast Asia Games, last August in Kuala Lumpur.

Last month Indonesia won its first medal, bronze at the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey Challenge Cup of Asia Division I. His contribution to Indonesia ice hockey has been enormous, not just about establishing the national team, but through his leadership. He made ice hockey known so that the young generation for the future of Indonesia ice hockey could grow.

IIHF IceTimes May 2018 / Vol. 22, No. 3

Denmark's dynamic deeds

Top 10 events in Danish hockey history

By Lucas Aykroyd





Denmark is a fresh face among the elite hockey nations, but it's firmly established its place in our family, especially in the new millennium.

Let's review the top 10 events in the 2018 IIHF World Championship host's hockey history.

1) Landing IIHF Membership (1946)

After the Second World War, the Danes wasted no time in kickstarting their hockey program. Danmarks Ishockey Union secured IIHF membership on 27 April, 1946. Success, of course, didn't come overnight. When Denmark debuted at the 1949 IIHF World Championship, it finished last with a goal difference of 4-90, including an infamous 47-0 loss to Canada. However, the Danes steadily built up their program, and after spending most of the 1960's and 1970's in the old C Pool and the 1990's in the B Pool, they were ready to take on the best.

2) Welcome Back to the Worlds (2003)

Few observers gave the Danes much chance when they returned to the top division in 2003 after a 54-year absence. After all, in recent years, newly promoted nations like France (2000) and Poland (2002) had promptly gotten



Denmark has year-to-year gone through a slow and steady growth to be counted among the elite 16 ice hockey nations.

relegated. Why would the Danes be different? They answered that question by stunning the two North American powers in the tournament in Finland. Peter Hirsch shone in goal as Den-



mark beat the U.S. 5-2 in its 26 April opener in Tampere and tied Canada 2-2 on 2 May in Turku. That helped the plucky Scandinavians finish 11th. Since then, Denmark has never been relegated.

3) Nielsen Makes NHL Breakthrough (2007)

Frans Nielsen wasn't the first NHL player born in Denmark. That honor belongs to defence-man Poul Poupiel, who debuted with Boston in 1965-66. However, he learned his hockey in Canada. Nielsen is a Herning-raised centre who polished his skills in Sweden with Malmo



IF and Timra IK. On 6 January 2007, he became the first Danish-trained NHLer with the New York Islanders, who chose him in the third round (87th overall) of the 2002 Draft. At age 33 with Detroit, Nielsen is Denmark's all-time NHL leader in goals (152), assists (271), and points (423). 2018 will mark his eighth World Championship participation.

4) First Time in the Quarter-Finals (2010)

At the 2010 Worlds in Germany, the Czechs stole the headlines by beating a stacked Russian roster for gold, while the host nation got rave reviews for its fourth-place finish. Yet Denmark's feats were just as noteworthy in their own way. For the first time ever, the Danes defeated established nations like Finland (4-1) and Slovakia (6-0). Also, Stefan Lassen's overtime goal gave them a 2-1 upset over the Americans. The Cinderella run ended when Denmark fell 4-2 to Sweden in the quarter-final. But psychologically, coming eighth was a huge boost.

5) Hansen Cracks Stanley Cup Final (2011)

A 2004 ninth-round pick of the Vancouver Canucks, Jannik Hansen has always endeared himself to teammates with his quick wit and relentless work ethic. But none of that guaranteed the speedy winger NHL success – let alone a berth in the Stanley Cup final. Still, Hansen became the first Dane to play for the fabled silver mug in 2011. The Canucks won the President's Trophy as the league's top regular-season team and marched to the final for just the third time ever (1982, 1994). Hansen got three playoff goals, including a memorable breakaway marker in the first-round triumph over archrival Chicago. However, after eliminating Nashville and San Jose, the Canucks lost Game Seven of the final to Boston, ending Hansen's hopes.

6) Andersen Fastest to Fifty Wins (2015)

Goalie Frederik Andersen has a habit of setting records. If he isn't passing Henrik Lundqvist for the most shutouts by a Frolunda Gothenburg goalie (eight) in 2012, he's establishing a new single-season record for wins by a Toronto Maple Leafs goalie (38) in 2018.

However, this low-key Herning native's most impressive achievement was arguably with Anaheim in 2015. He tied six-time Vezina Trophy winner Bill Durnan's 1944 record of 50 NHL

wins in 68 games. It showed how Andersen benefited from playing at three straight World Championships from 2010 to 2012.



7) Eighth Is Great in Moscow (2016)

With Worlds finishes of 12th (2013), 13th (2014), and 14th (2015), Danish hockey seemed to be stagnating. However, the 2016 tournament in Russia provided revitalization. Led offensively by Nicklas Jensen, Lars Eller, and Nikolaj Ehlers, Denmark beat Norway, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan in group play. Even though the Danes lost 5-1 to Finland in the quarter-final, they finished eighth. The momentum carried over to the 2016 World Cup of Hockey that fall, as three Danes – Mikkel Boedker, Jannik Hansen and Frans Nielsen – made the final with Team Europe before losing to host Canada.

8) World Junior Team Wows (2017)

It was a magical ride in Montreal as the Danes earned their third straight quarter-final berth. They beat two top nations for the first time in World Junior history. Goalie Kasper Krog registered 34 saves as Denmark edged Finland 3-2. Then Matthias From scored a spectacular overtime winner versus the Czechs. Though Russia blanked coach Olaf Eller's boys 4-0 in the quarter-final, Denmark's fifth-place finish was its best ever.

9) Ehlers' Danish NHL Points Record (2017)

Nikolaj Ehlers isn't just the most entertaining Danish NHLer to watch – he's also the most prolific. In his sophomore season with the Winnipeg Jets, the 21-year-old forward busted out with 64 points, surpassing the previous single-season mark of 58 by Frans Nielsen (2014). In 2017-18, Ehlers set another new Danish high with 29 goals, and he's a key player as the Jets build toward their first Cup in franchise history.

10) Denmark Hosts the Worlds (2018)

In 2014 Denmark won the right to host the 2018 Worlds in Copenhagen and Herning, beating out Riga, Latvia. Excitement has been growing for years, and the best is yet to come. Could a berth at the 2022 Olympics in Beijing lie ahead? Don't bet against this little Nordic nation.



IceTimes May 2018 Vol. 1 No. 3



Denmark welcomes the World

Previewing the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship

By Andrew Podnieks



The 82nd edition of the IIHF's flagship event is upon us, but this World Championship is different from any other.

This will be the very first time Denmark will host the top 16 teams in the world, climaxing a remarkable story that has been more than 15 years in the making when the Danes returned to the top pool.

Of the 16 teams in this year's tournament, only Korea is now left as having never hosted the event previously. Both these teams will be in Group B, playing in Herning, along with Canada, Finland, United States, Germany, Norway, and Latvia.

Canada is on another impressive run, having made it to the gold-medal game each of the



Team Canada will be led by star forward Connor McDavid.



The 2017 World Champions, Team Sweden will be defending their gold medal beginning in Group A in Copenhagen.

last three years, winning in 2015 and 2016, and losing a dramatic shootout to Sweden last year. Coach Bill Peters is back, and his early roster of forwards is a sight to behold, led by the NHL's top scorer, Connor McDavid.

Finland lost last year's bronze-medal game to Russia, 5-3, and has won three medals in the last seven years (gold in 2011, silver in 2014 and 2016). For fans of the U.S., they are buoyed by the presence of captain Pa-

trick Kane, perhaps the best American player in the world.

Although he has represented his country many times, his only other Worlds appearance was a decade ago, 2008 in Quebec City and Halifax. But when his NHL team, the Chicago Blackhawks, didn't make the playoffs this spring, he was still in the mood for hockey, and fans in Denmark will be the better for it.



Leon Draisaitl will join Olympic silver medallist Germany.

Hockey fans around the world have also got to be excited about what Germany can do here. True, there was no NHL involvement at the Korea Olympics this past February, but no one could have predicted that the team would come within 56 seconds of winning gold!

Coach Marco Sturm has been working wonders for the team's mental toughness, and this will be another benchmark. And the news gets better.

Sturm will have arguably the top two German players in the world on his roster, Leon Draisaitl of the Edmonton Oilers and Dennis Seidenberg of the New York Islanders, neither of whom was at the Olympics.



Patrick Kane makes his first Worlds appearance since 2008.

Neither Norway nor Latvia has finished higher than 10th in recent years, and they'll be in a fight to do better than that this year. Latvia didn't qualify for Korea 2018, but Norway finished an impressive 8th, something to build on, to be sure.

Group A will feature 2017 gold medallists Sweden playing just a short train ride from their own home, in Copenhagen. Their greatest group challenge will come from the Czech Republic, which is going through an unprecedented drought, having not won a medal since 2012.

Other teams in Group A include Switzerland, Belarus, Slovakia, France, and Austria.



Fresh off an gold medal at the 2018 Olympic Games, Team Russia will be going into Denmark with a new head coach.

The French were co-hosts last year and enter this tournament with the unenviable task of having to replace two of their long-standing and star national team players. Goalie Cristobal Huet and captain Laurent Meunier have retired, leaving large leadership holes in the roster. Coach Dave Henderson will have a tough time replacing those two titans of the team.

Slovakia, hosts next year in Kosice and Bratislava, hasn't won a medal since its inspiring silver in Stockholm in 2012. It will try to establish a level of play to match or exceed next year when its rabid fans can watch their team on

home ice for the first time since 2011.

Austria is back in the top pool for the first time in three years, but the tricky question is, for how long? Each of the last six times it has been promoted, it has been demoted right away. The country has one simple goal this year—do what it takes to earn a ticket to Slovakia in 2019.

Switzerland finished a disappointing 10th at the Olympics after losing to Germany in the qualification playoff, and in the last four years it hasn't managed to come close to its ama-



Korea will be competing in its first World Championship.

zing run in 2013 when it won nine games in a row and played for the gold medal (losing to Sweden). Many of its top players are still in the Stanley Cup playoffs, so the team has its work cut out for it.

Belarus also didn't play in Korea but has a very Danish history in recent years. It fought to get to the top level, but when it made it back in 2005, it played well enough to qualify for 2006 and 2007, and every year since. A smaller hockey nation, it comes up with big performances when it needs to.

Sixteen teams will fight for three medals, and although the top six are always the favourites there are 16 story lines which will make the World Championship as compelling as ever.

Finns are U18 kings

Country makes history at Challenge Cup

By Lucas Aykroyd



Niklas Nordgren's shorthanded goal with 9:19 left in the third gave the Finns a thrilling 3-2 final victory over the Americans. It's Finland's fourth U18 gold medal ever.

The defending champion U.S. came back from a 2-0 first-period deficit, but the Finns pulled it out in the third -- in unforgettable style. It was sweet revenge after losing last year's final 4-2 to the Americans.

Nordgren blocked defenceman Cameron York's shot at the blue line and exploded down on a 2-on-1 with Jesperi Kotkaniemi. Kotkaniemi slipped it over and Nordgren hammered it into the open short side for his tournament-leading eighth goal.

"It was the most amazing thing that ever happened to me," said Nordgren. "I got a good pass from Kotkaniemi. I had lots of good chances to score but, you know, one is enough."



Team Finland celebrate with the championship trophy following a 3-2 win over team USA in the gold medal game-

But not when it comes to championships. The Finnish program is on fire. This nation of 5.5 million people has now appeared in four consecutive U18 finals, winning twice. Suomi triumphed on American ice in Grand Forks, North Dakota in 2016, trouncing Nordic rival Sweden 6-1 with Jesse Puljujarvi's hat trick.

Despite the loss, the Americans played a tremendous tournament en route to their fourth silver medal ever. In the big picture, the U.S. has won seven of the last 10 U18

World Championships. This was a testament to the potency of USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, which furnished the talent for coach Seth Appert's roster. Even though their reign is over, they have nothing to be ashamed of.

This final had everything you could ask for: a high tempo, intensity, adrenaline, and an off-the-charts Chelyabinsk crowd of 7,499 banging thundersticks and brandishing U.S. and Finnish flags.

The quality of play was right up there with recent classic World Junior finals.

At the final horn, the Finns celebrated with explosive teenage enthusiasm, while the Americans were left crumpled and kneeling in dismay.

This was the fourth time the U.S. and Finland have squared off for U18 gold, with the Americans winning all three previous confrontations (2006, 2015, 2017).

For Finland, the 2015 and 2017 heartbreaks were particularly fresh. In 2015, Veini Vehvilainen's incredible 60-save performance in Switzerland wasn't enough to stop the Auston Matthews-led Americans from winning 2-1 in overtime on Colin White's goal. Last year, Joel Farrabee tallied twice, including the eventual winner, in a 4-2 decision in Slovakia.

But now, that storyline has finally changed. The result improved Finland's all-time U18 record versus the Americans to six wins and 11 losses.

In the bronze medal game, Sweden defeated a tough Czech U18 squad 5-2 to capture its fourth IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship bronze medal of all time.

Andrea Cardin / HHOF-IIHF Images

Wild in Budapest

Great Britain, Italy reach the top!

By Martin Merk



Great Britain and Italy won promotion to the elite 16, after surviving one of the most tightly-contested and entertaining Division I Group A tournaments ever.

Facing Hungary in the final game and the prospect of barely missing out on a trip to the 2019 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship, Great Britain got the point it needed when Robert Farmer tied the game against Hungary at two with 15.8 seconds left in regulation time.

“We are going up! We are going up!” the British fans chanted on the tribune. 15.8 seconds were missing in regulation time that changed everything. For a long time it looked like host Hungary would win the game in regulation time and get promoted together with Kazakhstan in a four-team tie at nine points.

But the last-minute bounce made Great Britain tournament winner and also allowed a



The two newly-promoted teams, Great Britain and Italy, together for a joint team photo after earning promotion in Budapest.

very grateful Italy to leapfrog Hungary and Slovenia for promotion as the second-placed team.

After the 2-2 tie the rest of the game wouldn't change anything anymore but Great Britain continued its party on the ice by eventually beating Hungary 3-2 in shootout with Ben O'Connor scoring the winning goal in the fifth round.

It was the fitting ending of a tournament that was full of drama, surprises and tight stan-

dings from the first to the last day, to the last game and the last minute. Five teams were still in run for promotion before the final day and four teams could still have made it before the last game's result.

For Great Britain it will be a return to the top division after 24 years. And like in the '90s they made it from the third to the top tier with two consecutive promotions in two years.

“We achieved the dream. I'm so happy for the players and the country. I don't think we

really know what has happened to us. [In the last period] we changed the approach a little bit, tried to push them back, threw pucks to the net. We had luck, 15 seconds to go and Farmer puts it between his feet. Dreams happen,” said head coach Peter Russell, the Scotsman who took over the national team three years ago.

Kazakhstan had to settle for bronze before Hungary, Slovenia and Poland, which will be relegated. Earlier that day Italy won its game against Slovenia also in the last seconds of regulation time to get itself into this position.

With a tie not helping either team first Slovenia then Italy both pulled their goalie for a sixth skater. Diego Kostner scored the game-winner for Italy with 2.3 seconds left.

The help then came from the Brits, who needed to secure a point against Hungary to give the Italians the right to punch their tickets to Slovakia 2019.

“We're glad. It was a great team performance. When they pulled their goalie we wanted to try to score. It was a great game for us and now we have to wait and hope. There were chances on both sides and it was a good game from both teams with good goalies and the luck on our side,” Kostner said.

Lithuania moves up

Next stop: Division I Group A in 2019

By Henrik Manninen



In front of 10,170 ecstatic home fans, Lithuania celebrates winning gold in Division IB after downing Estonia, 4-1.

In the battle of the Baltics, Pavilas Verenis scored a brace while blueliners Nerijus Ališauskas and Jaunius Jasinevicius scored one apiece as Lithuania went undefeated through the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division I Group B in Kaunas.

Lithuania's 4-1 final day win sealed their promotion to the 2019 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division I Group A. Japan finished second to win silver while Estonia slipped down to third in Division I Group B.

Lithuania's victory allowed Japan, which brushed aside Ukraine 7-1 in their final game of Division IB, to secure the silver medal.

With an average of 7,368 watching its home favourites win gold in Div. IB, the host city of



Lithuania was unstoppable playing on home ice in Kaunas.

Kaunas can call the 2018 tournament a success and another step forward in Lithuania's hockey development.

At the age of 45, defenceman Darius Kasparaitis has made an emotional return to international hockey, suiting up for his native country after a career that saw him play in 14 seasons in the NHL and in four Winter Olympic Games.

Dutch dominance

U18s collect country's 3rd gold in 2018

By Joeri Loonen



Similar to 2016, the Netherlands made sure their stay in Division IIA would be limited to just a single year.

Carrying the pressure of being the gold medal favourite, the Netherlands thrived on home ice at the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division II Group A in Tilburg.

In front of a capacity crowd at the IJssportcentrum in Tilburg, the hosts did not leave anything to chance and defeated unbeaten Australia 9-2 on the final day to win promotion to Division IB. Serbia claimed bronze while Iceland was relegated to the Division IIB.

The Dutch dominated the scoring charts with the top six of the scoring leaders all donning the orange jersey. On top of that the Dutch defence was rock solid allowing just five goals in five games.

The Netherlands sent out a clear signal to the



Netherlands celebrated another promotion to Division I.

rest of the teams brushing aside China 7-0 in their opening game before settings aside Iceland 11-1, then Serbia 5-0 and the Netherlands 10-2. Newly promoted China finished a respectable fourth after victories over Iceland (3-1) and Belgium (5-2), which had to settle for fifth place. Avoiding relegation was the main goal for the team of head coach Jyrki Aho, who knows his team still has a long way to go if they want to be competitive for the 2022 Olympic Winter Games the country will host in Beijing.

4th gold for Spain

Men's team concludes a historic season

By Andy Potts



Spain's golden season continues with the men's national team winning the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division II Group B on home ice in Granada.

The senior team's success means the Spaniards have picked up four gold medals this season, securing promotions for the men's U18 and U20 teams and the senior women's roster. Few countries, at any level of IIHF competition, have managed a comparable medal haul, with Spain ending its campaign with four golds from a possible five. All the successful teams were playing in Division IIB of their respective competitions.

The latest triumph came on home ice in Granada, as a Spanish team determined to bounce straight back to Division IIA after relegation 12 months ago dominated on home ice. The host nation rattled in 49 goals in five games, allowing just six, as it powered to top spot ahead of New Zealand thanks to



Spain's players celebrate the country's 4th gold in 2018

a 6-4 success when the teams met.

Israel secured third place with a victory over Mexico in its final game to finish on nine points. That result also condemned Luxembourg to relegation.

The Mexicans' 3-1 success in the head-to-head meeting kept the Central Americans in this section and sent Luxembourg back to Division III after just one season.

Georgia's joy

Emerging nation claims first gold

By Andy Potts



Georgian hockey is celebrating after the former Soviet republic produced its best-ever result in IIHF play to win the Division III title in Cape Town.

The mountainous nation, high in the Caucasus, only played its first internationals in 2010 and competed in IIHF events for the first time in 2013. For two seasons, it could not manage a single victory, but those struggles were all forgotten after four wins from five games in South Africa secured the sought-after gold medals and elevation to Division IIB.

The change in fortune came namely thanks to Russian-trained players who have joined the Georgian national team in the past two years. Of the five best scorers three have names hailing from Russia or Ukraine and all five learned their hockey abroad. The tournament's scoring leader Alexander Zhuzhunashvili originally came from Moscow to play for the country of his ancestors and made it to



Georgian hockey is continuing to develop positively.

the second-highest junior league MHL-B in Russia. Also Alexander Vasilchenko, Artyom Kozyulin and Artyom Kurbatov played their hockey in Moscow while Oliver Obolgogianni, second in scoring, played junior hockey in Finland, and goalie Andrei Iliencko is a native of St. Petersburg.

The free-scoring offence put Georgia in control of the group. The country started with a 6-2 win in a neighbouring clash with Turkey and followed that up by beating Bulgaria 5-3. Next came a crushing 11-1 demolition of Hong Kong before a stumble against the host nation saw South Africa win 4-2 and threatened to halt the promotion parade. Going into Sunday's final round of games, Georgia knew that it had to defeat Chinese Taipei, which it did handily 11-2 to secure promotion.

Sweet success

U18 team bring Ukraine on 10-year high

By Andy Potts



Ukraine won the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship Division I Group B on home ice in Kyiv.

The country will for the first time since 2007 be among the top-16 ice hockey nations in an IIHF category next year.

Coming in as the fifth-seeded team, the Ukrainians were not among the natural favourites despite home-ice advantage in the Palace of Sports. But this time the juniors in yellow-and-blue left behind nations usually placed ahead of them and completed their run for gold with a 6-0 win against Romania in front of 5,000 fans.

It didn't go that well from the very beginning. The Ukrainians lost the first game to Japan 1-0 on Taiga Abe's third-period goal and with a 32-save shutout by Eiki Sato. But then the winning streak started.



Ukraine came in as the underdogs but came out on top.

Andrii Basesvych

On the second game the hosts won a key game against eventual runner-up Austria. The 5-3 victory in a game they were outshot 41-25 meant Ukraine had the advantage in the tie-breaker with Austria, which also had 12 points from four games with the only loss coming against Ukraine.

After victories against Hungary (4-3) and Italy (3-1) the Ukrainians were tied for first place with Austria and just needed to regulation-time win against last-ranked Romania. They got what they needed.

Japan beat Italy 3-2 on the last day thanks to Taiki Takebe's overtime winner to secure the bronze medals. Hungary finished fourth, Italy fifth and Romania will go down after six mostly clear losses in the tournament.

Ice Blacks move up

New Zealand takes gold in WM18 IIIB

By Andy Potts



New Zealand U18s won gold in 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship Division III Group B, topping a three-team tournament on home ice in Queenstown.

The junior Ice Blacks faced off against South Africa and Hong Kong during the event, winning both games to secure a return to Division IIIA next season. A 4-1 victory over South Africa got things started then, after a night off watching Hong Kong's 4-2 win over South Africa, New Zealand finished the job with a lively 8-5 success against the Asian team.

That bore out the pre-tournament confidence of Kiwi head coach Steve Reid. Prior to the action, he told New Zealand hockey website 'Puck Yeah': "All the guys have come in and physically they're ready, but also mentally, like picking up the systems we're putting in place. They've done a really good job picking those up quickly."



New Zealand swept the three-team tournament at home.

James Allan

Home ice advantage also helped. Queenstown's rink is relatively small, forcing visiting teams to adapt their game. With Reid keen to emphasise skill and creativity, boasting that he had three lines that could score, the stage was set.

Opening the tournament with a 4-1 win over South Africa set up the hosts for a deciding finale against Hong Kong, who also came into the matchup having won against the South Africans 4-2.

Coach Reid admitted to knowing little about Hong Kong before the tournament but he had a chance to see them in action with a win over South Africa. That set up a win-or-bust match-up for both teams and New Zealand took the verdict 8-5.

France moves up

Historic rise to elite of Women's Worlds

By Andy Potts



Home ice suited France well as the French women won the 2018 Women's World Championship Division I Group A to earn promotion to the 2019 Women's Worlds.

France will complete the top division that will be extended to ten teams for next year's event in Finland. The French finished their five-game round robin campaign with four wins and a loss.

Although France has participated in the IIHF's women's program since 1999, this is the first time the nation will be in the top pool.

Slovakia finished in last place with one win, but because the top pool is expanding from eight to ten teams it won't be relegated.

France had already advanced earlier in the final day after Austria beat Norway and Hungary beating Denmark, both by 3-0 scores.



France's women's national team has reached new heights.

Before Day 5, Norway had been the only team to beat France and could have caused a tie for first place at nine points with France and other teams if they had won in regulation time and if France had lost in regulation time. Neither happened.

Austria, after opening the tournament with a loss, improved to a silver-medal finish while Hungary won the bronze. Denmark and Norway finished 4th and 5th respectively, followed by the 6th place Slovaks.

Norway's Ena Nystrom was named best goaltender by the tournament directorate while Gwendoline Gendarme of France was voted best defender and Fanni Gasparics, who led the tournament in scoring (6+4), won the award as best forward.

Italy wins at home

One goal seals promotion in Asiago

By Andy Potts



Italy a 1-0 win over China on the final day of the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship Division I Group B.

Linda DeRocco scored the only goal of the game midway through the second period and Giulia Mazzocchi stopped all 21 shots to give the Italians the edge in a winner-take-all finale.

The win puts Italy ahead of Korea in the final standings and give it a spot in the Division I Group A for next year. Italy will finish this year's Women's World Championship program 16th overall – its highest ranking it also reached in 1999 and 2005 – and will for the first time compete in the second tier of the Women's Worlds. Its only previous appearance at higher level came when it hosted the 2006 Olympics in Turin.

Italy won the Division I Group B on home ice in Asiago before 550 fans in the final game. A



Italy's women's program is showing signs of a revival.

tournament that saw a dramatic turn of events on the final day of the tournament.

In the early game on Saturday, Korea hammered Poland, 9-2, to move into top spot with 11 points and a record of 3-1-0-1, putting Italy in a must-win situation in the evening. Korea was the only team to beat Italy, but had to settle for second place, followed by Latvia and Kazakhstan.

China finished the tournament in fifth place with two wins and three losses and will remain in the Division I Group B for 2019.

Although Poland finished in last place, it will not be relegated because the top level is going to ten teams. The group will be completed by the Netherlands next year.

Gallery



Team Great Britain is in ecstasy after their incredible run to gold at the 2018 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship Division I Group A



Finland's Niklas Nordgren celebrates gold at the 2018 IIHF U18 World Championship.



Lithuania's head coach Bernd Haake is lifted up by his team after winning gold in Kaunas



Laszlo Mudra

A big supporting crowd in Budapest watching Team Hungary competing in the Division I Group A tournament.



Oliver Bräjon

2018 Women's World Championship Division I Group A winners France pose for a funny team photo in Vaujany.



Steve Kingsman / IIHF-IIIHF Images

The 2018 U18 Worlds in Chelyabinsk and Magnitogorsk achieved a new attendance record with 159,176 total spectators.

Damgaard on Danish hockey

'It's the biggest thing ever in Denmark!'

By Andy Potts

Danish defenceman Jesper Damgaard was at the heart of his country's team for 17 World Championship campaigns. In that time, he helped Denmark move up the world rankings and establish itself as an Elite Pool nation – stalwart service richly deserving of this year's Bibi Torriani Award and induction into the IIHF Hall of Fame.

On the eve of the 2018 World Championship coming to Denmark, we caught up with him to talk about building a truly professional program and getting ready to welcome the world.

Congratulations on winning the Torriani award. How much does it mean to you?

It's just unbelievable. When I got that call I was like 'are you kidding me?' It's a big commendation for me personally, and for Danish hockey. I was maybe the first generation that could take the next step with Denmark, and I think maybe



"We've sold 300,000 tickets to the Worlds already, and there's still a week before the first games." -Damgaard

I got the award because I was there every year through 17 World Championships.

As part of the Danish team that stepped up to become an established Elite pool nation, what do you think made the difference in the late 90s and early 2000s?

The difference-maker for me was going to Sweden as a young player. I went with a couple of

other guys and we learned so much. Then we got a Swedish coach on the national team and that changed everything. Suddenly the standards were much higher than before. It used to be that the national team was where everybody went for a bit of a holiday. It was a chance to get away from the wife, get away from the family and hang out with the guys for a week or two. After Jim Brithen came, we started to expect much more from the team.

Now, of course, being in the A Pool is still making a big difference. Since we went up to the A Pool there's been far more of a focus on hockey in Denmark. Then we got our first guys into the NHL and suddenly every hockey player wanted to become a pro. It became more accepted that you might have a real chance of making it as a player, rather than maybe sticking in at school and playing as a hobby.

How has that changed the hockey infrastructure in Denmark?

We haven't had any new rinks open in Denmark for many, many years. Maybe we have a few more players coming through now. But what we do have is a good program for the coaches. We have a lot of good coaches in all our clubs and in the system around the national teams. We have good coaches, and a good program coming from that. It's meant a lot to us.

Now you're coaching with Denmark's U18s. How much difference is there between the junior set-up today and when you were a teenager yourself?

When I started with the U18s everybody practiced maybe two or three times a week. There was no off-ice work, no strength work. Now the kids are training twice a day, playing 70-100 games each year. It's a huge difference. They



Damgaard will be honoured with the Torriani Award on 20 May in Copenhagen.

come into the national system now and they want to be professionals, they are just so well prepared.

It's satisfying to be part of the U18s and to see how far we've come. It's a big journey we've taken. When I started with the u20s we were in the C Pool and we played against teams like Greece and Spain.

Now our u20s have been in the A Pool for the past four or five years, playing against the best teams in the world.

Denmark is about to take another big step in May when it hosts the World Championship. How much of a boost is that for Danish hockey?

The World Championship is huge. The biggest events Denmark have ever staged got maybe 120,000 or 130,000 spectators.

We've sold 300,000 tickets to the Worlds already, and there's still a week before the first games.

It's the biggest thing ever in Denmark and it's all about hockey. Suddenly, it's like everybody wants to go see a game.

I don't know how much impact it's going to have in the future, I guess we'll see in a couple of years. I don't know how the Denmark team will respond. It could be a lot of pressure for us. I hope if we somehow get off to a good start against Germany then that home advantage could be big for us.

Everybody has been looking forward to this for a couple of years, everyone is excited and hap-

py. The team's results so far this year have been better than normal.

Denmark is playing its games in Herning, rather than in the capital, Copenhagen. Why is that?

Herning is the capital of Danish hockey. I'm from Herning myself and a lot of our leading players came from here. We've got a big arena and it felt like the natural place for Denmark to play.

Fact File: Jesper Damgaard DENMARK



- Born: 6 May, 1975 in Holstebro, Denmark
- Represented Denmark in 17 consecutive World Championships
- One of the longest-tenured national team captains in IIHF history (11 seasons)
- Only Danish player from his country to have his number (#7) retired by the federation.



Coming up

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DENMARK, Copenhagen & Herning
04.05.-20.05.2018

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