

Blackhawks will learn from Red Wings

Hockey future promising in Chicago after years of misery

By **KARL YU**
Epoch Times Staff

The consensus among various panels and talk shows is that this has been the best Stanley Cup playoffs in some time.

Fans have seen many exciting, high scoring games with plenty of opportunity for the young stars—Pittsburgh Penguins' Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and Chicago Blackhawks' Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews for instance—to showcase their skills.

In the second-round of the NHL playoffs, we were treated to a heavy-weight tilt between Crosby's Penguins and Alex Ovechkin's Washington Capitals.

And while the Pens' 6-2 Game 7 win was an anticlimactic end to the series, the previous six games provided fans with an example of how entertaining hockey can really be at this time of year.

Another entertaining series was predicted for the Western Conference final as the upstart Blackhawks had a date with their Central Division rivals and defending Cup champs, the Detroit Red Wings.

But the series fell short of expectations, with the Wings showing how much experience really matters. The 6-1 blowout in Chicago this past Sunday in Game 4 said it all.

Full Circle

But regardless of the loss in five

games to the Wings, hockey is experiencing a renaissance in the Windy City.

All of Chicago's home playoff games have been sold out and the packed houses have lent an atmosphere not seen since back at old Chicago Stadium, especially during the American national anthem.

Chicago sports icon and Super Bowl-winning Bears QB Jim McMahon can attest to how high the decibel level at the United Center can get even though he has played in front of larger crowds.

"The crowd noise in here is a lot more [than at Soldier Field], I think," McMahon is quoted as saying in an ESPN-Chicago blog post.

"If you can't get ready to play after the national anthem like this here, you can't play."

The Blackhawks' young guns haven't been firing on all cylinders in the conference final like they were in previous series. But still, Toews, Kane, Dustin Byfuglien, Andrew Ladd, Cam Barker, and Troy Brouwer are all getting valuable playoff experience.

The team had failed to make the postseason dance the past five seasons and have only made the playoffs twice in the past 11 years. The average age of the team is 25.8 with a number of core players, like Kane and Toews, below the average age.

Still, for all their youthful inexperience, the team was able to knock off the Calgary Flames and the



MORE TO COME: Patrick Kane (left) and Jonathan Toews give the Chicago Blackhawks a solid foundation to build on. JIM PRISCHING/GETTY IMAGES

Vancouver Canucks with their talent and determination.

During their maiden playoff campaigns, Jonathan Toews has scored seven goals and six assists in 17 games, while Kane has popped in eight goals and six assists in 16 games.

Rookie of the year candidate Kris Versteeg has 12 points in 17 games and leads the team in power play points with seven.

Standing 6'3" and weighing 250 pounds, converted defenseman

Dustin Byfuglien (pronounced "Buff-lin") is a burgeoning power forward. He has been getting plenty of attention for the havoc he creates in front of top-flight goalies like Calgary's Miikka Kiprusoff and Vancouver's Roberto Luongo. Byfuglien has chipped in with nine points in 17 playoff games.

Promising Defense

The team also sports a blue-line that is a good mix of new and old with size to boot.

Like Kane and Toews up front, the Blackhawks' defense features such promising youngsters as 23-year-old Cam Barker and 24-year-old Brent Seabrook. Both stand 6'3" and weigh about 220 pounds.

Seabrook has 12 points in these playoffs with half coming on the power play. Barker has tallied nine points with five coming on the PP.

If anything, the 2009 Stanley Cup playoffs have proven that the Blackhawks are ahead of schedule and are capable of great things if

they maintain their present course. The missing ingredient is stronger goaltending.

Injured Russian Nikolai Khabibulin has been adequate in net but Cristobal Huet had a poor showing in relief last Sunday. Both are not marquee names.

But this is just the beginning for the Chicago Blackhawks.

With some judicious personnel management, the makings of a dynasty like the Red Wings could be in the cards.

Barcelona crowned champions of Europe

By **RAHUL VAIDYANATH**
Epoch Times Staff

Barcelona capped off an incredible season by winning the Champions League 2-0 over defending champion Manchester United on Wednesday in Rome. They became the first Spanish team to win the Primera Liga, the King's Cup, and Champions League in the same season.

Manchester United and Barcelona was really the perfect final for soccer fans around the world with two newly crowned domestic champions (of England and Spain respectively) doing battle. The two teams met in the 1991 Cup Winners Cup final and last year's Champions League semifinal. Manchester United won both encounters.

After elaborate opening ceremonies including a performance from Andrea Bocelli, the game was underway.

Barcelona striker Thierry Henry returned to the starting line-up after a lengthy injury. Silvinho, 35, replaced the suspended Eric Abidal at left back and performed like he had been there all season.

Ryan Giggs was named captain for Manchester United. He started in place of Darren Fletcher who was suspended but had a dismal outing.

Gerard Pique and Yaya Toure, not Barcelona's standard pairing in central defense, looked solid while captain Carles Puyol did a great job of shutting down United's threats down the left wing.

Barcelona strikes early

Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo tested Barca keeper Valdes



WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS: Victor Valdes (left) leads the celebrations after Barcelona win their second European crown in four years. JASPER JUIJEN/GETTY IMAGES

with a long dipping free kick in the second minute as the English champions started strongly.

Barcelona was slow to get in the game but out of nowhere Samuel Eto'o, one of the game's best finishers, put Barcelona in front at the 10-minute mark totally against the run of play.

United's defense seemed to shut down as Eto'o walked around Nemanja Vidic and knifed a shot in at the near side. The goal sent shivers down Manchester United's spine as Barcelona immediately found solid footing in the match.

Barcelona bases their play on ball possession. That is how they control games, with short passing, give-and-gos, and great technical skill.

Barcelona's midfield with Iniesta, Busquets, and Xavi took control against Manchester United as the first half wore on. Iniesta and Xavi rarely gave the ball away.

Sir Alex Ferguson brought on Argentine striker Carlos Tevez at the start of the second half in place of the ineffective Anderson.

But Barcelona started the second half the way United started the first. Thierry Henry, who had been quiet in the first half, made one of his trademark runs down the left wing. He made Rio Ferdinand look like a pylon before drawing a great save out

of United keeper Edwin van der Sar.

Xavi then hit the far post with a curling free kick in the 51st minute after a strong run by Iniesta drew a foul at the top of the 18-yard box.

Frustration mounting for United

On came Bulgarian striker Dimitar Berbatov in the 66th minute as Manchester United sought a different dimension in their attack.

Barcelona put the game on ice when Lionel Messi headed in Xavi's cross in the 70th minute.

Now, with the game seemingly beyond reach, Ronaldo picked up a yellow card for persistent fouls on Puyol. Wayne Rooney, also frustrated, was switched to a more central role from left wing.

But in the end, Barcelona just had too much class for United. United ran out of ideas and Barcelona ended the game stroking around the short passes much like Spain did on their way to Euro 2008 glory.

Barcelona manager Pep Guardiola, in his first season as coach, will probably be asked what he will do for an encore after winning three major trophies for a Spanish team.

As for Sir Alex Ferguson, he'll know his team was outplayed in the Eternal City.

Hats off to Barcelona, champions of Europe.

Veteran coach Quinn hired by Oilers

CALGARY (Reuters)—The Edmonton Oilers named Pat Quinn as head coach on Tuesday hoping he can bring his golden touch to the NHL's most northern outpost.

Quinn, who guided Canada to victory at the 2002 Olympics to end a 50-year gold medal drought, has enjoyed tremendous success on the international stage but has yet to win a Stanley Cup.

Twice winner of the Jack Adams trophy as NHL coach of the year, Quinn's resume is impressive.

He has coached over 1,300 NHL regular season games with Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Vancouver, and Toronto, leading the Flyers (1980) and Canucks (1994) to the Stanley Cup finals.

Quinn, who earned a reputation as a hard-nosed player with just 18 goals and 950 penalty min-

utes during a nine-year NHL career, also led Canada to the 2004

'...the right choice for our hockey club'

— GM Steve Tambellini

World Cup of Hockey title and coached the gold medal-winning Canadian team at the 2008 world junior championship.

Out of the NHL coaching ranks since being fired by the Maple Leafs at the end of 2005-06 season, Quinn replaces Craig MacTavish, who was let go after nine years in charge in Edmonton after the team failed to reach the playoffs for a third consecutive year.

"I feel very confident this is absolutely the right choice for our hockey club," said Oilers general manager Steve Tambellini on the team's Web site (www.oilers.nhl.com).

"Today we are announcing a coaching staff that represent the leadership and expertise needed to take this organization forward."

The Oilers also announced that former New York Rangers head coach Tom Renney had been hired as an assistant.

Castroneves wins third Indy 500

By **JAMES FISH**
Epoch Times Staff

To the delight of a crowd of 300,000 who turned out last Sunday to watch the 93rd running of the "Greatest Spectacle in Racing," Helio Castroneves entered a very exclusive club—three-time winners of the Indianapolis 500.

Overcome with emotion, Castroneves burst into tears as he drank the ceremonial bottle of milk, celebrating his amazing comeback to stand on the top of the podium at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Helio Castroneves, who five weeks ago was wondering if he was on his way to jail, is instead on his way into the history books.

Acquitted of tax charges that threatened to end his career, Castroneves has entered the pantheon of American auto racing. He joins such legends as Al and Bobby Unser, A.J. Foyt, and Rick Mears, as three-time winners of America's greatest auto race.

Race summary

Castroneves started from the pole but lost the lead to Dario Franchitti on lap seven on a restart. He kept himself in the top five, while Scott Dixon and Dario Franchitti dominated the front of the field.

On lap 98, Tony Kanaan hit the wall in a vicious flaming crash. His right rear suspension failed, ramming him into the wall. After bouncing off, his momentum carried him back into the wall for another impact.

Kanaan was uninjured, fortunately. "Me and this place ... one more time again," Kanaan said as he left the infirmary. Of



THREE-TIME WINNER: Helio Castroneves shakes his fist in his car after winning the Indianapolis 500 last Sunday. CHRIS GRAY/THEN/GETTY IMAGES

eight Indy starts, Kanaan has led the race in seven, but has yet to win.

On lap 174, Raphael Matos, who had been driving a great rookie race, tried to pass Vitor Meira on the outside, but there wasn't enough room. The two came together, flipping Meira's car on its side and sending it sliding along the wall. Both drivers received medical attention. Meira reported severe lower back pain but could move all his extremities.

This caution, the eighth, ensured that all drivers would be able to run flat-out to the end.

At this point, strategy went out the window and set-up became all-important—the race came down to an 18-lap shootout.

Danica Patrick trailed the powerful Penske of Castroneves and Dan Wheldon, the 2005 winner, driving the National Guard-sponsored Panther Racing

car. "It's getting fun out here; I'm ready to go," she told her crew. "I think I can get Dan."

Though the Penske cars had been slow on restarts throughout the race, Castroneves made the right adjustments this time, and when the green flag fell, he leaped out to a 1.4 second lead over Wheldon.

Castroneves, with clean air and a clear track ahead, was the fastest car on the track, lapping at 219 mph and opening a 1.99 second lead.

Realizing he could not be caught, Helio relaxed just a bit and rolled home 1.34 seconds ahead of Wheldon, who was 0.35 seconds ahead of Danica Patrick who scored her best Indy finish in five attempts.

The win marked 15 Indy victories for Roger Penske racing and an incredible turn of events in Castroneves's life.

Karlovic hits tour record 55 Aces in losing effort at French Open

PARIS (Reuters)—Lleyton Hewitt had to duck and dive for almost four hours as he saw 55 aces whizz by him last Sunday, but still found a way to trip up lofty Croatian Ivo Karlovic 6-7, 6-7, 7-6, 6-4, 6-3 in the first round of the French Open.

Karlovic, 6'10" and seeded 26th, has enjoyed putting Hewitt in the shade in each of their three previous meetings, most notably in the first round at Wimbledon in 2003 when the Australian was the defending champion.

On Sunday, Hewitt came back from two sets down for the fifth time in his career to cut Karlovic down to size and gain sweet revenge.

The former world number one, now ranked 50th after struggling with a hip injury for much of 2008, admitted his heart sank when he saw the draw.

"First thing, obviously, I thought was the loss at Wimbledon a few years back in the first round," the 28-year-old told reporters.

"I felt like I was a little unlucky ... to play him on any surface, he's so dangerous."

The Croatian looked poised to hand the Australian his earliest Roland Garros defeat in a decade when he stole the opening two sets on tiebreaks.

Hewitt, never one to give up with-

out a fight, hung on to seal his passage into the last 64 when Karlovic misfired a smash well beyond the baseline.

The former world number one celebrated his moment of triumph by saluting the crowd with a clenched fist.

Despite winning more than eight games on aces alone, Karlovic was four thunderbolt serves shy of equaling the all-time record of American Ed Kauder, who fired 59 in 1955.

"His first serve is extremely tough on any surface to get," said Hewitt.

"He gets up higher because he's hitting so short in the boxes. The angle he gets, you can't touch a lot of his serves. It's physically impossible."