



GOOD FOR NHL: Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby shake hands after a blockbuster seven-game series was won by the Penguins last season. BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

Good times coming for NHL

After troubled off-season, hockey ready to bounce back

By KARL YU
Epoch Times Staff

NHL.com's top headline on Monday said it all.

Rather than being a story about the impending 2009-10 regular season, the first link on the site read "Email DirecTV about missing NHL games on VS."

But that shouldn't be surprising, as the National Hockey League seemed to be less about hockey and more about corporate battles these past few months.

The league saw wunderkind Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins defeat the Detroit Red Wings in seven games in the Stanley Cup finals, but then things went downhill.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and league officials have received a lot of criticism for their television deal with the VS (Versus) channel. Many say it is a little-known channel and not many people have access to it unless they order it through a cable package.

Major satellite television provider DirecTV—which provides service to over 18.3 million American households and is popular among sports fans—is involved in a fight with VS.

DirecTV dropped Versus over a rate dispute on Sept. 1, and with the regular season starting, this is not news the NHL wants to hear—the league is encouraging fans who are subscribers to write DirecTV.

But that wasn't all. The dominant story for much of the summer has been the legal bickering between the league and Research in Motion (RIM)—the people behind the BlackBerry—and CEO Jim Balsillie for ownership of the Phoenix Coyotes.

Balsillie has attempted to buy a number of NHL clubs before, including the Penguins, but the league has always thwarted his attempts, ostensibly because the RIM CEO wants to move the team to Hamilton.

In the latest bid, Coyotes majority

owner Jerry Moyes filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and planned on selling the team to Balsillie before the Commissioner Gary Bettman and the league stepped in.

A number of bankruptcy hearings have taken place, and with the start of the season drawing nigh, no firm decision is in sight.

LOOKING FORWARD
Despite the tumultuous off-season, there are a number of reasons to be excited about the 2009-10 regular season.

Although suffering from a groin injury, Sidney Crosby is back on track as the Pittsburgh Penguins begin defense of their Stanley Cup title.

Rival Alexander Ovechkin and the 2009 Southeast champion Washington Capitals began the regular season in Boston against the Bruins on Thursday.

The two have a rivalry reminiscent of the one between the NBA's Magic Johnson and Larry Bird in the 80s and both are in the prime

of their careers.

Crosby and Ovechkin are 22 and 24 years of age respectively and have combined for the last three Hart Trophy awards (Ovechkin has taken the last two). It wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility to see one of the two named NHL MVP again this year.

The season will also break for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia, and so fans of puck will enjoy better than NHL-quality hockey at the Olympics.

GM Place, or Canada Hockey Place as it will be called for the Olympics, will use an NHL-sized ice surface and not the usual international-sized rink.

Not only will the NHL's best hockey players represent their countries in the Winter Games, they will do so in a North American time zone.

The NHL's offseason was clouded by the Phoenix Coyote bankruptcy story and the DirecTV-Versus fiasco, but as they say, every dark cloud has a silver lining. Optimism abounds as the hockey season gets underway.

Hamilton breezes to win in Singapore

Button capitalizes on others' mistakes, has near-lock on championship

By JAMES FISH
Epoch Times Staff

For McLaren driver and defending world champion Lewis Hamilton, the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix was an easy win last Sunday.

Hamilton started from the pole and kept the lead throughout the race, surrendering it only briefly as the field cycled through pit stops. Only a few drivers could match his speed, and none could get close enough to challenge.

"It was a very, very tough race. Conditions made it very tough, but generally the race was pretty straightforward for me," Hamilton said after the race. "I was never seriously under a lot of pressure. I felt for myself it was a nicely controlled race."

RED BULL'S DEMISE

Both Red Bull drivers, Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel, were in the hunt for championship points. Both needed exceptional finishes in the remaining races to have a chance and both needed points leader Jenson Button to perform poorly.

Vettel ran third until Williams driver Nico Rosberg crossed the pit lane exit line on lap 19, earning himself a drive-through penalty.

That put Vettel right behind Hamilton. Vettel pushed hard until lap 39, when he got a drive-through penalty for speeding on pit lane, which badly hurt his chances in the race and in the championship.

On lap 46, Webber's right front brake disc exploded causing him to spin into the wall, ending his day and dashing his championship dreams.

Vettel stuck it out and managed to finish fourth, just ahead of Brawn drivers Jenson Button and Rubens Barrichello.

The outlook for Red Bull looks grim. Vettel needs to finish first or second in the remaining three races, while Button would have to finish seventh, eighth, or out of the points—unlikely with Brawn seemingly getting their pace back.

BUTTON THE BIGGEST WINNER

Brawn GP driver Jenson Button was the big winner at Singapore, even though he finished fifth.

Button made a complete hash of qualifying and spent most of the race back in the pack and out of the points. But attrition, penalties, and the miraculous transformation of his Brawn from a mutt to a greyhound with the addition of Option tires at his last pit stop gave Button a near-lock on the championship with three races left.

With Button's 15-point lead over teammate Rubens Barrichello and only three races left, if Button finishes within four places of Barrichello in each of the three remaining races, the world will have a new driving champion.

As much as Button can thank his own talent, he can thank the errors of Niko Rosberg and Sebastian Vettel as well.



TEEN SENSATION: Fiorentina's Stevan Jovetic keeps his eye on the ball against Liverpool. FABIO MUZZI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Liverpool flops against Fiorentina in Champions League

Arsenal guns down Olympiakos

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

Liverpool took advantage of a poor first half by Liverpool to record a 2-0 victory in Tuesday's Champions League action.

Nineteen-year-old striker Stevan Jovetic scored two first-half goals to condemn Liverpool to third place in Group E.

When asked what went wrong in the first half, Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez bluntly said, "Everything."

"We were watching the game, giving the ball away."

Liverpool put forth a stronger display in the second half but it was not meant to be. Coming off a 6-1 thrashing of Hull City last Saturday in Premier League action, Liverpool was full of confidence prior to the match.

But the display on the field at the Artemio Franchi stadium in Florence, Italy left Benitez fuming. "We were not the best in any part of the pitch."

Jovetic took advantage of a huge gap in the center of the Liverpool defense to calmly slide a shot past Pepe Reina and into the Liverpool goal.

Jovetic's second goal came when he deflected a blistering shot by Juan Vargas past Reina.

Liverpool was denied a penalty shot in the second half when

Fernando Torres was brought down in the box but the referee ruled the tackle was fair.

GUNNERS DOMINATE

At the Emirates Stadium in London, England, Arsenal thoroughly dominated Olympiakos and won 2-0. Were it not for grey-haired goalkeeper Antonis Nikopolidis, the Gunners could've had five or six.

Robin van Persie, playing in a lone-striker role, broke the deadlock in the 78th minute. Substitute Eduardo drove to the goal line and slid a pass to van Persie for the tap-in past Nikopolidis.

Arsenal's second goal was scored from an offside position but it counted anyway. In the 86th minute, Cesc Fabregas found Andrei Arshavin with a clever pass. Arshavin then deftly back-flicked the ball past Nikopolidis.

Perhaps justice was served as a 1-0 score line would not have been a fair result based on Arsenal's domination.

"We played a great first half [with] plenty of chances at that level," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger. Robin van Persie explained in an interview with Sky Sports what Wenger said at halftime. "We should just be patient. Our moment will come." The Dutch striker also scored the winner against Fulham last Saturday.

Brains and brawn needed in chess boxing

BERLIN (Reuters)—Bloodied, bruised, and battered, the two boxers have just completed a brutal bout in the ring in Berlin's Mitte district and remove their gloves to face their next challenge—a round of speed chess.

Welcome to the bizarre world of chess boxing, developed in inner city Berlin and featuring alternate rounds of chess and boxing in a fierce combination of brains and brawn.

Inspired by a science fiction book, the sport that emerged initially as an urban art event has grown into one enjoyed by many across three continents. Boxers play six rounds of chess alternating with five of boxing as they put their physical and mental skills to the test. Chess rounds last a total of four minutes, with the players wearing headphones to block out cheers, coaches' advice, and the commentator's voice.

"This is all about discipline and control of your body and your mind," said the sport's founder Iepe Rubingh, a Dutchman who set up the first club in Berlin.

Rubingh, a chess-playing artist, took up boxing in his 20s. It was around that time that he stumbled across the work of graphic artist Enki Bilal, whose novel "Froid Equateur" first featured the sport.

"I started quite late with boxing training. I thought about this sport and said: 'This cannot be done. You cannot play chess after a round of boxing. You are just not capable, your body will not allow you,'" Rubingh said.



CHESS BOXING: Zoran 'The Priest' Mijatovic and Frank 'Anti Terror' Stoldt play chess after trading punches. LARS BARON/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

BIGGEST MISTAKE
With huge amounts of adrenalin pumped into the body during the fight, a heart rate of 170, and more oxygen in the muscles than in the brain, chess boxers' limits are really tested when they take off their gloves and sit down, sweaty and out of breath, at the chess board.

"When you sit down to play chess after your boxing round, then you look at the board as if it is the first time you see it," said Rubingh. "It is a bit like biathlon, with the skiing and shooting."

"Adrenalin is massive, making it difficult to think straight, and it also makes you fearless and that is the

biggest mistake you can make on the chess board at that time. You have to train hard for this changeover."

Chess boxers have little in common with the stereotype of a prize fighter, or a chess player for that matter. Many of them are 30 or older and are in top physical condition, with a high intelligence quotient (IQ) and a rating under the ELO system used by the World Chess Federation (FIDE).

Berlin police officer Frank Stoldt is one of them. A kick boxer, the 40-year-old Stoldt, who has an ELO chess rating of 2,000, joined the Berlin chess boxing club the moment he heard about it.

"I thought they had invented the sport for me," said Stoldt, interrupting a round of speed chess in a small training room in the Berlin gym.

"It is a unique sport, combining two seemingly opposite things. But it has huge potential. It is this testing of the human body and mind that makes it so exciting," said Stoldt, a former chess boxing world champion, before taking up his skipping rope for a cardiovascular workout.

Some have called chess boxers the ultimate fighters, excelling in both physical and mental bouts. Winners in each of the four weight categories can be declared by a knockout or a checkmate, or when playing time runs out.

GROWING SPORT

The sport has grown beyond Germany to Russia, the United States, England, and Australia. So far, only men's competitions have been organized but a small number of women are now training at chess boxing clubs.

Losing its main sponsor due to the economic crisis has done little to dampen the sport's expansion plans, it seems. A European championship fight in England in October will be followed by the world championship in Russia's Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk.

"Grass-roots level development is what we are doing right now and we can do that easily," said Rubingh.

"Our vision is to one day make it to the Olympics. I think there it would become the top discipline for the ultimate athlete."