

City of Vancouver gets Canucks fever

Last Canadian team finally bows out

By **KARL YU**
Epoch Times Staff

VANCOUVER—There's something special about being in a Canadian city with a team in the NHL playoffs—hockey is religion in Canada, after all.

You not only see it in the increased number of car flags and people walking around wearing hockey jerseys; you can feel the electricity in and around the city.

The hockey fans in the city of Vancouver, as fair-weathered as they are, are passionate about their Canucks in much the same way as people in Boston rabidly support the Red Sox and people in Manchester, England, support Manchester United.

The hockey team has sold out every game at its home arena—General Motors Place—since November 14, 2002, and this past Saturday's playoff game against the Chicago Blackhawks (a 4-2 loss) was no exception.

Prior to the time when doors to the arena opened, fans congregated in the north plaza of GM Place grounds.

Dubbed the "Party on the Plaza," a local cover band called Dr. Strangelove performed some recognizable tunes while ex-Canuck Darcy Rota signed autographs at a booth, souvenirs were sold in the adjacent booth, Canuck mascot Fin walked around waving a Canucks flag, and a sea of blue and green, with a smattering of red and black, got pumped up for the game.

In the surrounding area, local sports bars saw people lining up hoping to grab a seat to watch the game, while throngs of cars searching for parking drove by horns-a-honking with as many as four car flags flapping in the breeze—such is game day.

Dylan Soo, an associate professor in the Faculty of Tourism at Royal Roads University in nearby Victoria, says that the playoffs are the best time of year.

"If [the Canucks] win, it is super



FORMS OF SUPPORT: A montage of fans showed support for the Vancouver Canucks during the NHL playoffs. KARL YU/EPOCH TIMES

exciting," he says.

"I have been to a few [playoff games] and they all seem to be the same since 2000. The place is rocking and it seems that everyone who is a Canucks fan is a friend."

Cary Hungle gave up his Canucks season tickets about five years ago but still likes taking in a playoff game or two and he definitely notices the postseason vibe.

"There is a real buzz, especially before the game and while the Canucks have a lead. You can get wrapped up enough in the atmosphere that you don't really notice the beer is \$8.25," quipped the teacher and school administrator.

The buzz can even be felt at Hungle's place of employment.

"There is a lot of banter in my grade seven class [on gameday]," explained Hungle.

"There is a Nikolai Khabibulin [Chicago's goalie] fan that has been taking heat and is loving it. Also in

the younger classes where the teacher is excited you see a lot of logos/jerseys and enthusiasm."

'Everyone who is a Canucks fan is a friend.'

Sports bar experience

GM Place holds about 18,630, so obviously not everyone in the city will get to watch the game live. Local-area pubs and sports bars reap the rewards as people watch the game while enjoying a pint and a burger.

Soo has also enjoyed a game on a big screen HDTV, at a licensed establishment but unlike the live-game

experience, the results of the sports bar atmosphere vary.

"[The bar experience] depends on what type of pub it is due to the patrons," he explained.

"Those pubs that are more sports specific have a more intense atmosphere but regardless, the atmosphere is great as it is the next best thing to being at a game."

The team traveled to Chicago for Game 6 on Monday down 3-2 in the series, and while it was a barn-burner, the Canucks lost a high-scoring 7-5 affair. And thus the playoff series, much to the chagrin of all the "Canuckle Heads," came to an end.

The sightings of a Canucks jersey and car flags might become more of a rare occurrence as the fans get over the sting of elimination but if the team qualifies for the playoffs next season, the buzz will begin anew.

This is a city that lives and dies with its Vancouver Canucks after all.

Russia wins world hockey gold, beating Canada again

Ilya Kovalchuk named MVP

BERNE (Reuters)—Russia rallied to beat Canada 2-1 and win the world ice hockey championship last Sunday, their second successive final victory over the same opponents.

Jason Spezza gave Canada an early lead but Oleg Saprykin equalized in the first period and Alexander Radulov fired the winner five minutes from the end of the second.

The Russians, who won last year's final 5-4 in overtime on Canadian soil to win the trophy for the first time in 15 years, survived a tense third period to frustrate their opponents again.

Russian goaltender Ilya Bryzgalov saved 37 out of 38 shots while his opposite number Dwayne Roloson faced only 17 shots all evening.

Russia's Ilya Kovalchuk was named player of the tournament (MVP).

"We know the way they play, and they know the way we operate," said Radulov. "I think we started the game better than they did, but by the second period they got more shots. Our goalie was outstanding."

Canada coach Lindy Ruff said: "We didn't take advantage of our opportunities and they did. Bryzgalov didn't make any mistakes or let us back in the game."

Canada survived an early Russia power play, thanks to superb point-blank saves by Roloson, and went ahead when Spezza fired the puck

past Bryzgalov from Shea Weber's pass at 5:37 of the first period.

Russia leveled during another power play, Braydon Coburn having been dispatched to the penalty box for delaying the game, when Vitali Atyushov pulled the puck back from behind the net and Saprykin fired home.

Canada dominated the second period, outshooting their opponents 16-5, as Martin St. Louis and Dan Hamhuis forced Bryzgalov to make difficult saves.

But Russia went ahead with five minutes left as Radulov finished off a two-on-one by collecting Konstantin Gorovikov's pass, firing past Roloson and indulging in a stick-twirling celebration.

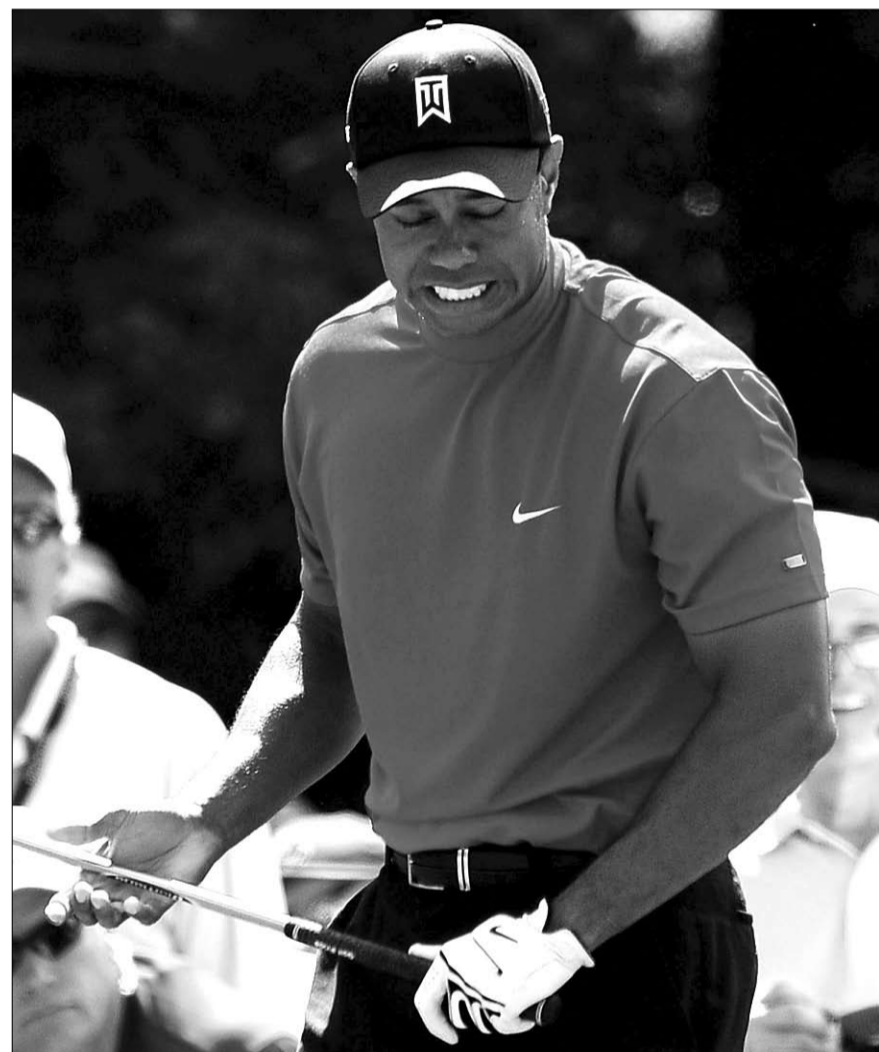
Russian diving

The Russians, guilty of some soccer-style diving which had the referees signaling for them to get up and play on, were happy to sit back in the third period and play on the counter-attack.

Canada had an excellent chance with two minutes left when Denis Grebeshkov lost possession and Canada found Shane Doan free, but he failed to control the puck and missed the chance for a breakthrough.

"We didn't get many chances, but we scored on those we had," said Russia coach Slava Bykov.

"We tried to play good defence and be patient, but it isn't easy against an opponent like Canada."



BAD SWING: Tiger reacts to his poor tee shot on the second hole of the final round at the Players Championship last Sunday. SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

Woods struggles with swing but knee feels great

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. (Reuters)—A frustrated Tiger Woods dismissed any notion that injury was clouding his game after he finished a disappointing eighth at the Players Championship last Sunday.

Joint second over night, Woods carded a one-over 73 at TPC Sawgrass in a final round marred by wayward shot-making and an unrelenting battle to find the middle of the fairway.

The problem was with his swing, not his knee, said the world number one, who has struggled for consistency following his February return after an eight-month lay-off for surgery.

"The knee feels great, no issues at all. That's a great sign," said Woods.

"I just kept hitting those spinners up to the right, and it was frustrating because if I aim down the right side, I'd spin it to the right."

"If aimed down the left side, I'd spin it to the right. I tried to put the release in early enough, but it still wasn't right," he said.

Woods hit the fairway just six times from 14 attempts last Sunday, and 30 from 56 for the week, leaving him ranked 62nd in the tournament.

His figures for shots approaching the green were little better with 44

from 72 attempts—40th best in the event.

"I'll fix it. When you are playing a golf course like this and you don't have it, and the greens are this fast and hard, you can shoot some pretty high numbers. You can see some guys went pretty high," he said.

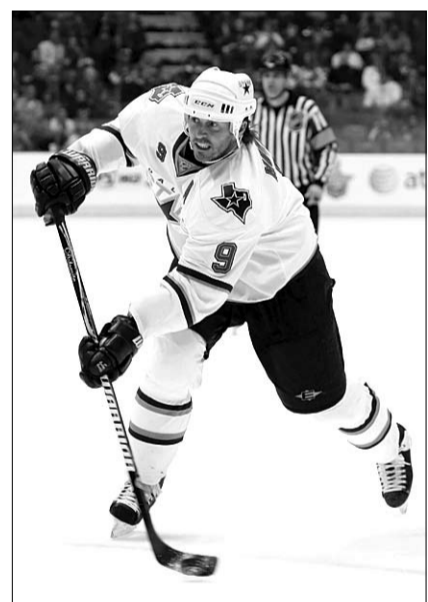
The 14-time major winner shut down his campaign last year after winning the U.S. Open in June and did not return to the PGA Tour until the WGC-Accenture Match Play Championship in February.

After being eliminated in the second round of his comeback tournament, Woods won the Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill Invitational and has recorded four top-10s in just a handful of strokeplay appearances.

While the record would draw envy from most players on the tour, the near misses have grated on Woods.

Woods said, however, he had plenty of time to get things right before the U.S. Open on June 18 at Bethpage, New York, although he has yet to make clear whether he will play again before the major.

"We know what it is, it's just a matter of me doing it. Sometimes, as we all know, playing the game is harder to do on the golf course."



MIKE MODANO
CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Modano to return for 20th season

DALLAS (Reuters)—Veteran Dallas Stars centre Mike Modano has decided to return to the National Hockey League for a 20th season after briefly contemplating retirement.

The 38-year-old is the highest-scoring American-born player of all time in the NHL and has played in Dallas for the last 15 campaigns.

"I've made my decision and I'm coming back to play," Modano told the team's official Web site (stars.nhl.com) on Monday.

"I think everyone eventually knew I was going to come back but I still wanted to take some time and think about things."

"Watching everyone else playing in the playoffs helped push me to make the decision. This is the best time of year and we want to get back to playing post-season hockey next season."

The Stars failed to reach the playoffs after finishing 12th in the 15-team Western Conference with a 36-35-11 record.

Modano, who has registered 543 career goals and 786 assists, skated in his 1,400th league game when Dallas ended the regular season against the Anaheim Ducks on April 10.

"A part of me wants to keep coming back to play until they tell me they don't want me to come back," said Modano, who was the top draft pick by the Minnesota North Stars in 1988.

"I love playing the game. We'll see how this coming season goes and go from there."

Mighty Barcelona wins King's Cup

Primera Liga could be second of possible three titles this weekend

VALENCIA, Spain (Reuters)—Three goals in a devastating nine-minute spell at the start of the second half saw Barcelona win 4-1 over Athletic Bilbao in the King's Cup final on Wednesday and the first of three possible titles.

Yaya Toure leveled for Barca in the first half before Lionel Messi, Bojan Krkic, and Xavi struck after the break to give the club their 25th King's Cup.

The Catalans could wrap up the Primera Liga title this weekend and they face Manchester United in the Champions League final on May 27.

"Now we are reaping the rewards of all the hard work we have put in during the season," Barca midfielder Sergio Busquets told Spanish state television as the team celebrated on the pitch.

"I hope this weekend we can secure our second title."

Barca had an unfamiliar look in defense with reserve keeper Jose Manuel Pinto in goal and Yaya Toure at centre back again, and they were quickly exposed at a set piece.

Pinto had tipped a Javi Martinez shot round the post and Fran Yeste made it count. His whipped-in corner after nine minutes found Gaizka Toquero rising above two defenders to head in at the back post.

Athletic looked fresher, snapping at Barca all over the pitch, until Toure stepped up to level in spectacular fashion as he advanced out of defense.



KING'S CUP CHAMP: Yaya Toure got the ball rolling for Barcelona with an incredible goal. MANUEL QUEIMADELOS ALONSO/GETTY IMAGES

Stunning response

The Ivory Coast midfielder went past three Bilbao players in the 31st minute, and from outside the area drilled a low shot inside the near post.

Gradually Barca asserted themselves and as they swarmed round the Bilbao area in the 55th minute it was Messi who struck, firing through a crowd of legs after Gorka Iraizoz could only parry Samuel Eto'o's shot.

Three minutes later, Bojan raced through on a break to score off the

far post and with Bilbao reeling Xavi curled a superb free kick over the wall and in off the near post in the 64th.

Just before Xavi's goal the match was held up briefly after Barcelona defender Daniel Alves was hit on the head by a tin can thrown from the stands.

Alves was able to continue and television pictures showed police leading a fan away.

Athletic were a broken team after that, but earn a place in next season's Europa League with Barca's place in the Champions League assured for next year.

TENNIS RANKINGS			MEN'S GOLF RANKINGS		
Women		Men			
Name	Points	Name	Points	Name	Avg. Points
1. (1) Dina Safina (Russia)	9,011	1. (1) Rafael Nadal (Spain)	15,360	1. (1) Tiger Woods (U.S.)	9.87
2. (2) Serena Williams (U.S.)	8,053	2. (2) Roger Federer (Switzerland)	10,170	2. (2) Phil Mickelson (U.S.)	8.47
3. (5) Venus Williams (U.S.)	7,452	3. (4) Andy Murray (Britain)	8,990	3. (3) Sergio Garcia (Spain)	6.79
4. (4) Jelena Jankovic (Serbia)	7,330	4. (3) Novak Djokovic (Serbia)	8,920	4. (4) Geoff Ogilvy (Australia)	6.36
5. (3) Elena Dementieva (Russia)	6,991	5. (5) Juan Martin del Potro (Argentina)	4,720	5. (9) Henrik Stenson (Sweden)	6.29
6. (6) Vera Zvonareva (Russia)	5,890	6. (6) Andy Roddick (U.S.)	4,040	6. (5) Kenny Perry (U.S.)	5.71
7. (8) Svetlana Kuznetsova (Russia)	5,206	7. (8) Gilles Simon (France)	4,030	7. (6) Paul Casey (Britain)	5.69
8. (7) Ana Ivanovic (Serbia)	4,894	8. (7) Fernando Verdasco (Spain)	3,900	8. (7) Padraig Harrington (Ireland)	5.30
9. (9) Victoria Azarenka (Belarus)	4,506	9. (9) Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (France)	3,455	9. (8) Vijay Singh (Fiji)	5.26
10. (10) Nadia Petrova (Russia)	3,840	10. (10) Gael Monfils (France)	3,310	10. (10) Camilo Villegas (Colombia)	4.84
11. (11) Caroline Wozniacki (Denmark)	3,790	11. (11) Nikolay Davydenko (Russia)	3,265	11. (11) Robert Karlsson (Sweden)	4.58
12. (12) Agnieszka Radwanska (Poland)	3,686	12. (12) Fernando Gonzalez (Chile)	2,945	12. (12) Sean O'Hair (U.S.)	4.52
13. (13) Marion Bartoli (France)	3,304	13. (14) David Ferrer (Spain)	2,645	13. (13) Steve Stricker (U.S.)	4.47
14. (14) Flavia Pennetta (Italy)	3,210	14. (15) Marin Cilic (Croatia)	2,635	14. (15) Jim Furyk (U.S.)	4.40
15. (15) Alize Cornet (France)	2,665	15. (19) David Nalbandian (Argentina)	2,455	15. (14) Anthony Kim (U.S.)	4.17
16. (17) Zheng Jie (China)	2,609	16. (16) James Blake (U.S.)	2,370	16. (16) Lee Westwood (Britain)	3.90
17. (16) Anabel Medina Garrigues (Spain)	2,505	17. (18) Tommy Robredo (Spain)	2,350	17. (17) Ernie Els (South Africa)	3.86
18. (18) Dominika Cibulkova (Slovakia)	2,415	18. (13) Stanislas Wawrinka (Switzerland)	2,135	18. (30) Ian Poulter (Britain)	3.79
19. (19) Kaia Kanepi (Estonia)	2,410	19. (17) Radek Stepanek (Czech Republic)	2,090	19. (18) Rory McIlroy (Britain)	3.73
20. (20) Patty Schnyder (Switzerland)	2,377	20. (20) Marat Safin (Russia)	2,015	20. (20) Mike Weir (Canada)	3.50

Rankings as of May 11, previous rankings in parentheses

French soccer coming to Canada

PARIS (Reuters)—The Trophee des Champions between the winners of Ligue 1 and the French Cup will be played in Montreal, Canada on July 26, the French League said on Tuesday.

It will be the first time the curtain-raiser to the season is to be played outside France.

"Time has come for French soccer

to capture new markets," League chairman Frederic Thiriez said in a statement. "Montreal is the best gate to enter the North American market."

Ligue 2 side En Avant Guingamp won the French Cup last Saturday. Olympique Marseille and Girondins Bordeaux are level on points at the top of Ligue 1 with three games to play.