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Croatia first P.G. side to win Rec Cup

For Art Knapps/Croatia, the fourth time's a charm.

The North Cariboo Senior Soccer League club won its first-ever Nike Provincial Rec Cup title Sunday in Vernon, crushing Victoria's Cordova Bay 5-1 in the championship final.

It was Croatia's fourth trip to the provincial Rec Cup, the B championship for club soccer in B.C., and last year's bronze medal was the previous high finish.

"We really wanted it this time and it showed," said Art Knapps/Croatia coach Nick Vukovich,

whose club was a perfect 4-0.

"We just found ways to win, even going down 1-0 in the first two games, we still found a way to pull it out."

After disposing of Chilliwack 3-1 Friday night, the defending NCSL regular-season champs won a hard-fought contest 3-1 over the Firefighter Legends of Richmond.

Croatia clinched its group title and spot in the final with a 2-0 shutout of Williams Lake's Fraser Inn on Saturday night.

Tien Mueller, Jon Lafontaine and Avtar Bhatti

all had multiple goal weekends for Croatia.

"The game against the Firefighters was the turning point for us," added Vukovich. "The Firefighters are a long-time powerhouse in Vancouver and they had some real good players so our guys had to come up with a very good effort, and they did."

The local side has little time to relish its victory. In two weeks Vukovich's club is expected to make the trip to Lethbridge for the Western Canadian Croatian Championship.

■ In women's action in Vernon, P.G. Croatia just missed bringing home hardware, beaten 1-0

in the bronze-medal game by Port Moody.

The defending Prince George Women's Soccer Association champs narrowly missed making the gold-medal game after finishing the round-robin in a three-way tie for first-place with Nanaimo and Burnaby. Nanaimo went through to the final thanks to making it to a shootout in one of its games.

Croatia wound up second in the pool, while Burnaby was third.

Croatia lost its opening game 4-1 to Nanaimo, but rebound with wins over Burnaby and Surrey by scores of 3-2 and 5-0.

Jury still out on world curling

by BRIAN DREWRY
Citizen staff

If the Winnipeg Free Press is correct, Prince George will have to wait a little longer to see world-class curling.

Neil King and his group, which hosted the 2000 Scott Tournament of Hearts at the Multiplex, has bid for the 2003 or 2005 Ford World Curling Championships.

The Free Press, citing unnamed sources, reports the Canadian Curling Association will announce June 29 that the Manitoba capital has been awarded the 2003 event.

"If it's true, that's really too bad for us because we would have preferred to host the worlds while the Scott was fresh in everyone's minds," said King, the secretary for Curl B.C.

But Warren Hanson, the Vancouver-based manager of operations for the CHA, says Winnipeg is not home free yet. Hanson adds that if Winnipeg's bid falls through, Prince George will likely be given the 2003 event.

"(Winnipeg) is not a sure thing yet," Hanson said. "Our board is meeting later this week to further discuss Winnipeg, and there are still a lot of things up in the air yet."

"Yes, we know the group in Prince George is ready to go (for 2003) and we know what a good job they did with the Scott."

Hanson said if Winnipeg's bid is approved for 2003, Prince George is in good standing for the 2005 event, which is the next time the worlds are scheduled to come to Canada. King and his group will go all-out to bring more exciting curling to the Multiplex.

"They told us up front Winnipeg was their first choice and that we would get it only if Winnipeg couldn't pull it off," added King. "But we'll go after (the 2005 event), for sure."

The only problem now for King and his group is that more cities can now come forward to bid for the 2005 worlds.

"As of right now I only know of Thunder Bay, Ont., which has bid for 2005, but now it opens it up for any other city which wants to join the bidding process, so we'll have to wait and see."

The world championships involve 10 women's and 10 men's rinks and is televised live by TSN the CBC.

Next year's World Curling Championships are slated for Bismarck, North Dakota. The 2004 worlds will be hosted by Sweden.

Murdoch finds more local talent

by BRIAN DREWRY
Citizen staff

Loralyn Murdoch had two problems with her UNBC Northern Timberwolves women's basketball squad last year. One she can fix, the other is out of her control.

Murdoch had a starting five that could compete with anyone in the B.C. Colleges Athletic Association. But, as she painfully found out early last season, after the starting five, the T-wolves were a little thin.

So Murdoch went on a shopping spree this spring, and has drastically upgraded the T-wolves depth and size.

When UNBC lost all-stars Nicole Kerr and Laura Foster to season-ending injuries midway through the season, the T-wolves didn't have the horses to pull out wins down the stretch. Hence, another season without playoff basketball.

Now however, Murdoch's newest recruits make the T-wolves bigger, more skilled, and, most importantly, much deeper.

"We needed more bench strength, for sure, plus some more size, and hopefully these new recruits will fit the bill," said Murdoch.

Heading the list of high school graduates who will take their acts to UNBC is College Heights standout Dayna Coole. The talented guard has signed on with the T-wolves, and when combined with returnees Kerr, Lindsay Anderson and Laura Zielke, the UNBC backcourt will be the envy of many.

"Dayna was one of the top seniors in Prince George and she will bring a lot to our team," added Murdoch.

Coole will have plenty of rookie friends to talk to next season. Murdoch has locked up big centre Kelly Evans of Fort St. John's North Peace, and she'll team with returning post Christina Neufeld.

Also agreeing to sport UNBC green and gold next season are guard Raj Lalli of Columneetza in Williams Lake, guard Rupi Gill of Prince Rupert, and post Alana Carwithen of Vancouver's Brookwood Secondary.

Murdoch also has veteran Jennifer Bondaroff returning.

"It's looking really good right now. Ideally I would like to add four more recruits, and I'm close to doing that, so hopefully we can take about 15 into the season."

The T-wolves will hit training camp at the end of August and their preseason slate will include a pair of home games against the University College of the Cariboo Sept. 29-30.

The BCCAA season gets going for real Nov. 2.



CAN'T RUN, CAN'T HIDE — Rob Bardsley of the Steamers Pub Devils, left, runs away from the pursuit of Leighton Clarke of the Cap-Abilities Oldstylers during Monday's P.G. Senior Lacrosse League game at Kin 1. Bardsley had two goals and two assists to help the last-place Devils improve to 3-10 on the year with a 17-12 victory. Caps dropped to 7-6. Dave Bennett of Steamers and Chad Martin of Cap-Abilities each scored six goals. For league standings, scoring leaders and top goaltenders, see page 10.

Hamhuis relaxed on eve of draft

by JIM SWANSON
Citizen Sports Editor

This is shaping up as the biggest week of Dan Hamhuis's life.

The Prince George Cougars defenceman has plenty of highlights to look back on from his 13 years on earth — playing major junior hockey, winning a bronze medal for Canada at the World Junior Hockey Championship, named to the WHL West all-star team, and being the captain of Team Orr at the 2001 Prospects Game.

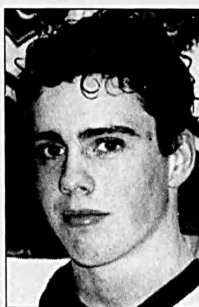
But none of those things will match what will happen Saturday in Miami.

Barring some unforeseen development — like, say, a hurricane that postpones proceedings — Hamhuis will be among the early picks in the NHL draft.

"I can't believe the kind of treatment you receive going into the draft, how great everyone in the NHL is to you," said Hamhuis, who has spent much of the last month in Vancouver perfecting his smooth skating stride at a power skating school.

"I don't know what to think of the draft, because of the massive media coverage and all that. It's going to be a unique experience."

Hamhuis, one of the celebrities on hand for the annual Fire Fighters Burn Fund golf tournament 10 days ago, is remarkably calm about the draft. Even the second-best skater in North America according to the NHL Central Scouting Bureau can do nothing but



HAMHUIS

north to Miami from his home in Nicaragua.

"It's not like I have to impress anyone now. I just get to relax and enjoy it. It's not like a World Junior camp where you are trying out and being watched every second, and where all the pressure is on because it's up to you."

"We're all pretty excited, and it's a great place to go for a holiday."

Hamhuis has been enjoying the spoils of being a top-ranked draft prospect. He jetted off to Toronto in April for draft testing and interviews, and was interviewed by Don Cherry for a segment that aired on Hockey Night in Canada during the Stanley Cup final.

Hamhuis, who leaves Thursday for Florida,

count the hours.

"I don't have to do anything now. All I can do is wait and see what happens," said Hamhuis, who will be seated in the stands in Miami alongside his girlfriend Sarah, parents Marty and Ida, sisters Erin and Cindy and uncles Herm and John. Herm Hamhuis's trip will bring him

north to Miami from his home in Nicaragua.

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Hamhuis, who leaves Thursday for Florida,

and other leading draft candidates were invited to New Jersey for Game 3 of the Avalanche-Devils series.

When asked which NHL teams have interviewed him, Hamhuis gave the shorter list of teams that haven't sat down and grilled him about his past, his goals, his injury record, and his family history.

"Calgary, Boston — those two haven't talked to me, and they're in my area of the first round, the area everyone says I should go," said Hamhuis, a Canucks fan as a child.

He said he felt most comfortable with the people from the Nashville Predators.

"Nashville told me if I'm still around at No. 12, they'll take me."

The kid from Smithers isn't sure what to think of where he'll be in the immediate future, either in the NHL or back for another season of junior seasoning.

"I'm keeping an open mind, because who knows what will happen on draft day," said Hamhuis, who is represented by Ross Gurney of Vancouver.

"There are so many trades, and the draft order can change just like that. But I'd definitely like to go to an expansion team for that reason, a team that won't have that much depth on defence and where I might be able to jump up in a year or two, or maybe sooner."

"I'll go to training camp with the idea of making the team, that's for sure. I'll jump at it the first chance I get."

NHL wheeling and dealing about to begin

by BILL BEACON
Canadian Press

Top prospects like Russian winger Ilya Kovalchuk and Jason Spezza are getting second billing to established stars heading into this weekend's NHL entry draft.

Most of the talk surrounding the league's annual meat market of 18-year-old talent has involved veterans Jaromir Jagr, Eric Lindros and Alexei Yashin, rather than teenaged talent like Stephen Weiss or Mikko Koivu.

And it may go down to the actual draft, on Saturday and Sunday, to find out which big names will move and which clubs will actually end up with the top picks.

The possibilities are endless in a summer in which many of the top names in the NHL are either on the trading block or eligible to become unrestricted free agents on July 1.

Kovalchuk, the consensus choice to go first overall, has been discussed as much for his trade value as for his flashy skills and

reportedly difficult temperament.

The Atlanta Thrashers, with the top pick after winning the lottery among non-playoff clubs, are believed to be shopping the choice for a goaltender and a skater.

The Thrashers already have left winger Dany Heatley, picked No. 2 overall last year, and centre Patrik Stefan, the first overall choice of 1999, ready to play and are looking to build a team around them.

Most often mentioned as a trading partner are the Buffalo Sabres, who have hold-out centre Michael Peca and three young goaltenders, including Martin Biron, to offer.

But there has also been talk of the Montreal Canadiens, a club starved for a superstar prospect like Kovalchuk or Spezza, getting involved. The Habs' only depth is



in goal with Jeff Hackett, Jose Theodore and Mathieu Garon and they can also offer a prospect or either the seventh or 25th overall picks.

The New York Islanders, with their trade-happy general manager Mike Milbury, pick second, and there are already rumours of the selection going to the Ottawa Senators in a blockbuster deal for Yashin.

The Ottawa Sun reported last week the Senators, who balk at Yashin's \$7-8 million US contract demands, were looking for the Islanders' draft pick as well as hulking defenceman Zdeno Chara and either big winger Brad Isbister or centre Tim Connolly.

The report said the Senators would use the pick to select either Spezza, star centre for the Windsor Spitfires, or Weiss, a five-foot-

11, 178-pound centre from the OHL's Plymouth Whalers.

The Tampa Bay Lightning, also reportedly looking to deal, have the third pick, followed by the host Florida Panthers, the Anaheim Mighty Ducks, the Minnesota Wild and Montreal.

Among other Canadian teams, Calgary picks 11th, Vancouver 16th, Toronto 17th, Edmonton 19th and Ottawa 27th.

Scouts say the six-foot-two, 207-pound Kovalchuk is a dazzling right winger with speed, puck-handling skill and a mean streak. He is also said to be self-centred and unpopular with his teammates.

Spezza is a six-foot-two, 215-pound centre who scouts regard as a gifted skater and playmaker.

Some consider Stanislav Chistov, a five-foot-nine, 170-pound Russian right winger, as the most talented player in the draft and many also like his Omsk teammate, centre Alexander Svitov.