



Photo: EUROPHOTO, JANI RAJAMÄKI

LATVIA'S SEVENTH PLAYER: No fans in international hockey are so committed as the ones dressed in maroon and there are no other fans who have such a close relationship to their national team as the Latvians. It goes beyond sports and is as much a matter of national pride and identity. After almost 15 years of travelling abroad to support their team, the Latvian fans will finally have the opportunity to host the world and see their favourites to perform on home ice in the brand new Arena Riga.

Latvia 2006 - a tribute to the best fans in the world

For the most loyal hockey fans in the world - this 70th IIHF World Championship is for you! Since 1993, the Latvian fans have traveled all over the globe to follow their team. Now we come to you.

RENÉ FASEL EDITORIAL

■ After an unavoidable absence of 46 years, Latvia rejoined the IIHF on May 6, 1992. The international ice hockey family was suddenly enriched with a member so full of passion, pride and also, as we all know today, the best hockey fans in the world.

Wherever the Latvian national team travels, the dedicated fans follow. It doesn't matter if it's an Olympic qualifying tournament in Klagenfurt, Austria or if it's a preliminary round of the IIHF World Championship in Karlstad, Sweden or the Olympic games in Salt Lake City, USA - the Latvian fans are there with their jerseys, their chants, their support and with their sportsmanlike conduct.

■ Personally, I will never forget when Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis left the VIP-seats at the Jordal Amfi arena in Oslo during a game at the 1999 IIHF World Championship in Oslo, Norway and joined the Latvian fans in the standing room section to cheer on the team in a preliminary round game. Could this have happened with any other team?

Mr. Ulmanis is, together with Latvian Ice Hockey Association President. Kirovs Lipmans, responsible for the enormous effort behind bringing the 70th IIHF World Championship to Riga and Latvia in 2006.

■ The 2006 IIHF World Championship will be the start of a new era in Latvian sports and Latvian ice hockey and the state-of-the-art Riga Arena should contribute to the development and the further popularity of Latvian ice hockey.

This year's event underlines the distinctiveness of hockey's international flagship event. Not many team sports can pride themselves with 70 world championships as Latvia will also become the 15th nation to host the event and the first first-time host since Ljubljana and the former Yugoslavia organized it in 1966.

■ The World Championship in an Olympic year gives one team a chance to score a unique double - and the other teams an immediate opportunity to redeem themselves. This year Sweden has a possibility to do something that no other country has managed, to win the Olympic gold and the World Championship title in the same year. (See more on this on page 3).

Countries like Russia, Canada and the United States would like to make up for the failure to win any medals in Turin and to improve their position in the IIHF World Ranking. Out of the seven last World Championships, the Czech Republic and Canada have combined for six gold medals.

■ The last surprise was Slovakia in the Olympic year of 2002. Who will be the next unexpected champion-and will that surprise happen in Riga?

René Fasel re-elected as President of AIOWF

■ ■ ■ IIHF President René Fasel has been re-elected as President of the Association of International Olympic Winter Sport Federations, AIOWF, for a new four-year period (2006-2010). The unanimous re-election took place at the AIOWF General Congress in Seoul, Korea on April 3. The AIOWF consists of the seven Olympic Winter Sport Federations: Biathlon (IBU), Bobsleigh (FIBT), Curling (WCF), Luge (FIL), Skating (ISU), Ski (FIS) and the IIHF.

Viasat secures exclusive broadcast rights until 2011

■ ■ ■ Zug, Switzerland, 12 April 2006 - Infront Sports & Media, the long-term marketing partner of the IIHF, has renewed an extensive and exclusive live broadcast agreement with Viasat Sport for the IIHF World Championship until 2011. This extends a working relationship that has been in place since 1989.

Viasat will broadcast the annual IIHF World Championship on its free-to-air and pay channels in the territories of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. The company already holds the exclusive rights to the IIHF World Championship until 2007.

■ ■ ■ In addition, Viasat has also acquired the rights to live broadcast coverage of the IIHF World Championship for additional new media distribution platforms with effect from 2007 and until 2011.

The rights granted are in the category of Internet, IPTV and Mobile Telephony. The transmission to mobile phones/handsets is possible over telecommunications networks and over digital mobile broadcast systems employing DVB-H transmission standards.

■ ■ ■ Subscribers to the Viasat digital satellite premium pay-TV platform in both the Scandinavian and Baltic regions will be able to watch live coverage of the event, and the games will be broadcast on TV3, TV3+ and on additional Viasat channels. The coverage of the IIHF World Championship will feature player profiles, interviews and extensive in-depth coverage for ice hockey enthusiasts.

Habscheid's triple double

■ ■ ■ Marc Habscheid, Team Canada's coach for the 2006 IIHF World Championship in Riga, has made Canadian hockey history. By being on Canada's Olympic staff in the Turin Olympics, Habscheid has now played and coached for Canada in the Olympics, the IIHF World Championships and the IIHF World U20 Championships, a one-of-a-kind achievement. Habscheid played in in the 1982 World U20 Championship, the 1988 Olympics and the 1992 World Championship. He coached in the 2003 World U20.

Lichtner lights the way for IIHF's future

■ ■ ■ Horst Lichtner will, on November 1, 2006, become only the third full-time General Secretary of the International Ice Hockey Federation after Walter Wasservogel (1977-1986) and Jan-Ake Edvinsson (1986-present). The announcement that the 46-year old Essen, Germany-born sports economy graduate will replace Edvinsson, was made on April 3.

The *Ice Times* checked in with Lichtner a couple of days after the appointment was made public.

Tell us something about your previous contacts with ice hockey and the IIHF?

I had a lot to do with the IIHF in my previous position as CEO of the CWL Marketing AG (the predecessor of Infront, the commercial partner of the IIHF). In that capacity I had to maintain close ties with the IIHF. I was also involved in the organization of the 1993, 1996 and 1997 IIHF World Championships. And last, but not least, my seven-year old son plays with the HC Luzern, on the "bambini" team.

What are the things you like about hockey?

It's the most dynamic sport I know. It's faster, quicker and more powerful than any other team sport. I like the friendly atmosphere among the fans and among the people on the hockey family. Compared with football (soccer), where I come from, there is

never any problem with fan violence and for that I think hockey is exceptional. Also behind the scenes the atmosphere in hockey is very different from football, where so much is driven by money. Hockey is still very much a sport.



A FAN OF THE GAME: The IIHF's new general secretary to be is no stranger to hockey, which he considers as the most dynamic team sport.

But surely, there must be things that hockey can learn from football?

Most probably, but this is a question I will be able to answer better one year from now. Obviously, the best parts of football's professionalism can be learned from. I see a big gap between how for example football's UEFA Champions League is run and the corresponding club championships in hockey. It's one of my long term visions to be able to contribute to improving that.

What do you see as your prime challenge in your new position?

To make our game available to the existing fans and to find new fans through the new means of communication

which are presented through the new and ever-changing digitalized sports environment. By using those means, internet, broadband, cable, we can reach out directly to the fans. On the other hand, if we don't use them, we lose the competition to others. I also have a vision of creating a strong research data on what hockey people and fans want and expect. Finally, I also want the IIHF to have a professional service to the member national association.

Name:

Horst Lichtner

Born: 1959 in Essen, Germany

Last positions held: 1994-1997, CEO of CWL Marketing AG, 1997-2001, Marketing Director of TEAM AG, 2001-2006 Marketing Director of the German Football Association (DFB).

Draw for the 71th World Championship on May 23

■ ■ ■ The draw, which will determine the four groups at the 2007 IIHF World Championship in Russia will be held in Moscow on May 23 at 12.00 at the office of the Mayor of Moscow. The 16 teams will seeded according to the IIHF World Ranking which will be established immediately following the Gold Medal game in Riga on May 21.

Teams ranked 1-4 will be in the first seeding group, teams 5-8 in the second tier, teams 9-12 in the third and teams ranked 13-16 will be in the last seeding group.

■ ■ ■ The 71th IIHF World Championship in Moscow and St. Petersburg will be played April 27 - May 13.



Association News

CANADA: Five Canadian cities/groups have made a formal bid to Hockey Canada to host the 2009 IIHF World U20 Championship. They are: Calgary/Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, Saskatoon and Toronto. Canada has hosted the "World Juniors" a total of seven times. Calgary/Edmonton, Ottawa and Toronto have never hosted the event. Saskatoon played host to the 1991 championship, while Montreal had it in 1978. Hockey Canada will determine the host site in May and refer to IIHF for final approval.

SWEDEN: The General Secretary of the Swedish Ice Hockey Association, **Michael Englund**, announced on April 10 that he will resign from his position at the annual meeting on June 10. Englund was appointed to that position in 2001.

IIHF News & Appointments

■ ■ ■ **Anna Eskola** joined the IIHF Sport Department as an assistant on April 1. She will be responsible for the administrative, organizational and promotional aspects of the department's events. Eskola, from Orivesi, Finland, joins the IIHF after studying at the Vierumäki Sports Institute of Finland, sports and leisure management, a degree that is supported by the IIHF.

■ ■ ■ IIHF Council Member **Doris Hogne** has added her husband's name and her new full name is now **Doris Hogne Rydheim**.



iceTimes is published bi-monthly,

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IIHF Disciplinary Announcements

■ ■ ■ Ukraine player **Danylo Guryev** has been suspended for two years following a positive doping test at the 2006 IIHF World U20 Championship Division I in Bled, Slovenia. The suspension bans Guryev from participation in competitions authorized by the IIHF or any member national association. Guryev's suspension was decided upon by the IIHF Disciplinary Committee, and will last until Dec. 13, 2007.

Can Sweden end the curse of Olympic gold?

■ ■ Sweden's national team coach Bengt-Ake Gustafsson is going for the most elusive "double" in international hockey - to win the Olympic gold and the IIHF World Championship in the same season. No team, not even the superior Soviet squads of the 70s, managed to win the World Championship in spring after collecting the Olympic gold medals a few months earlier. See the chart to the right.

"This is definitely our challenge this season," says Gustafsson who led Sweden to its second Olympic hockey gold in Turin in February. "To win this double would be something unique and a huge honor for the team and for Swedish hockey."

■ ■ Gustafsson admits that this was on his mind when he started the player selection process for the 2006 IIHF World Championship in Riga.

"When we talked to players, we made clear to them that they could be part of hockey history by becoming the first to win the two major international titles in the same year," says the coach who after only one season at the helm of the national program got rid of the team-that-never-wins-when-it-counts label.

■ ■ Gustafsson, an IIHF Hall of Famer who as a centre led Sweden to its first IIHF World Championship in 25 years in 1987 and also four years later in 1991, has a theory why no team has managed the double:

"It is emotionally draining to win an Olympic gold and it's difficult to fully re-focus after only two or three months when you play in the World Championship," says Gustafsson.

"It's easy to feel content after an Olympic win. Another reason is that the teams who won the



Photo: JANI RAJAMÄKI

CAPTAIN 5: Can Mats Sundin crown this season with another gold medal?

Olympics simply couldn't ice the same players for the World Championship."

"We had an intensive but short celebration following Turin," says Gustafsson. "The complete and extensive celebration will come during the summer, if we manage to write hockey history."

Post Olympic trauma*

■ ■ A team that won the Olympic ice hockey gold has never succeeded in winning the IIHF World Championship in same year.

Olympics

1972 Sapporo: Soviets dominate and defeat Czechoslovakia 5-2 in deciding game. Czechs finish 3rd.

1976 Innsbruck: Soviet Union wins gold with a perfect 6-0-0 record. Czechoslovaks (silver) are defeated 4-3 in clincher.

1992 Albertville: Russia (CIS) wins gold, defeats Canada 3-1 in final. Sweden finish a disappointing 5th.

1994 Lillehammer: Forsberg leads Sweden to gold after penalty shoot-out win over Canada, who gets silver.

1998 Nagano: Czechs win first Olympic gold after 1-0 final vs Russia. Sweden ends up fifth.

2002 Salt Lake City: Canada grabs gold after final win over USA. Slovaks fail miserably, only 13th.

2006 Turin: Sweden preys on Finns once again in a final as 3-2 score wins them second Olympic gold.

World Championship

1972 Prague: Czechoslovakia wins gold after beating Soviets 3-2 in key game. Soviet Union gets silver.

1976 Katowice: Soviets never recover from defeat vs Poland, finish 2nd. Czechs win gold with 19 out of 20 points.

1992 Prague: Sweden defeats Finland 5-2 in gold game. Olympic champ Russia ends up in 5th place.

1994 Milan: Canada trounces Sweden 6-0 in semi, defeats Finland in penalty shoot-out in final. Sweden gets bronze.

1998 Zurich: Swedes win gold in two final games vs Finland. Olympic champs Czechs get bronze medal.

2002 Gothenburg: Slovakia wins historic first gold after downing Russia 4-3 in final. Canada finishes in sixth place.

2006 Riga: Sweden goes for historic and elusive double.

*These are the only occasions so far when an Olympic ice hockey tournament and the IIHF World Championships were played as separate tournaments in the same season. In the years up to 1968, Olympics also counted as World Championships. In the Olympic years 1980, 1984 and 1988, no World Championships took place.

■ ■ This is not only a big year for Swedish hockey, but also for the entire Nordic region. Latvia 2006 marks the first year since 1949 where the four Nordic countries -- Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway -- participate in the top pool of the IIHF World Championships.

Going to his 11th Worlds, "JJ" has no intentions to slow down

■ ■ The numbers really speak for themselves. For Swedish centre Jorgen Jonsson, 33, Latvia 2006 will be his 11th IIHF World Championship and during this tournament "JJ" could reach his 270th national team game for his country. There is no active player on the international scene who can boast similar stats.

"He is coach's dream," says national team coach Bengt-Ake Gustafsson. "Every time he is on the ice, whether it's practice or game, he gives a hundred percent. There is no such a thing as an off-day. He is extremely reliable, he is very seldom injured and he is always motivated. When you start selecting the national roster, you put Jorgen's name there as number one."

It is very unusual that players in today's game play in more than 10 world championships and well over 250 national team games. The 11 world events equal Jonsson with such high-rollers of international hockey as Soviet Union's Valeri Kharlamov, Boris Mikhailov, Sergei Makarov and Czechoslovakia's Vladimir Martinec and Ivan Hlinka.

"It's an unreal feeling to know that my name is on the



Photo: JANI RAJAMÄKI

ULTIMATE TEAM GUY: Jorgen Jonsson on special mission, here checking Canada's star Joe Thornton in Austria 2005.

same list as the names of some of the biggest stars ever", Jonsson told the *Ice Times*. "I feel very fortunate to be able to be a part of the national team and his been a great joyride ever since I joined the national team.

Every time I am selected to the team, I feel great pride because I know that I am part of something that means so much for so many people in this country."

■ ■ Jonsson can also add four Olympic games (two gold medals 1994 and 2006) to his resume. He has been a mainstay on Tre Kronor since he broke in as 22-year old for the Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer 1994.

He describes the gold in Turin as his greatest sports moment and something he is still digesting.

Player's of Jonsson's calibre usually earn their money in the NHL and he could easily be in the 2-3 million dollars salary range. But apart from the 1999-00 season, which he split between the N.Y Islanders and Anaheim, Jonsson has chosen to stay with Farjestad of the Swedish league.

"I never really liked the life in the NHL. To play with Farjestad is good enough for me and my family. I don't suffer financially and I come home every evening with a smile on my face. This is the life I have chosen."

2006 IIHF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SPECIAL

1994: Golden goal in a penalty shootout; Luc Robitaille gives Canada its first World title in 33 years with this perfect execution on Finland's Jarmo Myllys. This is still the only time a world championship was won in a shootout.



Photo: BRUCE BENNET STUDIOS



Photo: CITY-PRESS, BERLIN

2002: Golden goal in regulation; Peter Bondra's mighty shot beats Russia's Maxim Sokolov. The puck is in the mesh, far right. Slovaks win 4-3.



Photo: JUKKA RAUTIO

1999: Golden goal in OT; Czech Jan Hlavac ends the 2nd final game vs Finland at 16:32 as lifts the puck past Miikka Kiprusoff

Golden goals and the heroes behind them

By Andrew Podnieks

■ Since 1992 when the IIHF changed the format of the World Championship from round robin to playoff elimination, the tournament has seen heroes of every sort emerge in the deciding, gold-medal game. Some players who have scored the winning goals are little-known players; others are superstars. Some winners are scored early in the first period; others in overtime or even a shootout. Regardless what the instance, though, the names of the heroes together form one of the most special lists of all time because it was their goal that gave their country a gold medal at the most important international hockey tournament on the calendar. Here are the winners and the circumstances surrounding their moment of glory.

1992: Roger Hansson scored Sweden's third goal midway through the game to give Sweden a 3-0 lead. Tre Kronor made it 4-0 before two late goals from Finland made it close. Sweden added an empty netter to win, 5-2.

1993: Andrei Nikolishin scored just 7:03 into the game to give Russia a 2-0 lead. The Russians made it 3-0 in the second and a goal midway through the third by Mikael Renberg meant that Nikolishin's was the winner.

1994: After a 1-1 tie through 60 minutes plus overtime, Canada and Finland went to penalty shots. After five shots each, both teams had scored twice, but on the sixth shot Luc Robitaille beat Jarmo Myllys for a second time and that proved to be the gold-medal goal.

1995: The Finns built a 4-0 lead before Sweden closed out the scoring in this game. It was Ville Peltonen who scored the second goal, but he was a fitting hero this day because he also scored the first and third goals for Finland. He added an assist on the fourth goal to go with his hat trick.

1996: Canada scored the first goal of the game early, but the Czechs answered right back and took the lead in the second period. Canada tied the game soon after, and the game settled into a close, hard-fought contest. Martin Prochazka scored the winner in dramatic fashion, beating goalie Curtis Joseph with just 19 seconds left in the game. They added an empty-netter before time expired.

1997: Canada completed an impressive rally by winning the final game of this best-of-three finals 2-1 after losing the opening game of the mini-series. In this deciding game, Canada scored goals late in the first period (Dean Evason) and early in the second (Owen Nolan), and only Mikael Nylander later in the game countered for Sweden. As a result, Nolan's goal stood as the winner.

IIHF World Championship Gold Medal winning goals (Since introduction of the playoff format)

1992	Sweden - Finland 5-2	(Roger Hansson)
1993	Russia - Sweden 3-1	(Andrei Nikolishin)
1994	Canada - Finland 2-1	(Luc Robitaille, GWS)
1995	Finland - Sweden 4-1	(Ville Peltonen)
1996	Czech R. - Canada 4-2	(Martin Prochazka)
1997	Canada - Sweden 2-1	(Game 3, Owen Nolan)
1998	Sweden - Finland 1-0	(Game 1, Johan Tornberg)
1999	Czech R. - Finland 3-1, 1-4 (Game 2, Jan Hlavac, 16:32 OT)	
2000	Czech R. - Slovakia 5-3	(Jan Tomajko)
2001	Czech R. - Finland 3-2	(David Moravec, 10.38 OT)
2002	Slovakia - Russia 4-3	(Peter Bondra)
2003	Canada - Sweden 3-2	(Anson Carter, 13.49 OT)
2004	Canada - Sweden 4-3	(Jay Bouwmeester)
2005	Czech R. - Canada 3-0	(Vaclav Prospal)

1998: In another odd twist to this best-of-two finals, the only goal, and thus the game winner, came late in game one. Little-known Johan Tornberg beat Finnish goalie Ari Sulander at 10:07 of the third. Game two was a scoreless tie, thus leaving Tornberg as the hero.

1999: In the strangest overtime goal in IIHF history, Jan Hlavac settled this best-of-two series by scoring at 16:32 of overtime. The Czechs won the first game 3-1 but the Finns won game two 4-1 to force the overtime to decide the winner. Despite losing the regulation game badly, the Czechs rallied on Hlavac's goal to win gold.

2000: The Czechs jumped out to an early 3-0 lead midway through the first period. Slovakia made it 3-1 midway through the second and Jan Tomajko made it 4-1 early in the third. The Slovaks made things interesting by scoring twice late in the game but the Czechs rounded out the scoring with a goal a minute before the end to make it 5-3. Thus, Tomajko's goal stood as the winner.

2001: David Moravec of the Czech Republic scored at 10:38 of overtime to break a 2-2 tie. The Finns had a 2-0 lead midway through the game, but couldn't hang on.

2002: In one of the most exciting gold-medal games ever, and one of its most dramatic finishes, Peter Bondra snapped home the winning goal at 18:20 of the third period to give Slovakia a 4-3 lead. The Slovaks had entered the third with a 3-1 lead, but the Russians fought back to tie the game. After Bondra beat Maxim Sokolov with the go-ahead goal, the Slovakian bench went wild but remained calm enough to kill the last 1:40 of the game to claim its first ever World Championship gold medal.

2003: Canada roared back from a 2-0 deficit to tie the game 2-2 before the end of the third period. During the four-on-four overtime, being used for the first time, Anson Carter's quick wraparound just barely crossed the goal line. The goal was ruled okay only after a lengthy video review.

2004: Canada and Sweden entered the third period tied 3-3, but that changed early in the third. Just 20 seconds from the opening faceoff, Dany Heatley fed rushing defenseman Jay Bouwmeester and his slapshot eluded Henrik Lundqvist. Canada added another goal midway through the final period to win 5-3.

2005: The Czechs scored a goal in each period en route to a 3-0 shutout win over two-time champions Canada. Tomas Vokoun was the hero in goal for the Czechs, but it was a Vaclav Prospal goal early in the opening period that proved to be the game-winning goal.

2006 IIHF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

Top World Ranking spot up for grabs in Riga

■ For the first time since the inception of the IIHF World Ranking system, there is a new king. After winning the gold medal at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games, Sweden topped Canada for hockey's top spot. But the reign could be short lived depending on what happens at this year's IIHF World Championship in Riga.

The distance between the two teams is close, and it won't take much for Canada -- or a handful of other teams such as the Czech Republic and Finland, to pressure the Swedes for the top spot.

The report to the right shows just how close things are on the men's side of the IIHF World Ranking. In this Pre-Championship report, which now has entirely dropped the results from the 2002 Olympics and 2002 IIHF World Championship from the equation, Sweden holds a 70-point lead over the Czech Republic. The 70 point gap means that if, for example, the Czechs finish in first place (1200 points), while Sweden nabs the bronze (1120), the Czechs would hold the top spot in the final 2006 IIHF World Ranking.

Also of interest is the battle heating up for the North American squads not to lose any further ground in the ranking. The Canadians are ahead for Finland by 80 points, while the Americans hold a slim 20-point lead against the Swiss.

For the European teams, especially Switzerland, there is a strong motivation to gain ground in the World Ranking because ultimately, it determines their national champions' right to participate in the IIHF European Champions Cup. The Finns spot in the ECC is secure, but the Swiss would love to put even more distance between themselves and the Germans and the Latvians as only the top-six European teams qualify for the ECC.

The Pre Championship report is the best gauge of what exactly the 16 teams in Riga must do to climb the ranking. With all of the previous World Championships already reduced in value by the standard 25% that they lose with each passing season, and with the 2002 events eliminated from the equation, all teams have to do is add the points they earn from the 2006 finish in Riga to determine their place in final 2006 World Ranking.

Below is a brief explanation of how the World Ranking System works:

■ The IIHF World Ranking is based on awarding points for the final positions in the last four IIHF World Championships and in the last Olympic Ice Hockey Tournament. The final 2006 IIHF World Ranking will thus be based on the performance at the 2006, 2005, 2004 and the 2003 World Championships and at the 2006 Olympic tournament.

The team that wins the IIHF World Championship gold medal or the Olympic gold medal receives 1200 points. In general, there is a 20-point scale between two ranked positions. As an exception, there is a 40-point interval between gold and silver, silver and bronze, 4th and 5th position and between 8th and 9th position. This gives teams a bonus for reaching the quarter-finals, the semi-finals, the final and the gold.

■ For the ranking to accurately reflect current form, the greatest importance is given to results of the recent years' competition. To a lesser degree, attention is also paid to results from previous years. The system uses a four-year cycle as the points earned in one year decline linearly within the next 3 years and in the 5th year results are dropped from the calculation altogether.

Example: Value of the gold medal

Year 1: 100% value -- 1200 points
Year 2: 75% value -- 900 points
Year 3: 50% value -- 600 points
Year 4: 25% value -- 300 points
Year 5: 0% value -- 0 points

The IIHF World Ranking will be released following each IIHF World Championship and the Olympic tournament.

Before each World Championship, a pre-championship report is released in which the values of the previous seasons are already reduced according to the above-described procedure and where only the points of the upcoming competition need to be added to get the IIHF World Ranking for the year.

2006 IIHF PRE-CHAMPIONSHIP REPORT

Rank	Country	'06 Pre Tourn	After Turin-06
1	Sweden	2895	4030 (1)
2	Czech Republic	2825	3930 (3)
3	Canada	2790	3940 (2)
4	Finland	2710	3765 (5)
5	Slovakia	2685	3805 (4)
6	Russia	2665	3725 (6)
7	United States	2560	3575 (7)
8	Switzerland	2540	3525 (8)
9	Latvia	2370	3335 (9)
10	Germany	2310	3270 (10)
11	Kazakhstan	2275	3100 (11)
12	Belarus	2190	3035 (13)
13	Austria	2150	3045 (12)
14	Denmark	2125	2990 (15)
15	Ukraine	2105	3015 (14)
16	Italy	2055	2820 (17)
17	Slovenia	2050	2900 (16)
18	Norway	2015	2760 (18)
19	France	1980	2755 (19)
20	Poland	1860	2635 (20)
21	Japan	1840	2625 (21)
22	Hungary	1750	2460 (22)
23	Netherlands	1720	2400 (23)
24	Estonia	1665	2320 (24)
25	Romania	1575	2195 (25)
26	Lithuania	1510	2085 (26)
27	China	1430	1980 (27)
28	Croatia	1400	1970 (28)
29	Serbia & Mont.	1305	1815 (29)
30	Bulgaria	1215	1655 (30)
31	Great Britain	960	1610 (31)
32	Korea	800	1360 (32)
33	Belgium	740	1255 (33)
34	Australia	735	1195 (34)
35	Israel	695	1140 (35)
36	DPR Korea	685	1105 (36)
37	Spain	640	1090 (37)
38	New Zealand	565	910 (38)
39	Iceland	520	875 (39)
40	South Africa	490	845 (40)
41	Turkey	475	795 (41)
42	Luxembourg	465	785 (42)
43	Mexico	465	775 (43)
44	Ireland	325	455 (44)
45	Armenia	300	420 (45)

In the '06 Pre Tourn' column the values of the 2005, 2004 and 2003 championships are already reduced by 25% and the 2002 World Championship and Olympics have been dropped. The right column, shows the points the teams had after the Olympics, but before all the values were adjusted for the Pre-Tournament Report. To get the 2006 Final ranking, simply add the points from the Riga finish to the value in the team's '06 Pre Tourn' column.

POINTS TO EARN

Top Division

1	1200
2	1160
3	1120
4	1100
5	1060
6	1040
7	1020
8	1000
9	960
10	940
11	920
12	900
13	880
14	860
15	840
16	820

Division I

17	800
18	780
19	760
20	740
21	720
22	700
23	680
24	660
25	640
26	620
27	600
28	580

Division II

29	560
30	540
31	520
32	500
33	480
34	460
35	440
36	420
37	400
38	380
39	360
40	340

Division III

41	320
42	300
43	280
44	260
45	240

Latvian fans are timeless - but team

■ ■ The Latvian hockey fans are arguably the best in international hockey and finally they have been rewarded with a World Championship on home ice. But as the nation is looking forward to host the event, there are concerns about the future of an aging national squad.

By Peter Westermark

Lulea, Sweden

■ ■ These are both exciting and challenging times for hockey in Latvia. In the short term, there is excitement as the country is preparing to play its first-ever IIHF World Championship on home ice in Riga. The challenge is of a long-term nature: the small Baltic state is about to start rebuilding its national team, which has long relied on a core group of veterans for its success in international competition.



Photo: CITY PRESS, BERLIN

REALIST: Aleksandrs Belavskis expects no Latvian miracles in Riga.

For this year's tournament, the Latvian Ice Hockey Association has set a goal of finishing tenth. It is a goal that the loud and colorful fans who have followed their team throughout Europe in previous years fully understand.

"The fans are realistic with their expectations," says Aleksandrs Belavskis, the former Latvian star forward who competed in seven elite division World Championships and 104 national team games before succumbing to a knee injury in 2003. "They know what they can expect from the team. Nobody demands a great success, though it would be fabulous if it happened."

■ ■ Latvia's best result to date has been a seventh place finishes in 1997 (the year it first entered the top division) and 2004. But their greatest success was arguably when the team finished eighth in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2000 after

a 3-1 loss to the eventual gold medalist Czech Republic in the quarter-finals. The highlight was a 3-2 win over Russia where Belavskis opened the scoring in the second period with a fancy spin-o-rama move. Following the historic victory, Latvia erupted in celebration, and there were 7,000 people waiting to greet their heroes at the Riga railway station when the team returned from St. Petersburg.

Six years later, another success of that magnitude is unlikely. In 2000, many of Latvia's core veterans were on top of their game. At age 33, national hockey icon Arturs Irbe was the number one goaltender for the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes. Players like Leonids Tambijevs, Vyacheslav Fanduls, and Viktor Ignatjevs, all mainstays, had just turned 30.

■ ■ Now, out of pure necessity, Latvia has now started the process of replacing its veterans with younger players. In 2000, Latvia had one player aged 23 or younger, Janis Sprukts, who was 18 at the time. At last year's IIHF World Championship, Latvia had six players on the roster who were 23 or younger. With the rebuilding phase now moving into full swing, Belavskis realizes it might not be smooth sailing.

"There could be a problem," he says. "There are a lot of these young players who are without international experience. It will take great sacrifice from the guys just to maintain Latvia's status as a top division team at the World Championships."

Just as with other countries, the next generation of Latvian national team players will come from today's World Junior team. Latvia was promoted to the top division at that level last year, but finished ninth out of ten teams at the 2006 IIHF World U20 Championship in Vancouver, Canada and was relegated.

Currently, HK Riga 2000 produces the vast majority of Latvia's junior national players. In 2006, Latvia used 16 players from its domestic league, and all came from the capi-



tal's powerhouse club. In 2005, it was 17 out of 18 domestic players.

"Riga has always been a hockey stronghold," says Belavskis. "Dinamo Riga played in the Soviet League for ten or fifteen years. Now, all the hockey schools are there. But hockey is also developing in the peripheral cities in Latvia. Give it ten years, and you'll see players besides Riga on the national junior team."

Developing youngsters into solid professionals is a challenge anywhere, but for a small nation which gained its sovereignty about 15 years ago, it is even tougher.

"There is no junior league in Latvia, so the kids are playing in the senior league," says Belavskis, who has just finished his first season coaching at the senior level in Sweden. "It's a hard way to develop, for sure. The kids want to become good hockey players, but the main problem is that there just aren't that many coaches here. Most guys are old, and there's no development or recruitment of new young coaches."

■ ■ Belavskis might be just the type of hockey man that the Latvian hockey program should recruit. His team, Björklöven, surpassed pre-season expectations by finishing fifth in Sweden's second league. Surprisingly enough, Belavskis was not given a new contract by the club, and is now a free agent.

"I would consider a return to Latvian hockey if I was given a chance to build and develop a team," he admits. "That's definitely a possibility."

Read about Latvia's forgotten hockey history and their future on page 9.

needs influx of youth



Photo: EUROPHOTO

"SARUJ, LATVIJA!": The IIHF World Championship changed dramatically in 1997 in Finland, when Latvia was promoted to the elite division and suddenly the arenas were invaded by jolly hockey pilgrims dressed in maroon. Many of them are spending their annual savings on travel, game tickets and accommodation to get to follow their national team. The fans in the photo below took a Latvian Love Bug to follow the 2003 championship in Finland.



Sergei Zholtok's memory lives on

By Lucas Aykroyd

Vancouver

■ It is a supreme and tragic irony that Sergei Zholtok will not take the opening faceoff for Latvia when the host team plays its first game of the 2006 IIHF World Championship versus the Czech Republic on May 5.

The Riga-born center was arguably the greatest forward his country has ever produced, with only Helmutis Balderis, the legendary puck wizard of the 1970's and 80's, challenging for that title. But during last year's NHL lockout, Zholtok was playing for HC Riga 2000 in a game in Minsk, Belarus when he suffered an apparent heart attack with five minutes left. Paramedics tried to revive the 31-year-old, who had a history of cardiac arrhythmia, but he died in the dressing room.

Participating in the biggest event in Latvian sports history this spring would have been second nature for the star forward, even with the added thrill of competing in front of friends and family. Zholtok never turned down a chance to play internationally.

■ In his late teens, he got his first taste of that experience when he was named to Soviet and Russian World Junior squads. But when Latvia gained its post-Soviet independence and began battling to gain respect in the hockey world, the swift-skating forward was even more excited to don the maroon-and-white jersey. After sparking the offense with six goals and an assist at the 1994 B Pool tourney, he went on to play at five elite-division World Championships. Zholtok set the tone up front in Latvia's historic seventh-place finish in 1997, and while larger or better-known hockey nations were relegated, he helped Latvia stay up in 1999, 2001, 2002, and 2004.

Zholtok also made his mark in the NHL, playing 588 games and racking up 258 points. He began his NHL career with the Boston Bruins and scored a career-best 26 goals for the Montreal Canadiens in 1999-00, also making appearances with Ottawa, Edmonton, and Nashville. But he played 228 regular season and playoff games with the Minnesota Wild from 2001 to 2004, more than with any other franchise, and his former teammates there probably knew him better than anyone in his final years. *Ice Times* spoke to Filip Kuba and Andrei Zyuzin.

"He was one of our leaders, for sure," says Czech defenseman Filip Kuba. "He competed for us every night. He was a guy who cared a lot for his family and his country as well. We have a big picture of him in the locker room with a big smile on his face. That's just how he was. He was always in a good mood."

■ Russian blueliner Andrei Zyuzin was particularly close to Zholtok: "My family is still in touch with his wife and kids, who still live in Minnesota. It was a tough loss. I saw him three weeks before he died, back in Minnesota during the lockout. We hung out together a lot away from the rink. His second son -- he has two sons, one is 16 and the other is five or six -- and my son is three, so they would play together. Our wives are pretty good friends, so we'd go to dinner together and do stuff together."

Zyuzin testifies that Zholtok's love of the world's fastest team sport was never in doubt: "Sergei was one of a kind. He was a warrior. Hockey, for him, was everything. He cared a lot in his heart about his teammates and every play, every time he went on the ice. Sometimes I'd tell him: 'Hey, Sergei, enough talking about hockey. Let's talk about something else!' But he was so in love with hockey. Number one for him was always hockey, along with his family."

"I have a lot of good, funny memories of Sergei, from the locker room and on the ice during practices," adds Zyuzin. "He always made some jokes. We were always laughing, especially me and Andrew Brunette and Jimmy Dowd, because of things he would do. Sergei did so much for the Minnesota Wild. He was just a great man and a great hockey player. I'm proud to have been part of his life as his friend."

■ The IIHF salutes the memory of Sergei Zholtok and his contributions to hockey around the world.

2006 IIHF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

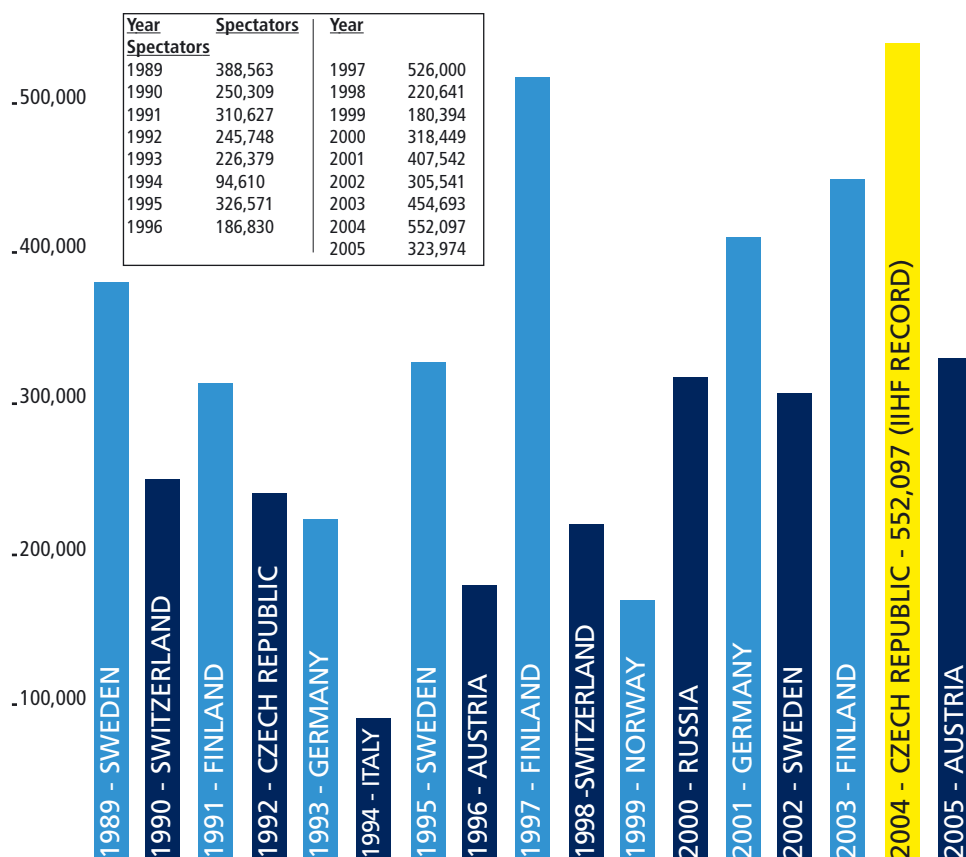
Where does your team stand in the IIHF Record Book?

ALL-TIME IIHF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

Top Division Sorted by Points

Country	Years	Games	Wins	Ties	Losses	Points	Goals for	Goals against	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
TCH/CZE	65	519	338	45	136	721	2398	1177	11	12	19	42
CAN	59	450	315	31	104	661	2456	949	23	11	9	43
SWE	64	515	300	53	164	652	2191	1375	7	18	14	39
URS/RUS	48	396	307	30	59	644	2328	759	23	8	6	37
USA	57	433	196	39	198	431	1696	1641	2	9	5	16
FIN	52	429	173	51	205	397	1456	1663	1	5	1	7
FRG/GER	52	394	117	42	235	276	1013	1732	0	1	2	3
SUI	40	266	94	22	150	210	875	1149	0	1	8	9
POL	30	218	45	16	157	106	495	1226	0	0	0	0
AUT	28	165	45	16	104	106	399	716	0	0	0	2
ITA	23	139	37	21	81	95	329	685	0	0	0	0
GBR	15	91	44	4	43	92	298	360	1	2	2	5
SVK	10	75	40	10	25	90	250	177	1	1	1	3
NOR	24	148	33	10	105	76	356	746	0	0	0	0
LAT	14	80	29	8	43	66	205	255	0	0	0	0
GDR	14	119	27	10	82	64	277	653	0	0	0	0
FRA	21	103	24	3	76	51	189	472	0	0	0	0
HUN	11	62	16	7	39	39	113	176	0	0	0	0
BLR	6	36	16	2	18	34	82	97	0	0	0	0
ROM	10	60	13	1	46	27	125	372	0	0	0	0
JPN	13	65	10	7	48	27	176	419	0	0	0	0
UKR	7	39	9	4	26	22	74	143	0	0	0	0
YUG	3	19	8	2	9	18	68	131	0	0	0	0
BEL	12	43	6	1	36	13	83	418	0	0	0	0
SLO	3	18	5	1	12	11	39	95	0	0	0	0
DEN	4	21	4	1	16	9	39	163	0	0	0	0
KAZ	3	15	3	1	11	7	26	50	0	0	0	0
NED	4	22	2	0	20	4	34	156	0	0	0	0
LIT	1	4	1	0	3	0	3	33	0	0	0	0
AUS	1	6	0	0	6	0	10	87	0	0	0	0

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ATTENDANCE (since 1989)



IIHF World Championship

All-time Record Book

Most World Championships (top pool)

1. Jiri Holik	14	TCH	1964-77
1. Sven Tumba	14	SWE	1952-77
3. Lasse Oksanen	13	FIN	1964-77
3. Dieter Hegen	13	FRG	1982-98
3. Ronald Pettersson	13	SWE	1955-67
3. Vladislav Tretiak	13	URS	1970-83
3. Udo Kiessling	13	FRG	1973-91

Most World Championship Games

1. Jiri Holik	CZE	123 games
2. Lasse Oksanen	FIN	117 games
2. Vladislav Tretiak	URS	117 games
4. Oldrich Machac	TCH	113 games
5. Udo Kiessling	FRG	109 games

Most World Championship Points

1. Boris Mikhailov	URS	169 points
2. Valeri Kharlamov	URS	159 points
3. Alexander Maltsev	URS	156 points
4. Vladimir Petrov	URS	154 points
5. Sven Tumba	SWE	127 points

Most World Championship Medals

1. Vladislav Tretiak	URS	13	10G, 2S, 1B
2. Alexander Ragulin	URS	12	10G, 1S, 1B
3. Alexander Maltsev	URS	12	9G, 2S, 1B
3. Vladimir Petrov	URS	12	9G, 2S, 1B
5. Vitaly Davydov	URS	10	9G, 1S
5. Vyacheslav Starshinov	URS	10	9G, 1B

The new hockey nation is proud of its old past...

■ ■ While Latvia's modern puck era started in 1992, the Baltic nation's hockey history is more than 75 years old. Out of the many new nations who joined the IIHF in the early 90s as the map of Europe was redrawn, Latvia is the only one that had a national team participating in the pre-war IIHF World Championships and Olympics. Today, Latvia is a mainstay in the top pool of the IIHF World Championship and has been so since 1997.

Like most other European countries, hockey in Latvia developed from the tradition game of bandy - field hockey on ice. Bandy championships were already taking place in Riga prior to World War I and the city later became the center of hockey in Latvia. Three Riga-based teams - the German Club Union, the university sport club US (Universitates Sports), and the army sports club ASK - became some of the best-known teams in Europe by the 1930s. Latvia held its first championship in 1931-32, with nine teams taking part. The national championship of the Republic of Latvia (as a part of the Soviet Union) began in 1946 and were held ever year until the breakup of the USSR.

■ ■ The Latvijas Hokeja Federacija (Latvian Ice Hockey Federation) was founded on January 5, 1923 and became a member of the IIHF on February 22, 1931. The Latvian national team played its first international game on February 27, 1932 and beat Lithuania 3-0. Its first international tournament was the 1932 European Championship in Berlin. Prior to World War II, Latvia took part in five IIHF World Championships, including the 1936 Olympic Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. The most successful Latvian player of this time period was Leonids Vedejs, who played in 34 out of 36 international games for Latvia between 1932 and 1940.

Pre-World War II Latvia's last international match was a 2-1 victory over Estonia in Riga on March 10, 1940. On April 27, 1946, Latvia's membership from the IIHF was dissolved after becoming a part of the Soviet Union. During the late 1940's, goaltender Harijs was the best Latvian player. His untimely death in 1950 cut short a promising career.

■ ■ Following its incorporation into the Soviet Union after World War II, the best Latvian teams began to play for the USSR championship and Latvian players often acted as coaches for other Soviet players. The most successful Latvian team was Dynamo Riga which was coached by the legendary National Team instructor Viktor Tikhonov from 1971 to 1977. The first well known Latvian player was Helmut Balderis,

who starred for the Soviet national team from 1976 to 1983. Latvians Arturs Irbe and Sandis Ozolinsh have made major impacts in the NHL during the 1990's.

After regaining its independence following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Latvia again held a national championship in 1991-92. Since then, the top clubs have been NIK'S Brih Riga, Essamika Ogre, Juniors Riga, Riga Alianse and BHS Ogre. Latvia rejoined the IIHF on May 6, 1992.

■ ■ "New" Latvia played its first national team friendly on November 14 the same year, losing to Finland 6-3 in Tampere, but already the next day the Latvians won their first national team game in 52 years defeating the Finns 6-3 in Jyvaskyla.

The "Maroons" rose quickly through the IIHF World Championship pool system. Latvia won the C Pool tournament in 1993 and the B Pool three years later. They finished seventh at their top division comeback in the 1997 IIHF World Championship in Finland and they were successful in qualifying for both the 2002 and the 2006 Olympics.

■ ■ Despite the on ice success, the young nation's biggest hockey achievement came during the 2001 IIHF Annual Congress in Hanover, Germany when Latvia was allocated the 2006 IIHF World Championship, becoming the 15th country to organize this event. It will be the first time since 1966 (Ljubljana, former Yugoslavia) that the IIHF World Championship will be hosted in a country for the first time.

-- with files from hockey historian Igor Kuperman, Toronto

... and celebrates its next generation of hockey stars

■ ■ It may not have been the Men's World Championship, but it sure felt like it when Latvia's U18 team took to the ice in Riga for the final game of the Division I U18 World Championship in early April.

The fans came out in droves to support their young maroon and white clad players throughout the week-long championship. But it was the last game of the championship that got the junior hockey world talking. In that contest, more than 10,000 fans packed into the new, state-of-the-art Arena Riga to watch the Latvians take on Denmark. At stake was a promotion to the top division as both teams were undefeated entering the game.

The massive crowd wasn't disappointed as the game proved to have as much drama as most top-level games. Denmark, unfazed by the large crowd, took a commanding 3-0 lead in the first 10 minutes before Latvia got their jitters under control and scored the next four straight goals. The Danes tied things at four to close the second period, making for tense moments for the Latvian faithful.

■ ■ But in the third, the fans were rewarded as the Latvian squad came out and rattled in three straight goals for the 7-4 win and the promotion. Gatis Gricinskis had three goals and one assist, while Arturs Ozolins added five assists.



Photo: ENRICO CALCATERRA COLLECTION

ORIGINAL LATVIANS: The host of the 70th IIHF World Championship is the only one of the nations who joined the IIHF in the early 90s who also took part in world championships and Olympics before World War II. This photo depicts the 1933 Latvian national team that took part in the world championship in Czechoslovakia that year, finishing 10th.



Photo: LATVIAN ICE HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

THE NEW FAVOURITES: Latvia's U18 national team gained promotion to the top pool after a 7-4 victory over Denmark in front of a sell-out crowd (10,000) at the brand new Arena Riga. It is believed to be the highest attendance figure ever at a IIHF World U18 Championship, top pool included.

The world's oldest hockey club completes 130th season

■ Want to impress your hockey friends with a trivia question? Here it is:

Q: What is the oldest, still existing, hockey club in the world? **A:** The McGill University hockey club from Montreal, also named the "Redmen". This season, McGill celebrated its 130th season of continuous hockey activity. The inaugural season was 1876-77.

During 2005-06, McGill set a school record for victories enroute to posting a 30-3-8 won-tied-lost record overall, including a spectacular 20-3-1 mark in regular-season play. McGill qualified for its first-ever appearance at the Canadian Interuniversity Sport national championship tournament, where they finished tied for third.

McGill University, founded in 1821, is steeped in tradition in the origins of sport, and is one of the most prominent academic institutions in North America. Sports were played at McGill on an informal basis and through club teams from about the middle of the 19th century.

A blueprint for the game of hockey began around 1873, when James Creighton, who would eventually go on to study law at McGill from 1876 to 1879, devised informal rules for a new winter game in Montreal, which later became known as ice hockey.

■ On March 3, 1875, two pick-up teams, composed of a number McGill students, played in the Montreal's Victoria Skating Rink in what is recognized by the Society for International Hockey Research as the first-ever public display of indoor hockey.

McGill students eventually formed the first organized hockey team and on January 31, 1877, they defeated members of the Victoria Skating Club by a 2-1 score in McGill's first official game. One month later, on Feb. 27, 1877, The *Montreal Gazette* published the first rules used for hockey -- there were only seven rules in all -- based on field hockey rules that had been published a few years earlier.

On February 28, 1881, the McGill team posed in Montreal's Crystal Pace Rink for what was to be the world's first photograph of a hockey team. See photo right. Before 1900, McGill teams featured chocolate-coloured striped uniforms. After 1900,



Photos: MCGILL (new photo) and NOTMAN ARCHIVES (old)

HOCKEY PIONEERS: The 130th edition of the McGill Redmen hockey club from Montreal poses for a team photo following the 2005-06 campaign, one of the most successful in the ancient club's history which began in 1875. Two years later, in 1877, McGill started to play organized hockey. To the right is the first known photograph of a group that called themselves a hockey team and wore uniforms; the McGill University club posing for a photo on February 28, 1881 at the Crystal Palace Skating Rink in Montreal.



the school colours were officially changed to red and white. Since those early days over a century ago, McGill has won 23 hockey championships and 13 former members of McGill's hockey teams have gone on to win a combined total of 34 Stanley Cup titles. In addition, 12 former members of the McGill team have been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

■ Double Olympic gold medal winner, Kim St. Pierre, goaltender of Team Canada's women's national team is probably the most famous McGill female player. St. Pierre, also a winner of four IIHF World Championship gold medals, made headlines two years ago when she played a few games with McGill's men's team.

-- Szymon Szemberg, with files from Earl Zukermann, International Society for Hockey Research

Record setting SC Bern becomes first European club to close in on the 16,000 mark in attendance average - Köln second again

Best attendance figures in European hockey leagues 2005-2006
(Last column indicates capacity percentage)

1. (1)	SC Bern,	SUI	15'994	% 95,3
2. (2)	Kölner Haie	GER	12'453	% 67,3
3. (4)	Frölunda Indians,	SWE	11'682	% 97,0
4. (28)	Adler Mannheim	GER	11'057	% 81,3
5. (3)	Hamburg Freezers	GER	10'748	% 83,9
6. (6)	Lokomotiv Yaroslavl	RUS	8'865	% 98,0
7. (5)	Jokerit, Helsinki	FIN	8'850	% 64,7
8. (x)	ZSC Lions, Zürich	SUI	8'539	% 73,0
9. (7)	HC Moeller-Pardubice	CZE	8'449	% 91,3
10. (8)	Färjestads BK, Karlstad	SWE	7'663	% 92,9
11. (9)	Linköping HC	SWE	7'531	
12. (14)	HV71 Jönköping	SWE	7'014	
13. (11)	Djurgårdens IF, Sthlm	SWE	6'964	
14. (16)	Sibir Novosibirsk	RUS	6'936	
15. (13)	HIFK Helsinki	FIN	6'821	
16. (19)	DEG Metro Stars	GER	6'625	
17. (x)	Leksands IF	SWE	6'487	
18. (12)	TPS Turku	FIN	6'444	
19. (17)	Frankfurt Lions	GER	6'319	
20. (x)	Hannover Scorpions	GER	5'851	
21. (24)	Ilves Tampere	FIN	5'867	
22. (26)	Tappara Tampere	FIN	5'866	
23. (22)	Kärpät Oulu	FIN	5'791	
24. (x)	Bili Tygri Liberec	CZE	5'485	
25. (10)	Slavia Prague	CZE	5'367	

Photo: FRÖLUNDA INDIANS HC



PARTY TIME IS ANYTIME... Frölunda plays in the Swedish league as the club averages 97% of capacity.

■ Swiss league's regular season champion SC Bern set a new all-time attendance record for a club team in Europe in 2005-06. The club from the nation's capital recorded an average of 15,994 fans in 22 home games in the 16,789 BernArena, to top all European clubs for a fifth consecutive year.

This is the first time a European club closed in on the 16,000-barrier, only a season after Bern became the first club in European hockey to surpass the average of 15,000. The club recorded 15,360 fans per game during the 2004-05-season. In 2000-2001, the season the IIHF started the Top-25 list, Bern averaged barely over 10,000 fans per game.

It was generally believed that the attendance figures in the European leagues would decrease following the extraordinary 2004-05 season when over 380 NHL-players signed with European clubs, but that proved to be false. Not only did Bern record an increase, but also the second and third placed clubs on the IIHF-list, Kölner Haie (Germany) and Frölunda Indians,

Göteborg (Sweden), recorded increased spectator numbers.

■ Kölner Haie finished second (for the fifth consecutive year) with an average of 12,453 (12,235 in 04-05) fans per game in the 18,502 KölnArena, while Frölunda Indians is the new number three with an average of 11,682 (11,676 in 04-05) in the 12,044 Scandinavium arena. Frölunda's record is also a Swedish league all-time high. The reigning Swedish champion also set an impressive mark with 47 (and counting) consecutive regular season games with plus-10,000 fans in attendance (dating back to October 2, 2004).

German league Adler Mannheim was the most improved club, jumping from 5,138 and a 28th position to 11,057 and a fourth place on the list.

This is, of course, due to the club's recent move to the state-of-the-art 13,600-seat SAP Arena, one of the projected venues for the 2010 IIHF World Championship in Germany (the KölnArena is the other).

RESULTS SUMMARY

IIHF World U18 Championship Div. I, Group A

Miskolc, HUNGARY, April 3-9

France - Slovenia	2 - 7	(0-4, 1-2, 1-1)
Austria - Kazakhstan	4 - 10	(2-2, 1-6, 1-2)
Hungary - Switzerland	2 - 5	(0-2, 2-1, 0-2)
Slovenia - Austria	5 - 4	(1-1, 4-0, 0-3)
Switzerland - France	6 - 3	(1-0, 2-1, 3-2)
Kazakhstan - Hungary	5 - 3	(2-1, 1-2, 2-0)
Switzerland - Austria	4 - 3	(1-0, 3-2, 0-1)
Slovenia - Kazakhstan	4 - 3	(1-0, 1-2, 2-1)
Hungary - France	4 - 4	(0-0, 2-2, 2-2)
Kazakhstan - Switzerland	2 - 2	(1-1, 1-1, 0-0)
France - Austria	4 - 4	(3-1, 1-1, 0-1)
Slovenia - Hungary	3 - 2	(0-0, 0-2, 3-0)
Kazakhstan - France	5 - 7	(1-1, 1-1, 3-5)
Switzerland - Slovenia	1 - 0	(1-0, 0-0, 0-0)
Austria - Hungary	7 - 3	(3-0, 2-2, 2-1)

Switzerland	5	4	1	0	18-10	9
Slovenia	5	4	0	1	19-12	8
Kazakhstan	5	2	1	2	25-20	5
France	5	1	2	2	20-26	4
Austria	5	1	1	3	22-26	3
Hungary	5	0	1	4	14-24	1

*Switzerland is promoted to 2007 World U18 Championship
Hungary is relegated to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. II*

IIHF World U18 Championship Div. I, Group B

Riga, LATVIA, April 2-8

Japan - Ukraine	8 - 1	(1-1, 2-0, 5-0)
Korea - Denmark	1 - 3	(0-0, 1-1, 0-2)
Poland - Latvia	0 - 1	(0-0, 0-1, 0-0)
Denmark - Poland	5 - 2	(1-0, 0-2, 4-0)
Ukraine - Korea	5 - 2	(1-0, 3-2, 1-0)
Latvia - Japan	6 - 1	(0-1, 2-0, 4-0)
Denmark - Japan	5 - 2	(2-1, 1-0, 2-1)
Korea - Poland	3 - 6	(0-0, 1-5, 2-1)
Latvia - Ukraine	7 - 0	(2-0, 2-0, 3-0)
Ukraine - Denmark	0 - 7	(0-1, 0-3, 0-3)
Poland - Japan	1 - 5	(0-0, 0-3, 1-2)
Latvia - Korea	6 - 2	(1-0, 5-1, 0-1)
Japan - Korea	3 - 3	(2-1, 0-1, 1-1)
Ukraine - Poland	1 - 7	(0-2, 0-2, 1-3)
Denmark - Latvia	4 - 7	(3-2, 1-2, 0-3)

Latvia	5	5	0	0	27-7	10
Denmark	5	4	0	1	24-12	8
Japan	5	2	1	2	19-16	5
Poland	5	2	0	3	16-15	4
Ukraine	5	1	0	4	7-31	2
Korea	5	0	1	4	11-23	1

*Latvia is promoted to 2007 World U18 Championship
Korea is relegated to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. II*

IIHF World U18 Championship Div. II, Group A

Bolzano, Merano, ITALY, April 2-8

Netherlands - Belgium	5 - 0	(1-0, 3-0, 1-0)
Estonia - Serbia & Mont.	6 - 1	(3-0, 1-0, 2-1)
Italy - Spain	7 - 0	(3-0, 2-0, 2-0)
Spain - Estonia	0 - 2	(0-1, 0-1, 0-0)

Serbia & Mont. - Netherlands	3 - 5	(0-3, 1-1, 2-1)
Belgium - Italy	1 - 10	(1-4, 0-2, 0-4)
Estonia - Netherlands	2 - 8	(2-3, 0-2, 0-3)
Belgium - Spain	3 - 5	(2-1, 1-2, 0-2)
Italy - Serbia & Mont.	7 - 0	(4-0, 2-0, 1-0)
Spain - Serbia & Mont.	2 - 10	(2-3, 0-3, 0-4)
Estonia - Belgium	2 - 2	(0-1, 2-1, 0-0)
Netherlands - Italy	0 - 2	(0-1, 0-1, 0-0)
Serbia & Mont. - Belgium	1 - 6	(0-1, 1-2, 0-3)
Netherlands - Spain	10 - 1	(4-0, 1-0, 5-0)
Italy - Estonia	9 - 1	(2-0, 4-0, 3-1)

Italy	5	5	0	0	35-2	10
Netherlands	5	4	0	1	28-8	8
Estonia	5	2	1	2	13-20	5
Belgium	5	1	1	3	12-23	3
Serbia & Mont.	5	1	0	4	15-26	2
Spain	5	1	0	4	8-32	2

*Italy is promoted to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. I
Spain is relegated to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. III*

IIHF World U18 Championship Div. II, Group B

Elektrenai & Kaunas LITHUANIA, April 15-21

Australia - Great Britain	0 - 11	(0-3, 0-4, 0-4)
Iceland - Croatia	1 - 11	(0-5, 0-4, 1-2)
Mexico - Lithuania	3 - 8	(1-3, 1-3, 1-2)
Croatia - Australia	2 - 5	(2-0, 0-2, 0-3)
Great Britain - Mexico	6 - 2	(1-2, 2-0, 3-0)
Lithuania - Iceland	9 - 1	(4-0, 4-0, 1-1)
Great Britain - Iceland	14 - 1	(2-0, 5-1, 7-1)
Australia - Mexico	3 - 4	(1-1, 1-2, 1-1)
Lithuania - Croatia	11 - 5	(1-2, 7-1, 3-2)
Mexico - Iceland	1 - 0	(1-0, 0-0, 0-0)
Croatia - Great Britain	0 - 6	(0-2, 0-2, 0-2)
Lithuania - Australia	10 - 0	(2-0, 6-0, 2-0)
Iceland - Australia	3 - 5	(3-3, 0-1, 0-1)
Croatia - Mexico	4 - 0	(1-0, 1-0, 2-0)
Great Britain - Lithuania	3 - 1	(0-0, 1-1, 2-0)

Great Britain	5	5	0	0	40-5	10
Lithuania	5	4	0	1	39-12	8
Croatia	5	2	0	3	22-23	4
Mexico	5	2	0	3	10-21	4
Australia	5	2	0	3	13-30	4
Iceland	5	0	0	5	7-40	0

*Great Britain is promoted to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. I
Iceland is relegated to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. III*

IIHF World U18 Championship Div. III

Miercurea Ciuc, ROMANIA, March 13-19

New Zealand - South Africa	4 - 4	(0-1, 3-1, 1-2)
Turkey - Israel	3 - 14	(0-4, 1-6, 2-4)
Bulgaria - Romania	0 - 18	(0-3, 0-7, 0-8)
South Africa - Turkey	12 - 1	(3-0, 4-1, 5-0)
Israel - Bulgaria	14 - 1	(4-0, 5-1, 5-0)
Romania - New Zealand	14 - 0	(2-0, 3-0, 9-0)
South Africa - Israel	5 - 8	(3-4, 2-3, 0-1)
Bulgaria - New Zealand	3 - 3	(0-2, 1-1, 2-0)
Romania - Turkey	15 - 1	(4-0, 6-1, 5-0)
South Africa - Bulgaria	4 - 1	(0-0, 2-1, 2-0)
New Zealand - Turkey	17 - 1	(7-1, 6-0, 4-0)
Israel - Romania	2 - 13	(0-5, 1-4, 1-4)
Turkey - Bulgaria	2 - 5	(1-2, 1-1, 0-2)

Israel - New Zealand	4 - 4	(1-2, 1-0, 2-2)
Romania - South Africa	8 - 0	(5-0, 1-0, 2-0)

Romania	5	5	0	0	68-3	10
Israel	5	3	1	1	42-26	7
South Africa	5	2	1	2	25-22	5
New Zealand	5	1	3	1	28-26	5
Bulgaria	5	1	1	3	10-41	3
Turkey	5	0	0	5	8-63	0

Romania & Israel promoted to 2007 World U18 Championship Div. II

IIHF World Championship Div. II, Group A

Sofia, BULGARIA, March 27-April 2

Romania - Belgium	4 - 2	(2-0, 2-0, 0-2)
Serbia & Mont. - Spain	4 - 1	(1-1, 2-0, 1-0)
Bulgaria - South Africa	14 - 1	(5-0, 3-1, 6-0)
Belgium - Serbia & Mont.	2 - 2	(0-0, 1-0, 1-2)
South Africa - Romania	3 - 19	(0-5, 0-6, 3-8)
Spain - Bulgaria	1 - 3	(0-2, 1-1, 0-0)
Romania - Spain	16 - 3	(6-0, 5-0, 5-3)
South Africa - Belgium	0 - 7	(0-3, 0-1, 0-3)
Serbia & Mont. - Bulgaria	2 - 4	(0-1, 1-2, 1-1)
Serbia & Mont. - South Africa	14 - 5	(3-1, 8-1, 3-3)
Belgium - Spain	4 - 0	(2-0, 0-0, 2-0)
Bulgaria - Romania	0 - 9	(0-1, 0-1, 0-7)
Spain - South Africa	5 - 3	(2-1, 2-0, 1-2)
Romania - Serbia & Mont.	11 - 1	(3-1, 3-0, 5-0)
Bulgaria - Belgium	4 - 4	(2-2, 1-1, 1-1)

Romania	5	5	0	0	59-9	10
Bulgaria	5	3	1	1	25-17	7
Belgium	5	2	2	1	19-10	6
Serbia & Mont.	5	2	1	2	23-23	5
Spain	5	1	0	4	10-30	2
South Africa	5	0	0	5	12-59	0

*Romania is promoted to 2007 World Championship Div. I
South Africa is relegated to 2007 World Championship Div. III*

IIHF World Championship Div. II, Group B

Auckland, NEW ZEALAND, April 3-9

DPR Korea - Australia	1 - 5	(0-3, 0-1, 1-1)
Mexico - China	1 - 4	(0-2, 1-2, 0-0)
New Zealand - Korea	1 - 8	(0-5, 1-1, 0-2)
China - DPR Korea	14 - 2	(6-0, 4-1, 4-1)
Korea - Mexico	15 - 2	(5-0, 7-2, 3-0)
Australia - New Zealand	6 - 2	(1-0, 2-0, 3-2)
Australia - Korea	2 - 4	(0-3, 1-0, 1-1)
Mexico - DPR Korea	0 - 3	(0-2, 0-0, 0-1)
China - New Zealand	5 - 0	(1-0, 2-0, 2-0)
Australia - Mexico	9 - 2	(2-0, 4-0, 3-2)
Korea - China	3 - 6	(1-0, 1-4, 1-2)
DPR Korea - New Zealand	3 - 0	(0-0, 1-0, 2-0)
Korea - DPR Korea	5 - 1	(2-1, 2-0, 1-0)
China - Australia	5 - 5	(2-2, 1-1, 2-2)
New Zealand - Mexico	3 - 4	(0-2, 1-2, 2-0)

China	5	4	1	0	34-11	9
Korea	5	4	0	1	35-12	8
Australia	5	3	1	1	27-14	7
DPR Korea	5	2	0	3	10-24	4
Mexico	5	1	0	4	34-25	2
New Zealand	5	0	0	5	6-26	0

*China is promoted to 2007 World Championship Div. I
New Zealand is relegated to 2007 World Championship Div. III*

HUNGRY FOR SUCCESS: Hungary is one of the world's fastest developing hockey countries and one of the most frequent organizers of IIHF World Championship events on all levels. The Hungarians also build new ice rinks at an impressive pace, which is a key to develop a strong hockey program. The other year, a beautiful 5,500-seat arena in Debrecen was opened and this season a 1,200-seat rink in the city of Miskolc was unveiled, just in time to host the 2006 IIHF World U18 Championship, Division I. On top of the seating capacity, the arena also has standing room for another 800 fans. The construction was completed in just seven months and the cost was 4 million Euros. Unfortunately, friendly ghosts hadn't had time to settle in the brand new arena as the hosting nation finished last and was relegated to division II for next season. The championship itself was nevertheless as success and the photos show, the games in the new arena were well attended. **Small photo:** Action from the game between Slovenia and Hungary, a game in which Hungary surrendered a 2-0-lead in the third period and lost 3-2.



Photo: CSABA VEGH, Icehockey2006.hu

Ovechkin - so young, so good and so soon



□□ This is the second time this space of *Ice Times* features Russian phenom Alexander Ovechkin. The first time was in 2002 after the 16-year old participated in his first IIHF World U18 Championship, scoring 14 goals in 8 games. His greatness was not difficult to predict as the headline read: "Does future of hockey spell Ovechkin?" Four years later, there are observers who claim that the 20-year old Ovechkin is the best player in the world. *Ice Times* sent writer John Sanful to an NHL game on Long Island to find out.

By John Sanful
New York

■ ■ It's early April and one hour before game time at the Nassau Veteran's Memorial Coliseum where the Washington Capitals will play the New York Islanders. The building is almost empty, except for a few early arriving ticket-holders.

However, there are two conspicuous figures on the ice. Wearing only a workout suit and bright yellow water shoes, Alexander Ovechkin is firing shots on an empty goal. Lithuanian teammate Dainius Zubrus slides cross ice passes to Ovechkin who whips a shot on his chosen spot on net. Even now, Ovechkin displays laser-like focus because moments like these further prepare him for when the game starts. It seems since he's burst onto the scene, Ovechkin has been preparing for success.

Ovechkin was touted as a future star already when playing for Russia in the IIHF World U18 Championships four years ago. Now there is no doubt that he's a superstar in this his rookie season in the NHL.

Ovechkin is a triple award threat. He's the odds-on favorite to win the Rookie of the Year award; is also in contention for the Maurice Richard trophy as leading goal-scorer and a darkhorse candidate for the Hart trophy as league MVP. Ovechkin has scored the most goals by an NHL rookie since 1992-93 when Teemu Selanne set a record with 76 and on April 10 he became only the sixth NHL rookie to reach 100 points.

"This has been a great year for me," he remarked about his rookie season. "Even though we did not make the playoffs, this is a good team and the players have been real good to me, which makes me play better and have fun."

■ ■ Ovechkin is a pure offensive force. When the puck is on his stick, all eyes are fixated on his every move. Fans marvel at the uncanny ability to skate and stick-handle; opposing skaters curse their fortune having to defend such a skilled player. His ability to play physical hockey has impressed even the most skeptical observers.



Photo: JUKKA RAUTIO

ALEXANDER THE GR8: Few players are so emotional in everything they do on the ice as Alexander Ovechkin. Here, Ovechkin has every reason to rejoice as he celebrates his winning goal against Canada in the Turin Olympics and gets a hug from Fedor Tyutin.

While his transition to North America seems effortless, there have been some adjustments. In leaving the comfort zone of Russia and the Russian Super League, Ovechkin had to better learn to speak English.

"It took some time getting used to learning how to speak better English, communicating with everyone, and learning so many different things," he said. "But Zuby (Dainius Zubrus) has really helped me with that and it's made a big difference."

He's also had to adapt to the rigors of an 82-game regular season.

"The travel is the big thing, no question about it" said Ovechkin of the difference between the Russian league and NHL. "There is a lot of travel here. You have to stay focused and well rested to compete for so many games."

■ ■ Ovechkin has that something special. There's never a moment of fear or hesitation when he collects the puck on his stick and heads up ice. What does it all mean? Only that Ovechkin is succeeding because he's sure of himself. It's less cocky than confident.

It's clear to see that intensity when he goes against Sidney Crosby. Crosby, the first overall pick in 2005, is

expected to be the next great hope of the NHL. The odds are Ovechkin will have something to say about that.

Prior to the Capitals and Penguins final meeting of the season on March 8th, Crosby had gotten the better of the two in head-to-head competition. Pittsburgh outscored Washington 19-8 in the first three meetings. The last game belonged to Ovechkin, who scored his 42nd goal and added two assists in a 6-3 home win.

"The competition is always high when we play each other," Crosby said after the game. "That's to be expected. It's just the way it goes - someone has to come out on top."

The two will vie for important hardware in years to come; and each game they meet will take on more significance than the last. But as this season progressed Ovechkin has clearly been the more dominant of the two in year one.

"All season people ask who is better me or Sidney Crosby, but all I can do is play my game and not think about it. He has his job to do, and so do I."

Every game their teams meet is an indication of what future impact these two marquee players will have. We're watching the dawn of a new age in the NHL where the guard has truly been passed.

■ ■ With the Capitals out of the playoff race, Ovechkin is set to join Team Russia at the IIHF World Championships in Latvia. While an NHL rookie, Ovechkin has already twice participated in the World Championships. Coming off an impressive Olympic debut where he scored five goals, Ovechkin will be a competitor to watch in Riga.

"If I'm invited to play, then that is what I will do," says Ovechkin who also stressed the importance of continuing to do his best in the remaining games left for Washington.

■ ■ It's always a tricky situation for a player going to the IIHF World Championships but whose NHL season has not yet ended. Even if the team has been knocked out of the playoff hunt, a player - particularly the most talented - must remain completely focused on every game left on the schedule. But there is no question that the World Championships mean a lot to Ovechkin who sees every opportunity to play for his country as an obligation and an honour.

"For Russian players, and I would say the same is true for anyone invited to play for his country, the opportunity to be on the national team and try winning a medal means a lot," he said. "It's been a great experience in the past playing in the World Championships."

■ ■ In the meantime, the Capitals go on to lose to the Islanders 5-0 as Ovechkin is kept off the scoresheet. He got his revenge on April 12 against Atlanta when he became only the second rookie in NHL history to record 50 goals and 100 assists in one season. Finland's Teemu Selanne was the first to reach that double milestone with the Winnipeg Jets in 1993.