

Who will be golden in Sochi?



Photos: Matthew Manor, Jukka Rautio / IIHF-IIHF Images, RIA Novosti

For two weeks in February, the Bolshoy Ice Dome will be the center of the hockey universe as the game's elite descend on Sochi, Russia for the 2014 Olympic Winter Games.



■ ■ The 2014 season is finally here, and with it the XXII Olympic Winter Games.

RENÉ FASEL EDITORIAL

This is a time that everyone around the hockey world has looked forward to ever since Sidney Crosby's overtime goal capped off a memorable hockey tournament in Vancouver 2010. With the world's best players now gathered in Sochi, Russia, the question becomes: who will be the team to end it this time around?

■ Olympic hockey's arrival in Russia is a long time coming. This country's hockey history stretches back for decades, in fact it was 60 years ago that the Soviet national team made its first appearance in international hockey at the 1954 World Championship in Stockholm.

In what would be hailed as the start of a new era for the sport, the Soviets tore through the tournament and

capped it off with a shocking 7-2 win over a previously dominant Canadian team. Flash forward to 2014, where the Russians will host a Winter Olympics for the first time ever. While the hosts will undoubtedly ice a very strong team that will be in the hunt to claim Olympic gold, the outcome is far from certain.

That is what makes this Winter Olympic tournament so intriguing. On the women's side, the rivalry between Canada and the United States has never been hotter, but that doesn't mean either team can look ahead to meeting each other in the final. The rest of the world is working very hard to close the gap between themselves and the North American nations, and as we saw with Sweden's silver medal finish in Turin 2006, anything can happen.

■ One thing is for sure, Russia will undoubtedly put on a great show. This is a country that knows how to organize a top-level hockey tournament, and I extend my gratitude to all the personnel and volunteers of the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee for their tireless work and preparation in staging what will be the biggest Winter Olympics yet.

■ 2014 has already seen some exciting hockey as the World Junior Championship concluded in Sweden. I would like to extend a sincere congratulations to the winners Finland, and also to the city of Malmö for putting on an exceptional tournament. While the hosts were not able to see their team take the gold, everyone who attended the games or who watched them on TV were treated to some fantastic hockey.

There will be a few more things to look forward to once the Olympics wrap up. The IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship will be going to Belarus for the first time, and in August the all-new Champions Hockey League will kick off its inaugural season, about which you can read on page 2.

But before any of that, we have business to take care of in Sochi. Let's see who will be the golden teams in 2014.

René Fasel
IIHF President

Fresh start for Europe's clubs, leagues

Champions Hockey League takes off next fall

■ The Champions Hockey League returns for 2014/2015. Under this name the new pan-European league will be launched with 26 founding clubs, six founding national leagues, and the IIHF as shareholders.

The 40 teams will play a preliminary round with 10 groups of four teams each starting on 21st August. The draw will be done in Minsk at the 2014 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship. The best 16 teams will advance to play home-and-away 1/8-finals. The final of the 149-game competition will be held on 3rd February 2015.

■ The founding clubs have a guaranteed multi-year licence if they fulfil preconditions including finances, proper organisation and infrastructure and participation in their country's top league. These well-known clubs will be joined by other teams – including the champions and regular-season winners from the top leagues of Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland – and at least two wild-card teams.

"It's the idea to give the wild cards to clubs from leagues that are not part of the six founding leagues. It could be Denmark, France, Great Britain, Norway or Slovakia for example," said Anders Ternbom, chairman of the interim board.

It is also being discussed to use the IIHF Continental Cup as a competition to qualify for the Champions Hockey League.

The clubs are enthusiastic. Eisbären Berlin GM Peter John Lee compares the new league with the development of the National Hockey League.

"When they had the NHL in Canada they thought that, instead of a market with 30 million people it's better to get

the Americans with 300 million people interested too," Lee said. "We haven't had a Stanley Cup winner from Canada since 1993 but we made hockey more popular. With this new format we can make hockey more popular in Europe. That's why we are very excited about that."

■ The first season will start with €1.5 million in prize money. An open question remains the participation of the Russian-based Kontinental Hockey League as Ice Times went to press.

"We have an open invitation to the KHL. They should be part of such a league but it must be under the same criteria as the other leagues," Ternbom said. "There have been discussions with the KHL ever since the project started but we have not been able to find a solution yet. We would like to have the KHL on board and we have ongoing discussions with them."

The first General Assembly of the Champions Hockey League shareholders will be on 27th February in Zurich.

■ The six founding leagues and 26 founding clubs:

Austria: Red Bull Salzburg, Vienna Capitals.

Czech Republic: Bili Tygri Liberec, HC Pardubice, Sparta Prague, Vitkovice Ostrava.

Finland: IFK Helsinki, JYP Jyväskylä, KalPa Kuopio, Kärpät Oulu, Tappara Tampere, TPS Turku.

Germany: Adler Mannheim, Eisbären Berlin, ERC Ingolstadt, Krefeld Pinguine.

Switzerland: SC Bern, Fribourg-Gottéron, ZSC Lions Zurich, EV Zug.

Sweden: Djurgården Stockholm, Frölunda Gothenburg, Färjestad Karlstad, HV71 Jönköping, Linköpings HC, Luleå Hockey.

NEWS & NOTES

SWEDEN: Malmö 2014 was the best attended IIHF World Junior Championship ever hosted in Europe. 144,268 spectators attended the 31 games in southern Sweden. Finland's overtime triumph at the 2014 IIHF World Junior Championship drew about a million viewers in Finland, and the broadcast peaked at 1.3 million. In host nation Sweden, the gold medal game drew 1,564,000 on average, peaking at two million, an impressive number in a country of approximately nine million people.



The 2014 World Juniors in Malmö was a big success.

Juniors at some point via the host broadcaster channels TSN and TSN2.

Canada's 5-1 loss to Finland in the semi-final ranks as the tournament's most-watched game with a record 2.7 million viewers, the largest ever for a World Juniors game played outside of North America. The gold medal game attracted an average audience of 1 million viewers – the largest ever for a non-Canadian game played outside of North America.

IIHF: The 14th global IIHF Hockey Development Camp will be held at the end of this current season, operating from 5 to 12 July 2014 in Vierumäki, Finland, and will include female players born in 1998 and 1999, coaches, team staff and administrators participating in the various programs.

PARTNERS



SUPPLIERS



OBITUARIES

Karel Gut, former Czechoslovak player, World Championship coach and IIHF Hall of Famer passed away in Prague on 6 January at the age of 87.



Gut was one of the great father figures of Czechoslovak ice hockey. As a player he won three IIHF World Championship bronze medals between 1954 and 1959, and also represented Czechoslovakia in three Olympic Games: 1952 in Oslo, 1956 in Cortina and 1960 in Squaw Valley.

As a head coach, Gut led Czechoslovakia to two IIHF World Championship titles in 1976 (Katowice, Poland) and 1977 (Vienna, Austria). Gut also earned an Olympic medal in Innsbruck 1976, where the Czechoslovak team claimed silver.

In the years 1994-2004, Karel Gut was the President of the Czech Ice Hockey Association. During this period the national team won the historic first best-on-best 1998 Olympic Winter Games in Nagano and became four times World Champion: 1996, 1999, 2000 and 2001. He was inducted to the IIHF Hall of Fame in 1998.

Moe Benoit, a gold medalist for Canada at the 1959 World Championship and silver medalist at the 1960 Olympics, passed away in Dayton, Ohio, on 10 December. He was 81 years old.

Benoit was born in Valleyfield, Quebec. He won the Allan Cup (in 1958) with the Belleville McFarlands, and the team went to Czechoslovakia to play at the World Championships. Canada won seven of eight games and finished ahead of the Soviet Union thanks to a 3-1 win during the round robin.

Thomas Connell Broden, better known as "Connie", who died in Toronto on 23 November at the age of 81, secured his place in hockey history as the only man to have won both an IIHF World Championship and the Stanley Cup in the same year.

Broden's Whitby Dunlops were designated Canada's entry in the 1958 World Championship in Oslo, Norway. The Canadians won all seven games, three by shutout, registering a total of 78 goals. Broden potted a dozen goals along the way and added seven assists to lead all scorers. The biggest of his goals came in the gold medal game against the Soviets. With the teams deadlocked, Broden's marker gave the Canadians a 2-1 lead in a match that finished 4-2.

Six weeks later Broden played in three regular season games for the Canadiens, scoring a pair of goals and adding an assist. Dressing for a single playoff game, he did not make it to the score sheet, but since it was in the final series he got his name on the Stanley Cup, earning a record that will likely never be broken.

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IIHF to welcome Hall of Fame Class of 2014 in Minsk

Soviet legends and stars from Canada, Sweden, and Belarus to be inducted

By Andrew Podnieks

Brilliant performance under pressure as well as long-lasting excellence is recognized as the IIHF Hall of Fame inducts players Vyacheslav Bykov, Andrei Khomutov, Nicklas Lidström, Ruslan Salei, Steve Yzerman and builder Murray Costello. Dr Mark Aubry will receive the Paul Loicq Award for his contributions to international hockey.

The 18th class of the IIHF Hall of Fame will be ceremonially inducted during the 78th IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship in Minsk.



Vyacheslav Bykov (RUS)

Born: Chelyabinsk, Soviet Union (Russia), 24 July 1960

Vyacheslav (Slava) Bykov was a great passer and team leader during the Soviet Union's days of dominance in the

latter part of the 1980s and early '90s. At age 15 he was already a star with the adult team which played in the lower league of Soviet hockey. His talents were duly recognized, and in 1980 he started playing for Traktor Chelyabinsk. By 1982, Bykov was with coach Viktor Tikhonov's CSKA Moscow team, and at the end of that first season he was helping the mighty Soviets to a 9-1-0 record and a gold medal at the 1983 World Championship in West Germany.

Tikhonov partnered the centreman Bykov with winger Andrei Khomutov, and the pair had a chemistry not often seen on a sheet of ice. The line was complete in 1986 when Valeri Kamenski, then 20, joined the national team. The Soviets won gold at the 1986 World Championship and continued to dominate over the next half decade and more. In all, Bykov won five World Championship gold medals to complement Olympic gold in 1988 and 1992. He captained the latter victory, in Albertville, and also at three Worlds-1990, 1993, and 1995.

Bykov later assumed coaching duties with the national team. He coached the Russians to a gold medal in 2008, defeating Canada in Quebec City in overtime. He also coached CSKA Moscow and Salavat Yulayev Ufa, the latter winning the KHL's Gagarin Cup in 2011.



Andrei Khomutov (RUS)

Born: Yaroslavl, Soviet Union (Russia), 21 April 1961

Andrei Khomutov played at the 1981 U20 and later that year appeared in his first World Championship games while

still only 19 years of age. The Soviets won gold in 1981 in Sweden, and Khomutov had his first of seven gold medals over the next decade

and a half playing with the old Soviet Union and later the new, modern Russia.

Khomutov also played for CCCP at the 1981 Canada Cup in September, helping the team win the tournament after a one-sided 8-1 victory over the Canadians. He then won gold in each of the next three years, the 1982 and '83 World Championships and the '84 Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

He led the 1990 Worlds with eleven goals and tied for the lead at the 1992 Olympics with seven. In 123 top-level international games over 15 years, Khomutov recorded 45 goals and 97 points. After hanging up his skates in 1998, Khomutov turned to coaching. He guided teams in Swiss NLA and NLB leagues before going back to Russia when he was a head coach in the KHL as well as the national team coach for Kazakhstan.



Nicklas Lidström (SWE)

Born: Krylbo, Sweden, 28 April 1970

There's no such thing as a perfect athlete, but Nicklas Lidström perhaps comes closer than any hockey player to earning such praise. Drafted

by Detroit in the 3rd round of the 1989 NHL Entry Draft, Lidström played for Västerås in the Swedish Elite League for two more years before leaving for the NHL. He became an impact player immediately, and the Red Wings never missed the playoffs during his entire career – 20 straight years – a record of success matched only by Larry Robinson, and was named winner of the Norris Trophy for best defenceman several times.

Lidström played in only three World Championships during his career, winning a medal each time: gold in 1991, bronze in 1994, and silver in 2004. He played in the first four Olympics involving NHL players, his career reaching its zenith in 2006 when he scored the winning goal early in the third period of the gold-medal game against Finland.

His place among the pantheon of greats is further embellished by his incredible NHL accomplishments. He took over the Detroit captaincy from Steve Yzerman in 2006 and two years later became the first European captain to lead his team to the Stanley Cup, the fourth Cup of Lidström's career. In 2002, he was named winner of the Conn Smythe Trophy, again the first European so honoured.



Ruslan Salei (BLR)

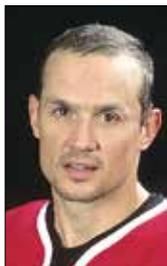
Born: Minsk, Soviet Union (Belarus), 2 November 1974
Died: Yaroslavl, Russia, 7 September 2011

Defenceman Ruslan Salei was a hero in his native Belarus

both for representing his country in IIHF tournaments as well as his lengthy NHL career. Salei played for Belarus at the 1994 and 1995 World Championships (C Pool). A natural leader, Salei has also captained the national team on many occasions. Belarus' finest result was a 4th-place finish in 2002 at the Salt Lake Olympics, thanks to a 4-3 win over Sweden in the quarter-finals, the nation's biggest victory of all time. Salei was one of the best players on ice that game, a defining moment in both his career and his country's hockey history.

Salei played nine seasons with the Anaheim Ducks, establishing himself as an all-around defenceman. In 2003 the team went to the Stanley Cup finals before losing to New Jersey in game seven. It was Salei who scored the overtime winner in Game 3, putting Anaheim back in the series after trailing, 2-0.

Salei later played for Florida, Colorado and Detroit before leaving the NHL in the summer of 2011. He signed with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl of the KHL but perished in the plane crash that killed the entire team. A short time later, he became a first player inducted into the newly-created Belarusian Hockey Hall of Fame, and his number 24 was retired from international competition by the Belarusian Ice Hockey Association.



Steve Yzerman (CAN)

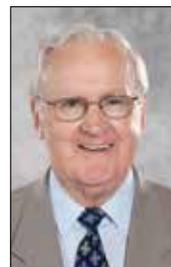
Born: Cranbrook, British Columbia, Canada, 9 May 1965

Few players in the history of hockey played with the sportsmanship, determination, and remarkable skill as

Steve Yzerman. And fewer still had such extraordinary success at both the international level and the NHL. Yzerman was only 17 when he played his first IIHF tournament, the 1983 U20 event in Leningrad (St. Petersburg). A few months later he was drafted by the Red Wings, made the team that fall, and never looked back. After a sensational rookie season he made Canada's roster for the 1984 Canada Cup, won by the host country.

He played in three World Championships in the next six years, leading the tournament in both assists (10) and points (19) in 1990. The crowning glory of his international career came in 2002 at the Salt Lake Olympics. Despite a serious knee injury, Yzerman was a key member of Canada's roster as the nation won gold for the first time since 1952.

It was in 1986 that he was named captain of the Red Wings, at age 21, and Yzerman went on to become the longest-serving captain in NHL history, wearing the "C" for Detroit every year until he retired in 2006. A scoring machine, he had six consecutive seasons of at least 100 points, and in five of those he also eclipsed the 50-goal plateau. He led the Wings to the Stanley Cup in 1997 and again in 1998 and won for a third time in 2002. He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto in 2009 and later guided Canada to Olympic gold in 2010 in Vancouver as the team's executive director.



Murray Costello (CAN)

Born: South Porcupine, Ontario, Canada, 23 February 1934

A former NHLer during the Original Six days alongside his brother, Les, Murray

Costello retired from hockey in 1960 and went on to a great career both nationally in Canada, and internationally with the IIHF. He started his administrative career in the Western Hockey League, working his way up to become president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) in 1979.

Costello united the CAHA with Hockey Canada to create a new Hockey Canada. His first great change after the merger was to introduce the Program of Excellence to Hockey Canada, the result of which created a junior program second to none. The success of the World Junior Championship in Canada started with that program and Costello's ability to convince the country's three junior leagues (OHL, QMJHL, WHL) to give up their top players for U20 participation.

Costello was a supporter of women's hockey at a time when the game was just developing, and it was under his aegis that the IIHF instituted a Women's World Championship starting in 1990. Costello also served on the Hockey Hall of Fame Board of Directors starting in 1981, and became a member of the IIHF Council for many years. He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame as a Builder in 2005.

PAUL LOICQ AWARD



Dr Mark Aubry (CAN)

For over three decades Dr Mark Aubry has been involved in sports, as a doctor in the Ottawa, Canada area and internationally at all top levels of competition.

Aubry entered the international hockey arena in 1992 when he was named the chief medical officer for the Canadian Olympic Team in Albertville. That first experience led him to pursue a career in sports medicine with the IIHF that flourishes to this day.

The co-director of the Ottawa Sport Medicine Centre, Aubry became the team physician for the Ottawa 67's of the Ontario Hockey League in 1996, a position he held for a decade. He later became team physician for the Ottawa Senators of the NHL. In 1998, he became the Chief Medical Officer for the IIHF and six years later added the same title for Hockey Canada to his expanding role in international hockey. He is a member of the International Olympic Committee's medical commission, and in 2006 Dr Aubry received the Dr Tom Pashby Sports Safety Award, the most prestigious sports medicine honour in Canada.

Ten things we learned from

Parity is closer than ever, challenging new format for teams,

By Lucas Aykroyd

■ ■ Surprises, heartbreaks, thrilling moments, and a jubilant atmosphere are all part of the IIHF World Junior Championship tradition, and Malmö, Sweden delivered in spades. What did we learn from the IIHF's annual U20 showcase over the holidays?

1) Never count Finland out

Before the tournament, almost everyone assumed Canada, the U.S., Sweden, or Russia would win the gold medal. No other nation had even medaled since 2006, when the Finns won bronze. But here, Suomi hit its stride at the perfect time. Safeguarded by the stellar netminding of Juuse Saros, Finland wasn't fazed by its Preliminary Round losses to Sweden and Switzerland. Its speed and work ethic delivered a 5-1 win over favoured Canada, and a gritty commitment to defence helped the Finns earn a 3-2 overtime shocker against host Sweden, which came in unbeaten. It was Finland's first World Junior title since 1998.

2) Teräväinen's a true terror

Just how good was Finland's top playmaking centre in the run to gold? Teuvo Teräväinen didn't just lead the tournament in scoring (15 points). The 19-year-old Jokerit product saved his best for last with three assists against Sweden in the final. With 26 points in 13 career World Junior games, his average of two points per game ranks only behind that of Raimo Summanen and Esa Keskinen (2.286) and Raimo Helminen (2.071) among fellow Finnish U20 stars.

3) Parity isn't just a buzzword

This is the first time in World Junior history that five different nations have won gold within a six-year span (2009-2014). The likelihood of one country monopolizing top spot, as Canada did during its five-year dynasties of 1993-1997 and 2005-2009, has never been lower.

4) NHL participation is a win-win

Players who have suited up for NHL clubs played huge roles at this tournament. Rasmus Ristolainen (Buffalo Sabres) got the dramatic OT winner for Finland in the gold medal game. Tournament MVP Filip Forsberg (Nashville Predators) and Elias Lindholm (Carolina Hurricanes) formed a deadly scoring duo for silver-winning Sweden. And without Mikhail Grigorenko and Nikita Zadorov (Buffalo Sabres) leading the way on forward and defence respectively, Russia likely wouldn't have claimed bronze. These young men developed their skills in pressure-packed situations, proving it's highly worthwhile for NHL teams to loan out their U20 stars for a few days over Christmas.

5) Swedes rule the roost

Sweden is the only nation that's appeared in the last three World Junior finals, winning one gold (2012) and two silvers (2013, 2014). During that span, the U.S. and Russia have one appearance apiece while



Teammates race to defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen moments after he scored the overtime winner against Sweden. Over two million

Canada has zero. Certainly, the Canadian Hockey League continues to produce the most NHL prospects, with 18 first-round draft picks compared to three for Sweden in 2013. But that goes to show that the individual and team-building skills required for international hockey aren't always the same as what the world's top pro league demands.

6) Canada faces some tough questions

Since the 1982 foundation of Hockey Canada's Program of Excellence, 2014 marks the first time Canada has failed to win a medal two years in a row. Going back to basics with taskmaster coach Brent Sutter, who stormed to gold in 2005 and 2006, simply didn't work. What is the solution? Better goaltending? Increased mental toughness in elimination games? Not giving too much responsibility to U18 players? Placing more emphasis on speed, puckhandling, and passing when picking the roster? The perennial World

Junior favourites, lacking gold since 2009, have many questions to answer before hosting next year's tournament in Toronto and Montreal.

7) Inconsistency plagues Czechs

Talk about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. If you'd bet before the tournament that a) the Czechs would beat Canada 5-4 in a shootout and b) promptly lose 3-0 to underdog Germany, most hockey observers would have laughed. Yet that's exactly what Miroslav Prohaska's team did in Malmö. It's symptomatic of a shallow talent pool. While there were flashes of hope for the sixth-place Czechs, this nation still hasn't finished higher than fifth since 2005's bronze medal.

8) Don't mess with Russia's PP

This is one of the oldest lessons in international hockey. This year's Russian U20 team didn't have a

m Malmö 2014

and thumbs up to World Juniors in Europe



Photo: Andre Ringuette / IHOFF-IIHF Images

viewers watched the final in both countries, making Malmö 2014 one of the most successful European U20 tournaments ever.

luminous offensive talent like Pavel Bure, Alexander Ovechkin, or Yevgeni Kuznetsov. They sometimes lost their focus: see the four minors they took for too many players on the ice during the Playoff Round. But they pounced on the power play when facing elimination. Russia scored two PP goals in its 5-3 quarter-final win over the United States and one in its 2-1 bronze medal victory over Canada.

9) Quarter-finals take their toll

The elimination of the bye to the semi-finals for the first time since 2002 proved significant. Had the Americans beaten Canada in their round-robin closer and topped Group A, they would have faced Switzerland in the quarter-finals and might have gone on to defend their title from 2013. Instead, falling to Russia, the U.S. found itself with no medal for the second time in three years. There are no shortcuts anymore.

10) Europe loves the World Juniors

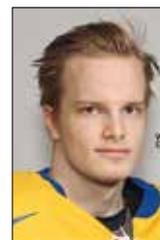
The total tournament attendance of 144,268 set a new European record. The capacity yellow-clad crowds at the Malmö Arena took the joyous vibe of their Ufa predecessors up another notch. On the television side, the final had about a million viewers in Finland, and the broadcast peaked at 1.3 million.

In the host nation Sweden, the gold medal game drew 1,564,000 on average, peaking at two million, an impressive number on a country of approximately nine million people. It all sets the bar excitingly high for future European hosts Finland (2016) and the Czech Republic (2020).

Finnish trio in All-Star Team

Nordic nations top individual awards

■ Although Swedish forward Filip Forsberg swept the MVP, All-Star, and Directorate top forward awards, 2014 World Champions Finland dominated the All-Star team with players in every position. Juuse Saros beat out Directorate top goaltender Oskar Dansk for the media All-Star team, while Rasmus Ristolainen's overtime winner justified his selection as the top D-man on both the Directorate and All-Star team.



Oskar Dansk, G, Sweden
Directorate Best Goaltender
5-1, 1.79 GAA, 92.82 SVS%



Juuse Saros, G, Finland
All-Star Team Goaltender
5-1, 1.57 GAA, 94.30 SVS%



Rasmus Ristolainen, D, Finland
Directorate Best Defenceman
All-Star Team Defenceman
5 GP, 3 G, +1



Nikita Zadorov, D, Russia
All-Star Team Defenceman
4 GP, 4 G, 1 A, 5 P, +4



Anthony Mantha, F, Canada
All-Star Team Forward
7 GP, 5 G, 6 A, 11 P, +6



Teuvo Teräväinen, F, Finland
All-Star Team Forward
7 GP, 2 G, 13 A, 15 P (leader), +11



Filip Forsberg, F, Sweden
MVP
Directorate Best Forward
All-Star Team Forward
7 GP, 4 G, 8 A, 12 P, +3

Chasing gold: top moments in me

By Andrew Podnieks

■ The 2014 Olympics marks the fifth consecutive Winter Games which will see NHL participation in hockey.

Two facts stand out from the first four: Canada is the only nation to win two gold (2002, 2010) and, perhaps surprisingly, Finland has won the most medals, three (1998, 2006, 2010):

Year	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1998			
2002			
2006			
2010			

Over those four Olympics, though, NHL players and their nations have provided many great moments for hockey fans around the world.

Here are the top ten, in chronological order:



NAGANO 1998
 Gold medal game: Czech Republic 1, Russia 0
 Bronze medal game: Finland 3, Canada 2
 Leading scorer: Saku Koivu/Teemu Selänne, Finland (10pts)



20 & 22 February 1998 Hasek leads Czechs

■ Although Robert Reichel and Petr Svoboda scored the winning goals in the semi-finals and finals, respectively, their achievements take a back seat to the play of goaltender Dominik Hasek. "The Dominator" stopped all five Canadians in the semi-finals shootout and then posted a shutout in the gold-medal game, giving the Czechs their first Olympic gold. The celebration in Wenceslas Square in Prague two days later remains one of the greatest events in the nation's history.



February 2002 Rules redefined

■ Much of the success of the post-2002 NHL can be credited to the rules differences between the NHL and IIHF which highlighted the magnificent speed and skill on display at the Salt Lake Olympics. The first was the elimination of the centre-red line for two-line offside passes. At the Olympics, teams fired passes from behind their own goal up to the opponent's blue line with great success, opening the rink and creating excitement unmatched in the NHL. As well, the hurry-up faceoff rule eliminated slow play and deliberate delay-of-game tactics, resulting more than a few times in a faceoff with only one opponent to take the puck. The effects were most apparent in a 5-2 Swedish upset of Canada where the Swedes used their "torpedo" offence to perfection versus the Canadians, who would figure things out and change tactics in time for the medal run. Soon after, the NHL changed its rules to reflect the success of the 2002 Olympics.

20 February 2002

Belarus Stuns Sweden

■ The quarter-finals in Salt Lake had two tough matchups (Canada-Finland and Russia-Czech Republic), one probably-known outcome (United States-Germany) and one virtually certain victory (Sweden-Belarus). Yet Belarus refused to play the part of the easy victim. As the game played out the score was tied 3-3, and then with less than four minutes to play Vladimir Kopat sent a long shot on goal which handcuffed Tommy Salo. The puck bounced off his mask and dribbled over the goal line, giving Belarus a shocking 4-3 win.



SALT LAKE CITY 2002
 Gold medal game: Canada 5, USA 2
 Bronze medal game: Russia 7, Belarus 2
 Leading scorer: Mats Sundin, Sweden (9pts)



20 February 1998 Bure pots five on Finns

■ It wasn't until Nagano '98 that became the first best-on-best Olympics that Pavel Bure played for Russia at the highest level. Not only did he help take the Russians to the gold-medal game, he produced one of the most dazzling individual performances of the modern Olympics, scoring five goals in a game (three on breakaways!) in the semi-final game against Finland. Bure opened the game with natural hat trick to give Russia a 3-0 lead. Finland stormed back, scoring three goals in the second period to level the game. But the Russian Rocket would put the game away, scored twice more in the third period as Russia won 7-4.



24 February 2002 The Lucky Loonie

■ Less than three years after retiring, Wayne Gretzky (pictured on left with Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson and team captain Mario Lemieux) took over as executive director of Team Canada and hired Pat Quinn as the team's coach. Curtis Joseph couldn't hold the number-one job in net, but Martin Brodeur came in and was virtually perfect. Canada beat Finland and Belarus in the playoffs to advance to the gold-medal game against the host nation, but the energy and emotion from the Canadians was too much for the Americans. Jarome Iginla's two goals led Canada to a 5-2 win, the nation's first Olympic gold in half a century. After the win players skated around the centre-ice faceoff dot to acknowledge the "lucky loonie," the one-dollar coin buried in the ice by the Canadian ice crew.

n's Olympic ice hockey since 1998



February 2006

Sweden's Greatest Come Together

■ When Sweden won Olympic gold in 2006, it did so with a roster that history might well show to be the finest collection of players ever assembled at one time for Tre Kronor. In goal was Henrik Lundqvist. On defence was Nicklas Lidström, Kenny Jönsson, Niklas Kronwall, Mattias Öhlund. Up front were Mats Sundin, Peter Forsberg, Daniel Alfredsson, Daniel and Henrik Sedin, Henrik Zetterberg. The gold-medal game was against arch-rivals Finland, and after the second period the score was 2-2. But when Saku Koivu broke his stick at the faceoff to start the third, Sundin took the puck into the Finnish end and dropped it to Lidström who ripped a shot past Antero Niittymäki for what turned out to be the winning goal. Sweden then won gold at the World Championship a few months later, the only nation to win the golden double in the same season.

28 February 2010

Crosby closes Vancouver

■ The final day of the 2010 Olympics had but one event left by the time organizers were getting ready for the Closing Ceremony—a gold-medal showdown on ice between Canada and the U.S., a repeat of 2002. After two periods, Canada had an impressive 2-0 lead, but the Americans stormed back to tie the score in the final minute, sending the game to overtime. Canada's coach Mike Babcock decided to play his best players and go for the win. Seven minutes into the 20-minute, four-on-four period, he put out Jarome Iginla and Sidney Crosby, and the two made magic. "Iggy, Iggy!" Crosby shouted as his linemate got the puck along the boards deep in the American end. Crosby eluded defenceman Brian Rafalski and let go a quick shot before Ryan Miller could pokecheck him, and at 7:40 number 87 had scored the golden goal. Under incalculable home-ice pressure, the hosts had won the final and the most sought-after medal: gold in men's ice hockey.



TURIN 2006
Gold medal game: Sweden 3, Finland 2
Bronze medal game: Czech Republic 3, Russia 2
Leading scorer: Teemu Selänne/Saku Koivu, FIN (11pts)



VANCOUVER 2010
Gold medal game: Canada 3, USA 2 OT
Bronze medal game: Finland 5, Slovakia 3
Leading scorer: Pavol Demitra, SVK (10pts)



February 2006

Canada goes down in Turin

■ Canada is always one of the favourites in any best-of-best tournament, but after victory in Salt Lake and the same management team heading to Turin, Canada was surely the prohibitive favourite to repeat as gold medallists. Shockingly, just the opposite transpired as the nation finished 7th, its worst finish since hockey debuted at the Olympics in 1920. Making matters worse, the high-octane forwards were shut out in three of their last four games. And the final ignominy? A 2-0 loss to Switzerland, the first ever win by the Swiss over Canada in 86 years of Olympic competition, was sparked by two goals from Paul DiPietro, a Canadian who had earned Swiss citizenship after having played for years in the Swiss league.



28 February 2010

Finland medals in 3 of 4

■ If the Swedes are modest hockey players, the Finns fly under the radar with even greater humility. They were the last of the big nations to make it big on the top stage, winning their first gold medal at the World Championship only in 1995. Their first Olympic medal was a silver in 1988, and they still have yet to win Olympic gold. In the last four Olympics, Canada has stolen the thunder twice, Dominik Hasek is remembered for 1998, and the Swedes for their double gold in 2006. Yet Finland has quietly won medals in three of the four Olympics, more than any other nation. Of course, they'd trade all three for one gold, but since that isn't possible they can surely look at their success for what it is—consistent at the highest level of play.



7 January 2014

Alfie, Jagr, Selänne, Visnovsky in all five

■ It wasn't until January 7, 2014 that 25-man rosters for the Olympics in Sochi had to be submitted. When the 12 rosters were announced, four names stood out for historic reasons: the Czechs included Jaromir Jagr, the Finns listed Teemu Selänne, the Swedes Daniel Alfredsson, and the Slovaks Lubomir Visnovsky. These four are now the only players (assuming they are healthy and step on the ice in Sochi) to have played in all five NHL-participation Olympics (the record-tying sixth overall of Selänne's career). This will almost certainly be the last for all four, but one can never say never. Who would have thought after 2010 that these men would still be at the top of their game for Sochi?

Storylines of the Olympic women

USA's attempt to break Olympic silver streak, chances of a European breakthrough,

By Lucas Aykroyd

■ ■ From historic Canadian dominance to Russian medal hopes, let's take a closer look at 10 themes that will dominate headlines during the Olympic women's hockey tournament in Sochi, Russia (February 8-20, 2014).

1) Will Canada's reign continue?

Never mind that the United States defeated Canada in four out of their six pre-Olympic exhibition games between 12 October and 30 December. Historically, Canada still holds a big edge where it counts most: at the Winter Games.



Photo: Jeff Vinnick / IHHF-IIIHF Images

Sochi gold would be a fine cap to Wickenheiser's legacy.

Dating back to 11 February, 2002, the Canadian women have won 15 straight games en route to gold in 2002, 2006, and 2010. Their last loss was to the U.S. in the 1998 gold medal game in Nagano – when Bill Clinton was still in the White House. The Americans have won four of the last five Women's World Championships, but they're still bitter over the Olympic drought.

2) How will Dineen do for Canada?

The 12th December resignation of Canadian head coach Dan Church due to philosophical differences with management came as a shocker less than two months before Sochi. His replacement, former NHL player and coach Kevin Dineen, brings a great hockey mind and a will to win. Ex-Hartford teammate and current TSN analyst Ray Ferraro described the 50-year-old as "an incredible person," adding: "To know Kevin is to like him."

Still, even given Dineen's background as a 1984 Olympian and two-time IIHF World Championship silver medalist (1985, 1989), he has little time to get the pulse of this tight-knit group. His hiring could pay off perfectly or backfire big-time.

3) Does Hayley still have it?

For years, Canadian forward Hayley Wickenheiser was deservedly hailed as the best female player in the world. Along with teammate Jayna Hefford, the 35-year-old is poised to play in her record-setting fifth Olympics, and no one else is even close to her all-time mark of 46 points.

Lately, though, some have suggested she's lost a step. Multiple injuries limited the Shaunavon, Saskatchewan native to three games and zero points at the 2013 Women's

World Championship in Ottawa. Before the Olympic roster announcement, there was even speculation she might be excluded. Hyper-competitive, Wickenheiser will aim to prove her critics wrong.

4) Is Amanda Kessel 100 per cent?

The younger sister of Toronto Maple Leafs star Phil Kessel, this highly skilled 21-year-old forward absolutely tore up NCAA hockey last season with the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers. She won the Patty Kazmaier Award as MVP. Not only did she put a nation-leading 101 points in 37 games, but at the 2013 Worlds, she also paced Team USA with seven points and scored the 3-2 winner against Canada in the final.

Amanda Kessel is essential to America's hopes of defeating Canada with youth and speed. So the fact she spent much of the fall rehabbing a lower body injury has to be a concern. Coach Katey Stone will need Kessel going full steam come 8 February, when the U.S. opens versus Finland.

5) Can Russia medal at home?

For Olympians, medaling at home is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. That's why host Russia has invested heavily in its usually pedestrian women's hockey program. With ex-NHL star and three-time Olympian Alexei Yashin as general manager, the Russians achieved a bronze medal at last year's Worlds. It was just their second medal ever after 2001's bronze.

Russia could do it again in Sochi. But it'll need superlative performances from everyone from veteran snipers Yekaterina Smolentseva and Tatyana Burina to goaltenders Nadezhda Alexandrova and Anna Prugova. There'll be stiff competition for third place. At the recent Six Nations Cup, Finland beat Russia 4-3 in group play and blanked Sweden 4-0 in the final.



Smolentseva and her teammates are under home pressure.

6) Has the competitive gap narrowed?

When Canada hammered Slovakia 18-0 to open the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, it provoked a torrent of media questions about whether the top nations were just too good for the lower-ranked ones. Of course, in international



With the rivalry against Canada near boiling point, forward Amanda Kessel's in

men's hockey, Canada also used to obliterate most of its Olympic foes from 1920 to 1952.

It took time to narrow the gap, and women's hockey is no different. Still, one hopes that Switzerland will make a respectable stand against Canada in its 8th February opener, and that Japan will do likewise against Sweden the following day. It's good to see progress.

7) Who'll be the underdog goalie sensation?

Typically, Canadian and American goalies post the best numbers at the Olympics, supported by world-class defenders. But usually, a netminder from an underdog nation also leaves a powerful impression.

For instance, think of the heroics of China's Hong Guo in 1998, limiting Canada to two goals and Sweden to one. In 2006, Switzerland's Florence Schelling had a remarkable 93.9 save percentage and 2.40 GAA. And remember Kim Martin's dynamic play for Sweden in 2006, making 37 saves in the miraculous 3-2 semi-final shootout win over the Americans that led to a silver medal. In Sochi, surely somebody will face 100 shots in two games and do all right for herself.

8) How will the new format play out?

This year, the top four teams from the 2012 IIHF World Ranking (Canada, United States, Finland, Switzerland) will

Photo: Andre Ringuette / IHHF-IIIHF Images

's hockey tournament

new playing format among questions going into Sochi



jury could affect USA's chances of a first Olympic gold since 1998.

be in Group A, while the fifth- and sixth-ranked nations (Sweden and Russia) will be in Group B along with successful qualifiers Germany and Japan.



Kim Martin is hoping to take Sweden back to the final.

While the Americans and Canadians are expected to finish 1-2 in Group A and receive byes to the semi-finals under the new format, a loss by either one to the Finns is a slight possibility, and that could open the door for a quarter-final upset. You never know.

9) Which Olympic rookies will shine?

Could McGill University forward Melodie Daoust steal the show in her debut with Canada's national team after being named rookie of the year and MVP in back-to-back Canadian university seasons? Besides Amanda Kessel, there'll be other intriguing first-timers on the U.S.



Finland's Tapani has a chance to prove herself in Sochi.

roster, including forward Lyndsey Fry, the first Arizona native to play Olympic hockey, and defenceman Lee Stecklein, the youngest American at age 19.

Swiss blueliner Lara Stalder has been a rookie standout with the University of Minnesota-Duluth's women's team and could continue her prowess in Sochi. Another NCAA debutant, Finnish forward Susanna Tapani of the University of North Dakota, should also be on your radar.

10) What will it mean for the game?

No matter who wins women's hockey gold in Sochi, there'll be an upsurge in girls wanting to play hockey in the victorious nation afterwards. And that's good news for anyone who loves this growing global game.

Promotion format defined

Qualification series for 2015 Women's Worlds

The IIHF Council approved the following promotion/relegation mode between the top-two levels of the IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship:

-A best-of-three qualification event will be played between the bottom-ranked team of the 2014 Olympic women's ice hockey tournament and the winner of the 2014 IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship Division I Group A.

-The best-of-three qualification event shall be hosted by the better-ranked team, according to the 2014 IIHF Women's World Ranking that will be released immediately after the Olympics, to be completed no later than 15th November 2014.

-The winner of this best-of-three series qualifies for the 2015 IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship in Malmö, Sweden, while the loser will play in the 2015 IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship Division I Group A.

-Sweden as the host of the 2015 IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship cannot be relegated. In case Sweden finishes in last place at the 2014 Olympic women's ice hockey tournament, the next placed team would play in the qualification event instead.

By the Numbers

■ ■ Here are some interesting statistical tidbits relating to Olympic women's hockey:

15 – Consecutive games won by the Canadian women's team, currently the longest streak in women's Olympic history

24 – Age of goaltender Florence Schelling, who will be minding the Swiss net in her third Olympic Games

3 – The Olympic single-game record for power play goals by Finland's Kirsi Hänninen (Feb. 9, 1998) versus Japan

8 – Number of consecutive exhibition wins the U.S. had versus Canada before losing 3-2 in the gold medal game in Salt Lake City on February 21, 2002

2 – Female goalies with career goals-against averages below 1.00 at the Olympics after playing minimum of 200 minutes (Kim St. Pierre, Canada, 0.78; Sarah Tueting, United States, 0.91)

9 – Number of Olympic tournament games played by Sweden goalie Kim Martin, good for fourth all-time and tops among active goalies (Martin is the youngest player ever to participate in an Olympic women's ice hockey tournament at 15 years, 1 month, and 8 days when she made her debut in Salt Lake)

1 – Number of Finnish players who have participated in every Olympic tournament since 1998 (Karoliina Rantamäki)

16,805 – Single-game attendance record for Olympic women's hockey set at Canada-U.S. gold medal game on February 25, 2010 in Vancouver

16 – Olympic goals scored by CAN forward Hayley Wickenheiser, tops in Olympic women's hockey history (also all-time leader in points with 46)

54 – Number of days Team Canada coach Kevin Dineen has had to prepare prior to his team's first Olympic games, after being hired to replace Dan Church on 17 December

NOTES:

–USA forward Amanda Kessel, whose brother Phil was named to the men's team, will make her Olympic debut barring an injury setback. The Kessels will be the second brother-sister combo to compete in the same Winter Games in ice hockey, after Tina and Tobias Enström represented Sweden in Vancouver.

–Triple Olympic champions Caroline Ouellette, Hayley Wickenheiser and Jayna Hefford, will feature on the line-up for Team Canada.

–This will be the second ever appearance for Japan in the women's hockey competition at the Winter Games, the first coming at the inaugural women's tournament in Nagano. Defenceman Yoko Kondo, who will turn 35 during the Olympics, is the only player left from the 1998 squad.

–Since the first IIHF Women's World Championship was held in 1990, there have been 19 tournaments (world championships and Olympics combined) and only once did the top-two finishers include a country other than Canada and the United States: Sweden winning silver in Turin 2006.

Danish junior team goes to Canada for 2015

Olaf Eller's group seeking to end Denmark's one-year curse

By Henrik Manninen

■ ■ Qualifying for the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship in Toronto and Montreal, and with the bulk of the players that got them there still eligible, Denmark's U20 team is already planning ahead for next year's push to stay in the top division.

"We have 12 players from this team, many of them leading players, who will play for the U20 national team next year, so our goal is clear and that is to stay in the top division," said Olaf Eller, head coach of Denmark's U20 national team following their unblemished record of five straight wins that saw them win the 2014 IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship Division I Group A in Sanok, Poland.

■ Two games into the Danish U20's most recent promotion success, Olaf Eller wasn't impressed with how his team had started the tournament. Although a 3-1 victory against Austria followed by a 4-2 win against hosts Poland had resulted with maximum points, the skating had not been hard enough and the puck movement still left 'a lot to be desired' according to Eller.

With games against Belarus and Latvia looming around the corner, Eller, who by his own admission at times might appear to be a bit too nice to his players, must have chosen his words with great care, as the response he got from his crop of youngsters were first class. Denmark stormed out in the next two games against their two main rivals and sealed their much-deserved promotion with one game to spare in a manner that impressed their amicable head coach.

"When it mattered the most we were at our best. We played with pace, energy, and with full lines in all our games apart from the final period against Latvia," said Eller, the father of the Montreal Canadiens' Lars Eller and U20 player Mads Eller.

■ While Denmark's senior national team has become a mainstay in the top division of the IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship since 2003, the results of the nation's two junior national teams are yet to reach the same level of consistency.

Denmark's U18 squads have been yo-yoing between the two top tiers for most of this century, but have at least two consecutive top-level appearances (2004-05) to look back on and will once again be competing at the highest level in 2014.

For the U20 national team, Denmark's two appearances at the top of the World Juniors tree have both ended with straight relegation; first one in 2008 and then most recently in 2012, when two overtime defeats during the relegation round cruelly sealed their demotion.

■ Already aiming to get lucky on the third time, the Danes will touch down in Canada next year with a pool of players that are currently celebrating back-to-back promotions at junior level after lifting Denmark's U18 national team back to the top division last year.



Coch Olaf and son Mads Eller (1G+4A) will head to Canada for the 2015 World Juniors.

of the Best Forward award by the Directorate during the tournament in Sanok.

"The best part of this team is how this team sticks together. We have known each other for a long time, played both with or against each other and we are all good friends, so we are all excited to be coming back to play for the national team and too see each other again and that is our main strength," said Mads Eller.

■ Mads is part of a fine Danish hockey family where he and his six years older brother Lars picked up the game from their father Olaf and started off their development in Rødovre in the greater Copenhagen area.

Photos: Miroslaw Ring

GROUP A Montreal	2015 IIHF  WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP CANADA Toronto - Montreal	GROUP B Toronto
Finland (1)		Sweden (2)
Canada (4)		Russia (3)
USA (5)		Czech Republic (6)
Slovakia (8)		Switzerland (7)
Germany (9)		Denmark (10)



Oliver Bjorkstrand (10) earned Directorate Top Forward honours.

"A number of these players got their breakthrough already a few years ago when they as U16 players played 2-2 against Sweden, and although it is always very hard to compare past and present generations of players I would say that we have a strong team that has taken yet another step with this win, and with the history they have had as junior players so far, they clearly have a chance to be able to compete and stay in the top division of the U20's," Olaf Eller said.

There will likely be few changes from the team that won in Sanok to the one that will be on the plane to the World Juniors in Toronto and Montreal next year. Returnees could include, among others, solid netminder Georg Sørensen and two defencemen based in Sweden, Sonny Hertzberg and Mads Larsen, who have brought stability at the back end for Denmark.

Going forward, Nikolaj Ehlers, born 1996, already plays a prominent role in the team, as does Mikkel Aagaard, Denmark's top points scorer in Sanok, and last but not least two players from their current first line, Mads Eller of the Edmonton Oil Kings and Oliver Bjorkstrand, a 3rd round draft pick by Columbus Blue Jackets currently in his second season at Portland Winterhawks and winner

Meanwhile, across the country in Herning, Oliver Bjorkstrand followed in the footsteps of brother Patrick, three years his senior and today a Danish national team player currently at Medvescak Zagreb in the KHL, who both were taught the game by their USA-born father Todd, who had arrived to Denmark as a player in the late 1980s and has also coached Denmark's U20 with success and is a great inspiration to Oliver.

"My dad is really a big part of where I am today. He watches most of my games and tries to help me to improve my game, but as for my own development, I need to get myself stronger, bigger and develop every part of my game in order to be ready for next year's World Juniors," said Oliver Bjorkstrand, who together with Mads Eller are already eagerly awaiting to take yet another step in their fledgling careers and make Denmark a more permanent feature at the World Juniors.

"Most of the players in our team are used to play in front of 1,000 to 2,000 people, now we will play in Toronto and Montreal in front of full houses with up to 20,000 people. It is going to be a big experience, and we will work very hard to be prepared for it so we can stay in the top division," said Mads Eller.

Italy moves up

■ ■ The Italian U20 national team arrived in the Scottish city of Dumfries as the third seeds in the IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship Division I Group B, but nevertheless managed to secure promotion with a string of close victories.

Giovanni Morini scored two late goals for Italy, including the overtime winner, in the key matchup against the top-seeded French to ensure the Azzurri had a one-point lead going into the final game with Ukraine.

Coming back from a 2-1 deficit to win 4-2 over Ukraine in the final game gave Italy the points needed to advance. Prior to that game, the Italians had four 4-3 wins including two in overtime. Kazakhstan took silver and France had to settle for bronze.

■ Hungary won the 2014 IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship Division II Group A on home ice in Miskolc to get back to Division I level.



Oilers write Norwegian hockey history

Miracle in Rouen as well-oiled Stavanger machine dethrones KHL club



Photos: Christian Robaegs

It took a great offensive effort and some help from Rouen, but the Stavanger Oilers became the first Norwegian team not only to play in the Continental Cup Super Final, but to win it.

By Martin Merk

■ ■ The Stavanger Oilers were the first Norwegian team to reach a final tournament in international club competition. In their first IIHF Continental Cup Super Final participation they also won the title and achieved one of the biggest success stories for hockey in Norway, listed on ninth place in the IIHF World Ranking.

Like two years ago the Patinoire Île Lacroix was a place for miracles in European club hockey. In 2012 the Rouen Dragons defeated Donbass Donetsk 5-1 in the last game thanks to late goals to reach the goal difference needed for the tournament win – one of the biggest successes for French hockey.

This year the Dragons defeated Donbass again, winning 4-3 in a shootout against a team that had meanwhile joined the Russian Kontinental Hockey League, where it sat in third place of the Western Conference (only behind defending champion Dynamo Moscow and SKA St. Petersburg) before leaving for France.

The Ukrainians started with two wins including a 3-2 shootout victory against Stavanger on Day 1 but couldn't afford to lose two points against winless Rouen on the last day. Therefore Stavanger ended up in first place against their own expectations.

"We didn't think that Donbass would lose points after their game against us," said Petter Thoresen, the five-time Olympian and 12-time Norwegian champion who coaches the Oilers. "I was wrong. It's never easy in hockey. Rouen played a heck of a game. You need passion to win hockey games."

And he said it with a smile since his team was watching the last game between Rouen and Donbass and didn't expect a miracle but rather to take home silver medals.

"It was an exciting game. I was really nervous at the end.



The Oilers earned the Continental Cup while watching the Dragons-Donbass game play out from the tribune.

If you play you don't get that nervous than when you just watch. It's an unbelievable feeling," said the Oilers' Ruben Smith, who was named Best Goalkeeper of the tournament.

"It was a very tough tournament. We were really happy the way we played as a group. When we do that we can accomplish things like this. No Norwegian team had ever made it to the Continental Cup Super Final before us and we win it in our first year. It's a moment I take with me forever."

■ It was a well-deserved tournament victory. Before the Norwegians had to hope and rely on a previously winless Rouen team that was outscored 12-2 in the first two games, the Norwegians did their job. They recovered from the shootout loss against Donbass and convincingly defeated the Rouen Dragons (6-2) and Asiago Hockey (7-2).

The team won the hearts of the local fans and was celebrated by them and their 150 Oilers fans thanks to solid play and teamwork throughout the whole tournament.

The Oilers are a newcomer in European hockey, founded only in 2000. Thoresen, the father of Sochi 2014 participant Patrick Thoresen, joined the team in 2009 after winning championships as a player and coach. He led the team to

four Norwegian playoff finals and three championships since.

"My philosophy is to play as a team, play for the team, play together and work for the team and not for yourself and that's the way we've worked for the last four-and-a-half years," Thoresen said.

"The club has built a new arena and is a really strong and professional organization in Norway. It's the newest and best arena. It's good for the players in Stavanger to have such an organization so they can fully focus on hockey."

Thoresen also hopes to have sent a strong message since representatives of the Champions Hockey League were in Rouen and will distribute wild cards for teams from countries that are not among the six founding members.

"I'm not sure whether it will happen but it's the goal for the Oilers organization to play in this league because we learned to play against other teams and that's good for us and Norwegian hockey," he said. "I guess they followed the results here and when we can compete against one of the best teams from the Russian league we can compete against other teams too."

■ Other teams were not as happy as Thoresen. Just as it did two years ago in the same venue, tournament favourite Donbass Donetsk suffered another Rouen trauma. They made up for the 2012 loss in 2013 by defeating the French in Donetsk 7-1 and claiming last year's Continental Cup. But being too sure about winning the last game, they didn't fulfil their own expectations in Rouen when they lost to the French and disappointed 400 fans from Ukraine in the stands.

For Rouen the surprise win was a consolation after two hefty defeats in the first games, but the French were not able to improve from fourth place behind Asiago.



"It's really a dream job"

Cherkasov talks about delivering Olympic ice hockey in Sochi

By Martin Merk

■ Organizing Olympic ice hockey tournaments with 20 teams involves a lot of work with different parties to make the venues ready for world-class hockey.

Ice Times talked with Vladimir Cherkasov, who started as Sochi 2014's Sport & Venue Manager for the Ice Hockey Complex and is now the Venue General Manager of the Bolshoy Ice Dome, the main hockey arena in Sochi.

How is the job in Sochi?

It's a dream job for me. Having the Olympics in your own country is like a miracle and if you're involved in the organizing process it's really a dream job. I like hockey, I know hockey, I know what the venue should be, what the dressing room should be so it was very interesting for me to create something, give advice to the construction company and to the guys who are responsible for the construction of the venue. This process lasted three years.

When did you join?

I started to work in the organizing committee in June 2010. When I started to work I was the only one responsible for the hockey complex with the Bolshoy Ice Dome, Shayba Arena and the practice venue. Then I invited good people to share the responsibilities for the arenas and I'm happy to have a team like this. Last year we had several events like the 2013 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship in April and I was happy to work with this team.

What can you say about the arenas?

When I came here I was only able to see the walls where the Bolshoy Ice Dome is and nothing at the place where you can see the Shayba Arena now. I had only the drawings. These two arenas are like my babies for me. I spent a lot of time on the corridors and to plan where the dressing rooms should be, how far from the ice, where to locate the warm-up area, the laundry and so on. Just like everybody loves their babies so I love the arenas. The Bolshoy Ice Dome is the best hockey arena in Russia right now, that's for sure.

How was hockey as a new sport in this city received by the local population?

Hockey is really a new kind of sport for the region, that's why it was important for the local people to invite them to experience the sport so that they understand what hockey is and what a hockey arena looks like. During the U18 Worlds I was shocked a little bit because after the first game when Russia won against the United States 4-3 we had thousands of people who wanted to buy tickets. So by the end of the tournament we had like 7,000 people for each Russian game. The people started to become hockey-crazy and they like the arena.

Can you say something about ticket sales for the ice hockey tournaments?

Certainly ice hockey is the most popular winter sport in Russia and second overall after football. All of Russia is waiting for the game between Russia and Canada, that's



Vladimir Cherkasov will be overseeing all the Olympic venue operations in the Bolshoy Ice Dome.

Photos: Uliana Barbysheva / Sochi 2014

that comfortable for players but here it is.

All the necessary zones for the athletes are very close to each other like the dressing rooms, sport zone, athletes' lounge, information room, medical centre, anti-doping centre, rooms for skate sharpening and uniform repair and a big gym and warm-up area.

I think we have everything we need. The press zone is really huge, the mixed zone was designed especially for the Olympics, like with the whole venue. The location is very comfortable. Players don't have to go long ways to the media and then to the dressing room while at the same time the ways for the media are short too.

no secret. After Vancouver 2010 I think Russians want to see this game. I can say we have no problem with selling tickets for hockey. If you want to buy tickets, they'll be very tough to find.

How about the women's hockey tournament?

It's going well. Russia won the bronze medal at the last IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship. That was a real success for Russian women's hockey. Everybody was surprised about the progress the team has made and people are really interested. I think the arena will be full too during the women's tournament for Russia's games and they would like to see Canada and the United States too.

What does the event mean for Russian people?

We haven't had such an event in this country for many years. The last Olympics were the Summer Games in 1980 in the Soviet Union. It's something very special for all Russia. There are many people who don't know much about the Olympics and want to see it.

What will the Olympic Park be like for fans?

The concept is very good and comfortable for spectators because you can come to the park for a whole day and see a variety of events in the costal cluster because the venues are in walking distance from each other. If you have tickets for figure skating, short track, speed skating, curling or hockey you can see many events in one day. It's very comfortable for spectators. If you want to go to the mountains it will take you 40 minutes to get to Krasnaya Polyana by train. If you're not fortunate enough to have tickets there will be public viewing and a food court in the Olympic Park and many activities for the fans.

What can the players expect from the hockey venues?

The first special feature is that this venue is maybe one of very few in the world with 12 permanent dressing rooms near the ice. Usually organizers have to create temporary dressing rooms because normal venues have six to eight dressing rooms and here they have 12 for all teams who participate in the men's tournament and there are 10 dressing rooms at Shayba Arena for the women's teams.

We also have the practice arena at Bolshoy Ice Dome just 15 metres away from the dressing room. It's not always

What were the last things that were being worked on around the hockey rink and in general in the last few weeks?

The majority of the things were already done. In the Olympic Park there were workers who cleaned the venues, planted trees and grass. Mostly it's preparing for operating the venues like dividing the zones. The venue owner normally doesn't use the venue the same way the organizing committee will use it during the Olympics. We needed to mark zones, put signage and fences, separate client groups, create dedicated entrances. That's the final preparation. Around the Olympic Park the final roads were built although most of them have been ready for a while.

What do you think about the tournaments? Who will win?

(Laughs.) The only thing I can say is that we really welcome all the teams who participate in the men's and women's ice hockey tournaments. We are waiting for all the teams but of course the majority of the Russians wait for the game between Russia and Canada.

What's the plan with the arenas after the Olympics?

The plan is right now that Shayba Arena and the two practice rinks will be used for ice hockey and camps for teams from all over the country and local teams. And the Bolshoy Ice Dome will be used as a multifunctional venue for different kinds of sports also tennis, basketball, boxing or concerts. After the Games there will be a Formula 1 race and I guess all buildings will be used in some way and the central stadium will be a venue for the Football World Cup in 2018.

There are also rumours a KHL team with the name "Delfin" (Dolphin) could play here next season.

That would be the best solution. The local people start to understand what hockey is and they love it as we saw during the U18 World Championship. They like the game and the passion and I'm sure if we have a KHL team here the tribunes will be full. I don't know whether it will happen and it's not so easy to build a team. Maybe somebody will make the decision to relocate a team.



For the full interview:
IIHF.com/cherkasov