

SPORTS CALENDAR

By CHRISTOPHER HULL

Stanley Cup playoffs debut on ABC, ESPN

When we were still in grade school, we read a book of strange-but-true hockey stories. Securely wrapped in our Montreal Canadiens road jersey, we lost ourself in its pages and were sad to arrive at the back cover.

Before we did, we learned about Lester Patrick, the 44-year-old coach of the New York Rangers who strapped on the pads and replaced injured goalie Lorne Chabot in a 1928 playoff game. And about Bill Mosienko, the Chicago Black Hawks (it was two words back then) player who scored three goals in the improbable span of 21 seconds in the last game of the 1951 season.

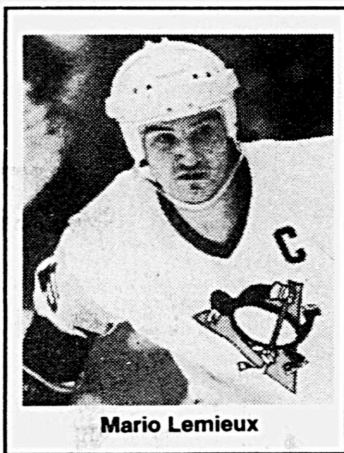
It was inspirational stuff. And it still conjures a feeling of nostalgia for a great game with North American roots as old as baseball's. This year, the NHL is bearing witness to what could be its most unlikely story yet: the inspirational saga of Pittsburgh Penguins star Mario Lemieux.

Super Mario, whose career has been strewn with a variety of injuries, was having what baseball analysts would call a "career year" at the midpoint of this season. After 40 games, Lemieux had 104 points, nearly 30 more than Buffalo's Pat LaFontaine, his nearest competitor for the scoring title. Then came the neck pain and the diagnosis that he was suffering from Hodgkin's disease, a lymphatic cancer.

That was back in January. Lemieux missed seven weeks - 19 games, including the All-Star Game - while he underwent chemotherapy to bring the cancer under control. During that time, the scoring lead slipped away, and, more importantly, his team foundered. At the beginning of March, he returned, scoring a goal and an assist, and since then the Pens have been on a tear, reclaiming the top spot in the league. Strange, but true.

On Sunday, April 18, real NHL hockey returns to network television in the United States when ABC airs a first-round playoff game. Of course, NBC has aired the annual NHL All-Star Game for the past few years, but that hands-off contest - fun though it may be - bears little resemblance to the intense, tight-checking game that's played come playoff time. ABC will air Sunday-afternoon games for the next four weeks.

The prime outlet for the 1993 NHL playoffs, however, is ABC's cable-TV relative, ESPN, which will air 37 Stanley Cup playoff games, including the entire final series. Coverage begins Tuesday, April 20. Playoff matchups were not yet finalized at deadline.



Mario Lemieux

STATION GUIDE

STATION	Prince George	Mackenzie	Vanderhoof
CITV, Edmonton	(2)	(5)	(2)
CKPG (CBC), Prince George	[2] (3)	[6] (3)	[5] (3)
Real Estate Teleguide	(4)	(2)	
CBC (French), Vancouver	[4] (5)	(7)	(5)
KING (NBC), Seattle	(6)	(11)	
KIRO (CBS), Seattle	(7)	(6)	
KOMO (ABC), Seattle	(8)	(8)	
KCTS (PBS), Seattle	(9)		
Shaw Cable 10	(10)	(10)	
BCTV (CTV), Vancouver	[12] (11)	[13] (13)	[8] (8)
KNOW, Knowledge Network	(13)	(12)	(13)
*CNN HEADLINE NEWS	(14)		
*A&E Arts & Entertainment	(15)	(16)	(16)
*TSN, The Sports Network	(16)	(18)	(10)
*CNN, Cable News Network	(17)		(19)
*TNN, The Nashville Network	(18)	(22)	
*CMT, Country Music Television	(19)		(18)
*MMN, MuchMusic Network	(20)		
*CHCH, Hamilton	(21)	(4)	
**The Family Channel	(22)	(20)	(20)
**Superchannel	(23)	(21)	(21)
**TBS, Atlanta Superstation	(24)	(17)	(12)
**WGN, Chicago Superstation	(25)		(4)
YTV, Youth Television	(26)	(23)	(23)
CBC, Newsworld	(27)		(24)
Vision TV	(28)		(25)
Canadian Home Shopping Network	(29)		
House of Commons	(30)		(28)
*TV 5 French	(31)		

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