

THE FREE PRESS SPORTS

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PHONE 564-0005

The Sunday PLAYBOOK

► Women's hockey camp

Time is running out for women interested in learning the ins and outs of hockey from Team Canada member Cheryl Pounder. The BC Outback women's hockey team is holding their first ever female hockey school August 25 to 27 here in Prince George. Players receive 4.5 hours of on-ice instruction, a two-hour game and a hockey school jersey. The school is open to ages 13 and up. For more information, contact instructor Daphne Neal at (250) 345-2173 or email daphneal@rockies.net.

► Kings need billets

A billet! My kingdom for a billet! The Spruce Kings are in need of people to billet players during the 2000/2001 BCHL season. Anyone interested in playing host to one of the BCHL's finest can contact Bette at 960-1191 or 563-9990.

► Run the Labour Day Classic

The longest-running footrace in the Interior is getting ready to take to the streets of Prince George again. The 27th annual Labour Day Classic will wind it's way around the Civic Centre, Two Rivers Art Gallery, Fort George Park and Connaught Hill on September 3, which means only a few weeks for training. There are six separate divisions. An 8.5-mile course, a 17-mile course, wheelchair event, 3 by 3-mile relay, walk and parent with stroller. Organizers are encouraging all competitors to register early to avoid confusion before the race. To register, call 564-8141.

► Playoffs start on Wednesday

Playoffs for the Prince George Women's Soccer Association begin Wednesday at the Ron Brent Elementary School soccer fields. Opening games start at 6:30 p.m. on field one and two with the first and last place rec teams facing off on field one and the third and sixth place teams playing on field two. The competitive side of the PGWSA doesn't start play until the week after on Tuesday when all four teams play at 6:30 p.m. Playoff finals for both rec and competitive divisions are August 24, also at 6:30 p.m.

Not afraid to Ruch it up

Midfielder adds new element to playoff match

In the battle for the top spot in the North Cariboo Senior Soccer League, PG Croatia/Keg is clearly in the lead. With playoffs only a few weeks away, Croatia is leading the regular league standings by a clear 10-point margin. To the casual observer it would seem they have a lock on the championship. But a casual observer wouldn't know that second-place Boston Pizza/Maple has a secret weapon. They wouldn't know about Alain Ruch.

At 5'7", Alain's more from the 'Little Boy' than 'Fat Man' school of secret weapons, but he packs a deceptively powerful punch. Born in Switzerland, Alain was baptized in Europe's rich soccer tradition almost from birth. When he was four he was already taking to the field to play and continued playing until his family emigrated to Canada four years later.

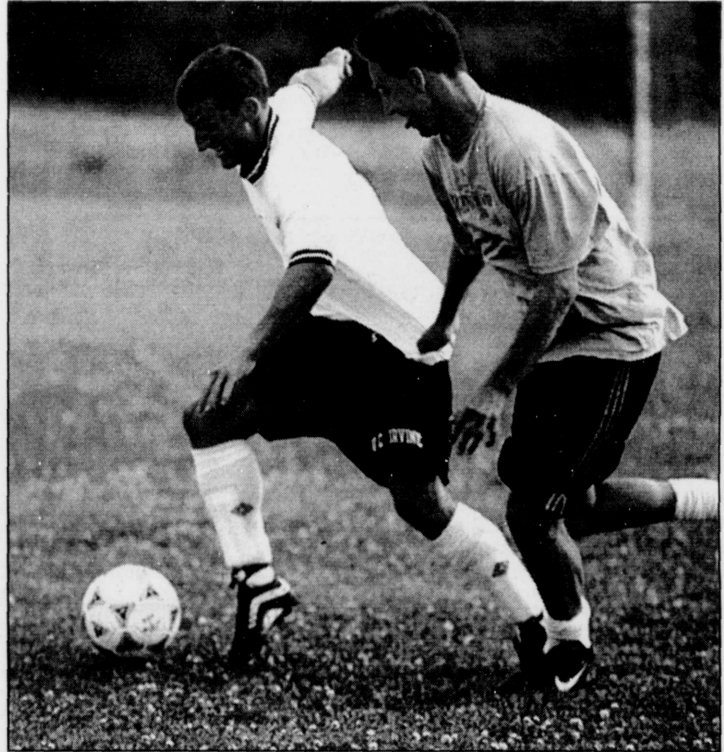
After a break in his soccer playing after coming to Canada, Alain enrolled in Prince George's sprawling youth program and quickly shot to the top, playing on all-star teams every one of his six years and winning provincials three of those. He was drafted into CIF/Automaster after leaving the youth association and played last year there. But this year his father Hans, a former player in Switzerland's own second division team, began coaching BP/Maple and the team stood poised to give long-time champs Croatia a run for their money and Ruch wanted to be a part of that.

"I thought this year I'd change teams so we could take a shot at Croatia," says Ruch.

The addition of Ruch has proven to be a boon to the hungry BP/Maple team. In his first season with the team he already leads his team in goals. But it isn't individual skill that will enable BP/Maple to take on Croatia and it isn't what makes Croatia so strong itself, says Ruch.

"Skill-wise we're a great team and just about as good as Croatia. But the team chemistry isn't as good as Croatia," admits Ruch. "Their team play is heads and tails above everybody. They're the most organized team."

The style of play in Prince George is a



Finesse will count more than physique for Ruch in playoffs. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

great deal different from the style of play in Europe, says Ruch. Finesse takes a back seat to physical dominance.

"We live in a country dominated by hockey," explains Ruch. But he's bringing his tactical, play-oriented style to BP/Maple and he's hoping it will rub off in time for playoffs.

"My biggest asset on the field is my vision... seeing how the play is unfolding," says Ruch. Part of that vision comes from Ruch's time playing in the collegiate soccer league with the University College of the Cariboo, which gave him a four-year soccer scholarship. But when it comes to scoring goals, sometimes he just can't help himself.

"My coach puts me up in the midfield, but I'm really offense-oriented. I take it upon myself to be the leading goal scorer

even though that's not really my job."

As well as being BP/Maple's best scorer, Ruch is also the team's best-kept secret from Croatia. Despite the fact that the regular season is almost finished, Ruch has yet to take the field against their arch-rivals. A mix-up with player cards in the first game meant Ruch had to sit on the sidelines. In the second matchup between the two teams, Ruch was in Quebec on an education exchange program.

With Ruch as an unknown quantity taking the field, BP/Maple may just have a shot at unseating the entrenched champions of men's soccer in PG. But it will take dedication, something Ruch says the team needs to work on.

"If we played our best and got our (stuff) together, we could at least challenge Croatia for top spot in the league."

Some People Say We're All Talk They're Right



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