

Will the Slovak train reign again?



Photo: City-Press, Berlin

ON GOLDEN RAILS: Captain Miroslav Satan (18) leads the rest of the victorious Slovak national team in celebration following their 4-3 win over the Russians in the 2002 gold medal game in Sweden.

Medal hopes high as hosts prepare for 2011 World Championship



Two things make the 2011 IIHF World Championship special. Slovakia will become the 17th country to host the IIHF's flagship event and it will be the 75th men's championship in the 103-year history of the federation.

RENÉ FASEL EDITORIAL

■ ■ It is always a special feeling to go to a country who is a first-time organizer. And after Latvia 2006 and Canada 2008 it is the third time in five years that we have allocated the men's World Championship to a country for the first time.

Although Slovakia is fairly new as a sovereign country (18 years since gaining independence in 1993) and as such organizes the championship for the first time. Bratislava of course hosted the hockey world already in 1959 and in 1992, but then as part of the former Czechoslovakia.

The Slovaks are no strangers to the sport. The first organized ice hockey game on Slovak ice took place in 1921 just outside Bratislava, and the Tatra-town of Stary Smokovec organized the 1925 IIHF European Championship, the forerunner to the World Championship.

■ ■ This issue of Ice Times devotes generous space to Slovakia's biggest moment as a nation after the independence – the World Championship title in Sweden in 2002, a sensational run capped by Peter Bondra's golden goal with 100 seconds remaining in the final game vs. Russia.

Not only was this a great win by a new nation, but it was also a defining moment in international hockey history. Until then, the hockey world spoke about the "Top Six" nations and the rest. As of May 11, 2002, there were now the "Top Seven".

It is truly remarkable that a country of just over 5 million people can develop such exciting players as Peter Bondra, Miroslav Satan, Marian Gaborik, Zdeno Chara, Pavol Demitra, Marian Hossa, Zigmund Palffy, Jozef Stümpel, Jaroslav Halak and many others.

■ ■ As the Olympics in Vancouver 2010 marked the end of the old guard – players born and trained during the Czechoslovak times – the 75th IIHF World Championship will hopefully be the start of the new Slovak era, with most of the national team players having grown up and developed in the new nation.

It is also our hope that this championship will leave a lasting legacy as for the continued development of ice hockey in Slovakia, especially considering the fully rebuilt arena in Bratislava and the two new practice sheets within the building.

■ ■ The Czech Republic's win in Cologne one year ago was the most surprising ending to a World Championship in over two decades. Now, with the Slovaks being at home, the Czechs almost at home, the Russians, Swedes, Finns, Canadians and Americans striving for medals and the progressive improvement of Belarus, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Norway, I cannot recall a championship which is as unpredictable as the one coming up.

The second half of April will be one of the busiest championship periods ever, with four major events intertwined, and a short window of three days before Slovakia 2011; the World U18 in Germany, the World Women's in Switzerland and the two men's Division I Championships in Hungary and Ukraine respectively.

I wish you great season finale!

René Fasel
IIHF President

Girls Hockey Day-calling all nations!

■ On October 2nd, 2011, we will be celebrating the first annual World Girls Hockey Day! Whether your nation already has experienced the fun of a Girls Hockey Day or if you have never run this type of event before, mark this day on your calendar. We are looking for as many nations as possible to join in the excitement of the day by organizing an on-ice session that will allow girls to try playing ice hockey. All you need is a small amount of time on an ice rink and volunteers who love hockey, love kids and want to be part of getting the future of female hockey on the ice! We



will be following the events around the world on the IIHF.com website, so be sure to let us know that you want to be a part of the day. The IIHF also has some great resources that can help those who have never put on a Girls Hockey Day in the past. Let IIHF Women's Program Manager, Tanya Foley (foley@iihf.com) know that you are interested in being a part of the World Girls Hockey Day and for one day join in showing the world the next generation of champions!

Ryan Walter's Latest Challenge

Former NHLer coaching Team Canada at World Women's Championship

The top ranked Canadian women's hockey team have a new coach at the helm for this year's IIHF World Women's Championship. Former NHL player, broadcaster and now Team Canada head coach Ryan Walter to discuss the team's preparations ahead of the World Championship in Zurich and Winterthur, Switzerland.

With your experience at the Four Nations tournament and in camp, what are your initial impressions of the team?

Well I think that Hockey Canada has great depth at the women's highest level. We'll bring in 34 players to fill 21 spots here for the World Championships, so there is definitely some depth and very good skill. These ladies are among the best in the world, and what impressed me most was that they want to be better and take their game to the next level. That really impresses me when I see that in an athlete.

Looking at the team that won gold at the Olympics last year versus the group you have this year, has it changed since then?

There are some changes. We had four or five veterans retire, and anytime you have a quarter of your team move there is room for younger players to fit in and play larger roles. Right now I'm very pleased with the balance between veteran players, the ones in the middle that are really going to push hard, and the younger kids who are just starting out with the program.

Being a former NHL coach, do you take a different approach when coaching a women's team?

My coaching style is probably pretty conducive to the women's game. I'm not a yeller or a screamer, and I think the great coaches that I had while in the NHL were down-to-earth and honest and communicated well. I've tried to take those qualities to the women's game, and so far so good. My goal is to try to add value to each of the players first, then to the team as a whole. It's not about my ego, it's about our team, and I think that that approach has worked out well so far and we'll see where it goes.

Would you say your coaching style differs significantly from that of your predecessor Melody Davidson?



Walter played over 1,000 NHL games.

For sure. The Four Nations Cup has a little bit of pressure, but at the World Championships, where I've played four times as a pro, there's a lot more pressure and it's a great opportunity for our kids to grow.

Lately the United States has been the better team at the World Women's Championships while Canada tends to be on top at the Olympics. Any thoughts as to why this is?

It's tough to say. I very much honour the U.S. program, because they are among the best in the world. Their team right now, from the goalie up, is playing a high calibre game. I'm very much impressed with their program and their players, and we look forward to our games at the World Championship.



For the full interview, go to IIHF.com/Walter

Ilves Tampere writes history

EWCC won by team of plucky Finns

■ Since the creation of the European Women's Champions Cup the trophy has been either in Swedish or Russian hands. No longer, as Ilves Tampere from Finland swept the final tournament in Lugano and became Euro champs for the first time.

The Finns clinched the win by defeating Aisulu Almaty from Kazakhstan 1-0 in their last game February 26. They had earlier defeated Russian SKIF Nizhni Novgorod 5-3 and host HC Lugano, 5-4 in overtime.

"It was really tough to play Almaty. They have a good defence and it was also hard for us because we had such an intense game the day before with the overtime win against Lugano," said Saara Tuominen, who was second in scoring with six points (2+4), one behind Lugano's Kira Misikowetz.

Ilves Tampere had several Finnish national team players on the roster and it was not only a success for the team, but for the young coaches that took over the team last summer.

"It is such a big thing for us to be the best team in Europe," said Severi Lehtonen, 20, the assistant coach of Samuli Marjeta, 23.

"It's special for us to be younger than some of the players. We are all friends and we have a great team spirit," he said.

"We were so happy that we made it to the final four and I'm almost a bit shocked that we won the tournament. The EWCC is a competition we have focused on since September and it was so tough because the teams here were so professional."

Ilves had a tremendous start in the EWCC event, jumping out to a 4-0 lead against Russian champion SKIF Nizhni Novgorod, and the Finns remained strong throughout the whole tournament. Ilves beat the Russians 5-3 before taking on host HC Lugano for a clash between the two undefeated teams after Day 1. Lugano edged Aisulu Almaty in a 2-1 shootout win in their opener.

The Finns needed just one more point in their last game against Aisulu Almaty and they got three in a hard-fought win with the only goal scored by Saara Tuominen, who capitalized after Heidi Peltari had hit the crossbar with a shot from the blueline.

SKIF won the silver medals thanks to a 5-4 overtime win against Lugano on the last day.

This year's European Women's Champions Cup included 20 teams from as many countries that played in seven events.



Photo: Felix A. Eicher

Ilves' victory will bring the cup to Finland for the first time.

The change from player to zebra

Former Olympian Brüggemann swapped his jersey in for a striped sweater, and doesn't regret it

By Martin Merk

■ It doesn't happen often that a top player continues his hockey career as a referee. However, former German Olympian Lars Brüggemann was eager to try it, and doesn't regret the step that could also suit other players if they follow his example.

The 35-year-old was a top defenceman in the German league. He also represented his country in the Nagano Olympics in 1998, in the 1998 World Championship in Zurich and Basel, and in the 2000 World Championship B-Pool in Poland. But his career ended early. He had to stop during the 2006-2007 season in Wolfsburg as a 30-year-old due to injury.

"I had huge knee problems and the regeneration didn't really work with many games and practices, so I decided to call it quits," the North Rhine-Westphalia native said. "I had a break for some months and then I thought about becoming a ref where the risk of colliding with players isn't that big."

The thoughts came up when he visited a game and co-incidentally talked to Gerhard Müller, who's also an IIHF referee supervisor. The chat got him interested in officiating.

"As a player I railed against referees as many players do, so I decided I wanted to do it better," he said about his initial thoughts. "But I quickly realized it's not that easy and I shouldn't have railed that much at the refs!"

■ Brüggemann first had to start in amateur and junior hockey in 2007 to make his way up. The beginning was the most challenging part for him.

"I was a rookie as a referee after the many years as a player. I realized that officiating is not that easy as I imagined when I was playing. Referees do have a huge responsibility," he said. "At the beginning I really had to get used to it. That was the toughest time. I felt a bit strange without having a stick and I did some mistakes, but then it got better. It went up continuously with my career."

At age 35 Brüggemann still sees many familiar faces from his player career. Having ten former teammates or opponents on the ice has become a normal part of his job.

"That's nothing special and I think they're happy to see a former player, and everybody is professional enough to realize that we're doing different jobs now," he says and thinks that with his step into officiating he could even change the attitude.

"Many players think it's good that a former player does this job, although I don't think every



LOOKING GOOD IN BLACK AND WHITE: Lars Brüggemann played in 437 German DEL games and joined the national team at the 1998 Olympic Games in Nagano.

Photo: Fotobüro J. J. J.

player would make a good ref because to become a good ref you don't necessarily need to be a good player. When I'm talking to players I have the feeling that they think more about officiating themselves while some years ago players didn't consider this option at all."

■ Meanwhile Brüggemann has become a top referee in his country. He was welcomed in the German top league DEL in the 2009-2010 season and since January 2011 he's one of three referees in the country that are hired as a full-time on-ice officials.

Last season he also made his international debut as a referee at the Continental Cup preliminary-round tournament in Krakow, Poland.

"It was a great honour and a good experience," he says, but later in that season he got an even more surprising call a few days before the 2010 IIHF World Championship Division I Group A was set to start in Tilburg, Netherlands.

"I was very lucky. I jumped in due to cancelled flights because of the volcano eruption as I don't live that far away from the Netherlands," Brüggemann remembers the situation.

"It was a bit difficult because I wasn't prepared, but I progressed day by day and it was a very good experience also because I once played this tournament as a player."

■ He seems to have done his job well. When his game assignments were done, Brüggemann was selected for the Austria vs. Ukraine game

that decided promotion to the 2011 IIHF World Championship in Slovakia. That's the best mark you could get.

"I'm doing many events I did as a player, also the InLine Hockey World Championship last year. And there are still some bigger events I can dream of as a referee," he says.

Think of the Top Division of the World Championship, or the Olympics.

For now he will have another new event on his list once the playoffs in Germany come to an end. He's assigned for the 2011 IIHF World U18 Championship in Crimmitschau and Dresden, Germany.

"I've been looking forward to the World U18 Championship since I was listed in autumn," Brüggemann admits. "It's a promotion for myself that gives me confidence and I'm looking forward to officiate at this event in my own country. I already met some of my colleagues at this event during the referee exchange program this year. They're nice guys and I'm really looking forward to working with them."

Montreal cruises to emphatic win over Toronto in 2011 Clarkson Cup

St. Pierre closes the door as Quebec team wins second Cup, Botterill ends her remarkable career on a high note

■ Kim St. Pierre earned the shutout and veteran Team Canada forward Caroline Ouellette had a goal and two assists to lead Montreal to a convincing 5-0 win over Toronto to win the third Clarkson Cup. The trophy is emblematic of professional women's hockey supremacy in North America and was won in its first year by Montreal, in 2009. Minnesota won in 2010.

Also scoring were Noemie Marin, Vanessa Davidson, Sarah Vaillancourt, and Sabrina Harbec. Toronto goalie and CWHL founder Sami Jo Small faced 51 shots and was brilliant in defeat.

The trophy was presented by Kyra Clarkson, daughter of the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, who donated it while she was Canada's governor general. The Clarkson Cup weekend started with four teams – Brampton and Minnesota were the others – playing a round robin,



TWO OUT OF THREE: Montreal hoists the Clarkson Cup.

Photo: Brandon Taylor

Neither Toronto nor Montreal has a nickname this season. Both teams are hoping that the CWHL will become affiliated with the NHL and the women can use Maple Leafs and Canadiens, respectively, just as the men do in the NHL.

Montreal featured several Olympians, notably St. Pierre, Vaillancourt, and Ouellette as well as Julie Chu, arch-rival for the United States when these players congregate next month for the World Women's Championship in Zurich and Winterthur, Switzerland. Toronto boasted captain Jennifer Botterill, Tessa Bonhomme, and Alexandra Hoffmeyer (whose father, Bob, played several years in the NHL).

with Toronto and Montreal the top two teams in the standings. Brampton also played in the CWHL while Minnesota qualified for the final weekend by virtue of being champion of the Western Women's Hockey League.

Botterill announced her retirement from the national team just days ago, and tonight marked her last league game. One of the greatest women to play the game, she heads into retirement with Hall of Fame credentials.

2011 IIHF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

Golden heroes of 2002, where are they now?

By Andrew Podnieks

On the eve of hosting the World Championship for the first time, Slovakia might well recall its first great moment in international hockey history, the afternoon of May 11, 2002, when Peter Bondra scored with 100 seconds left in regulation time to give his nation a 4-3 win over Russia and its first and only gold medal at an IIHF event.

Almost a decade later, the players from that team have spread far and wide, some to retirement, some to stardom, others to relative obscurity.



Coach Jan Filc

■ Coach **Jan Filc** brought the team its first three medals at the World Championship, a bronze in 1999, a silver in 2000, and this gold in 2002. He has coached Slovakia at two Olympics (2002 and fourth place in 2010) and is now the head of youth development for the Slovak Ice Hockey Association.

■ Veteran defenceman **Jergus Baca** had been playing with Revier Löwen Oberhausen in Germany's DEL until 2002. Following the World Championship, he returned to Slovakia to play for Liptovský Mikuláš and Dukla Trenčín, before finally retiring at age 40.

■ Winger **Lubomir Bartecko** was in the middle of an NHL career that continued until 2003, when he returned to Europe to play for Sparta Prague. He played in four World Championships and two Olympics including 2010 Vancouver, and is currently with MODO in the Swedish League.

■ **Peter Bondra** is now the general manager of the Slovak team and as a player reached 500 goals and 1,000 games played in the NHL.

■ Defenceman **Ladislav Cierny** was 27 and making his World Championship debut in 2002. He has gone on to a fine career in the Slovak league with Zvolen and last played internationally at the 2004 World Cup.

■ Centre **Michal Handzus** started his NHL career in 1998 and has been in the league ever since, currently with the Los Angeles Kings. He also played in the 2010 Olympics.

■ Defender **Radoslav Hecl** was drafted by Buffalo in the summer of 2002 at age 28 and played his only NHL games with the Sabres the next year. After the World Championship he returned to Slovakia and played three seasons with Slovan Bratislava. After a two-year stint in the AHL and Italy, he retired in 2008.

■ Centre **Miroslav Hlinka** was playing with MODO Örnsköldsvik but left Sweden in 2003 to play for Dynamo Moscow and for various Czech and Slovak teams. He's been playing for Banská Bystrica since 2009.



Jan Lasak

■ Goalie **Jan Lasak** was in the middle of a brief NHL career in 2002 but has since enjoyed a lengthy career in Europe, most notably for Pardubice in the Czech league. In 2005 he posted a 1.79 GAA through 16 playoff games as the team won the Czech Extraliga Championship. Currently with Jokerit Helsinki.

■ **Richard Lintner** used the success of 2002 to sign with the New York Rangers, but moved back to Europe after only one season. In 2003-2004 he was credited for scoring the most goals and most points for a defenceman that year in the Swedish League. He is currently with the Finnish club Saipa.



Photo: CityPress, Berlin

WILL IT HAPPEN AGAIN? In 2002 Slovakia fielded a varied cast of players who came together for an improbable Cup run to remember. A turn at hosting the World Championship is next.

■ Defenceman **Dusan Milo** never played in the NHL but moved from Zvolen to MODO Örnsköldsvik after winning gold in 2002. He has been playing for Krefeld Pinguine in Germany for the last five years.

■ Winger **Ladislav Nagy** has had three separate stints with the Phoenix Coyotes, the first during this 2001-02 season. He currently plays for MODO Örnsköldsvik.

■ Winger **Vladimir Orszagh** was drafted in 1995 by the New York Islanders, playing 289 games in the NHL with the Isles, the Nashville Predators, and the St. Louis Blues. Knee injuries affected Orszagh in his later years, forcing him to retire in 2009 after an unsuccessful comeback attempt with Banská Bystrica.

■ Winger **Zigmund Palffy** was coming off a 32-goal season with the Los Angeles Kings and averaged more than a point a game through 684 NHL games. He played at the 2010 Olympics, having appeared previously in 2002 and 1994. In 2007 he came out of retirement, joining his hometown club SK Skalica.

■ Forward **Rastislav Pavlikovsky** has continued to play in Europe and represent Slovakia in IIHF events, most recently at the 2009 World Championship. His club duties are currently with AIK Stockholm in the Swedish Elitserien.

■ Centre **Robert Petrovicky** had long and distinguished careers in both the NHL and leagues in Europe. In the last two years he has mostly defended the colours of Dinamo Riga, Latvia's entry in the Russian KHL.

■ Forward **Peter Pucher** has played most of his career in the Czech Extraliga and played in six World Championships at the top level for Slovakia. He moved back to Slovakia to play for Zvolen in 2009.

■ Winger **Miroslav Satan** had an exceptional career in the NHL, capped by a Stanley Cup win with Pittsburgh in 2009. He played 1,050 regular-season games with five teams. This season he began with Slovan Bratislava before moving to Dynamo Moscow.

■ At age 23, defenceman **Peter Smrek** was one of the youngest players on the 2002 team. He never established himself in the NHL, although he played 28 games, and moved back to Europe for several seasons, where he last played for Severstal Cherepovets in the KHL in 2009-2010.

■ Winger **Radovan Somik** signed with the Philadelphia Flyers as a result of his play in 2002, but his NHL career was limited to 113 games. He has played extensively in the Czech league, and is currently with Pardubice.

■ Goalie **Rastislav Stana** played six years in North America before 2002. Following the championship, he had a short stint with the Washington Capitals before moving on to Sweden and, currently, Russia.

■ Defenceman **Martin Strbak** won a Russian championship with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl leading up to the 2002 Worlds, played briefly in the NHL the next year, and then returned to Europe to play primarily in Russia again, currently with Dynamo Moscow.

■ Forward **Jozef Stümpel** was in the middle of a fine NHL career in 2002. After 957 NHL games split between Boston and Los Angeles, he signed with Barys Astana in the KHL in 2008 and joined Dynamo Minsk last season.

■ Winger **Robert Tomik** played his one and only World Championship in 2002 during an exclusively European career rooted in Czech and Slovak leagues. He played last season with HC Kosice.

■ Winger **Marek Uram** also has played exclusively in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, notably with Znojemsti Orli in the former and Slovan Bratislava in the latter.

■ **Lubomir Visnovsky** joined Slovakia in 2002 after the Los Angeles Kings were eliminated from the playoffs. The defenceman later played with the Edmonton Oilers and, for the last two seasons, the Anaheim Ducks. After an injury cut short his 2009 season, he has rebounded with a very strong campaign in 2010-2011.



Hlinka & Co.

History doesn't favour the hosts

Few teams have found any success playing at home

By Andrew Podnieks

When the IIHF Congress awards the hosting of upcoming tournaments to national federations, those nations celebrate with pride and joy at the prospects of welcoming the hockey world in several years' time. Yet, as we know, that day of celebration often turns to disappointment when the event finishes. Indeed, the host nation has not won World Championship gold since 1986.

Still, the hosting of an event is a special moment in a country's history, irrespective of the home team's result (within reason, of course). And when a nation hosts for the first time, that moment is even more special.

■ Consider **1949**, for instance, the first time **Sweden** hosted the Worlds. Tre Kronor had been involved in IIHF participation since 1920, but the nation was still one very much in the process of leaving bandy in favour of "Canadian hockey." By the time 1949 rolled around, it had developed an impressive national team, but its only medal had been a silver medal in 1947 (as well as a silver medal at the 1928 Olympics). In 1949, the team won its two preliminary round games but won only two of five games in the medal round and finished off the podium, in fourth spot. Nonetheless, the Swedes created a sensation by holding Canada to a 2-2 tie, a stunning result for a country that had once lost an Olympic game 22-0 to the same opponent.

Photo: Jukka Rautio, Europhoto / Imagesonline
USA's Andy Roach spoiled the Czech party at the 2004 World Championship in Prague.

■ In **1957**, the Swedes gave the **Soviet Union** a rude awakening. The USSR had joined the IIHF only in 1954, but its instant success gave the nation credibility and just three years later it was hosting the Worlds for the first time. The event was such a roaring success that several games were transferred from an arena to a football stadium, including the game to decide gold on the last day. But by playing the hosts to a 4-4 tie before some 57,000 fans, Sweden earned gold and pushed the Soviets to the silver.

■ The **1962** World Championship took place in Colorado Springs and Denver, the **Americans** earning the privilege to host thanks to their heightened profile after winning Olympic gold in Squaw Valley two years earlier. But whereas they beat Canada, Sweden, and the Soviets to win that gold, they failed to beat the first two while CCCP didn't participate in the 1962 event. The result was a bronze medal for the United States on home ice.

■ **Finland** was the last of the big nations to host for the first time, an honour it ac-

cepted in **1965** when Tampere was the host city. Today, Finland is a hockey power, but it took decades for the small nation to develop a program worthy of its greatest adversaries. While the event was a success in 1965, the Finns finished a disappointing seventh of eight nations, winning only one of seven games.

■ Although Katowice's hosting of the **1976** World Championship was not a first for **Poland**, it felt like it. After all, Krynica hosted in 1931, and in the intervening 45 years a tremendous amount had happened politically. Poland won the first game of the tournament, beating the Soviets 6-4 in perhaps the most stunning upset in hockey history. It is a result that would never have happened anywhere but when the Poles hosted, a great example of the power of home-ice advantage.

■ At the other end of the spectrum was in **2000** when St. Petersburg hosted. This marked the first time the new **Russia** had welcomed the world, and all of the team's greatest available stars came out to play. Yet, despite Yashin and Afinogenov and Kamensky and Bure, the team traumatized its fans by finishing 11th out of 16 nations.

■ Prague and Ostrava hosted in **2004**, the first time the separated **Czech Republic** had hosted, and another disappointing result followed, a shocking quarterfinals loss to the underdog Americans in a shootout and a fifth-place finish.

■ The same result happened when **Latvia** hosted in **2006**. The tiny new, hockey-loving nation with just about the wildest fans in the world descended on Riga for 56 games of world-class hockey, but they went away with only a tenth-place showing.

■ Even **Canada**, while playing superbly, managed to come up short of the dream ending. Hosting for the first time in **2008** to honour the 100th anniversary of the IIHF, the hosts made it to the finals against the Russians, a dream matchup. An overtime loss in the gold-medal game at the Colisee in Quebec City wasn't quite what the fans had hoped for. Great event, great success, but wrong ending for the first-time hosts.

And so, Slovakia 2011 is upon us. The excitement is palpable. Success for the hockey-mad nation has been sporadic, but everyone remembers 2002 like it was yesterday. But will that memory and the excitement of being first-time hosts translate to gold, or a medal of another colour? Odds are against it, but never discount the Slovaks.

Russia, Canada on top in 2011 Pre-Championship rankings

■ ■ Russia is on top of the men's IIHF Pre-Championship World Ranking while Canada is No. 1 in the women's heading into April's and May's IIHF World Championship.

On the women's side, not even the IIHF World Ranking system has been able to separate the two major powers of the women's game. Heading into the 2011 IIHF World Women's Championship in Switzerland (Zurich and Winterthur, April 16-25), Canada and the United States are identical at 1770 points.

The reason why Canada is ranked number 1 is the gold medal at the Vancouver Olympics more than one year ago. One of the rules of the ranking system is that the higher position in the last tournament decides who gets the upper hand, in case of equal ranking points.

Canada and the USA were also perfectly equal in the ranking immediately after the Olympics, with both countries on 2950 points. It is guaranteed, however, that this current Russia-Canada tie will break come April 25th. The chart beside helps you to very easily calculate the World Ranking, which will be official after the championship.

So, for example: If Team USA defends its World Championship gold medal from 2009 in Finland, you simply add the winner's 1200 ranking points to the current pre-Championship ranking points of 1770, for a total of 2970.

If the scenario from 2009 is repeated, with Canada taking the silver, the Canadians will be able to add 1160 points to their current 1770 for a total of 2930.

■ ■ On the men's side Russia is on top of the pre-Championship World Ranking despite its disappointing sixth place finish in the 2010 Olympics. The reason for this is Russia's stellar performance in 2008 and 2009 (World Championship gold) and also in last year's World tourney in Germany – a silver medal.

Canada's ranking numbers took a hit with the 7th place finish in Cologne one year ago, but due to the gold in Vancouver and the silver medals in 2008 and 2009, the Olympic champions are only 15 points behind. So basically, since 20 or 40 ranking points separate the various final tournament placing positions, Russia cannot afford to finish behind Canada in Slovakia 2011 if they want to keep their historic rival behind them.

Can any team other than Russia or Canada emerge on top of the IIHF World Ranking after Slovakia 2011 is over? Sweden is third in the pre-Championship ranking but 80 points behind Russia and 65 behind Canada, so the team of Tre Kronor needs to finish well ahead of its main competitors in Bratislava to claim first place.

For example: If Sweden wins gold on May 15, they will end up with 3670 points. With this they will be ranked No. 1 if Russia doesn't finish higher than third and Canada doesn't medal.

But on the other hand, both the Czech Republic (20 points behind Sweden) and Finland (40 points behind) could challenge for third World Ranking position if they have strong showings in Slovakia and the Swedes don't.

2011 IIHF MEN'S PRE-CHAMPIONSHIP REPORT				2011 IIHF WOMEN'S PRE-CHAMPIONSHIP REPORT			
Rank	Country	Points	Points to be earned	Rank	Country	Points	Points to be earned
1	Russia	2550	Top Division	1	Canada	1770	Top Division
2	Canada	2535	1 1200	2	USA	1770	1 1200
3	Sweden	2470	2 1160	3	Finland	1680	2 1160
4	Czech Republic	2450	3 1120	4	Sweden	1640	3 1120
5	Finland	2430	4 1100	5	Switzerland	1580	4 1100
6	USA	2340	5 1060	6	Russia	1570	5 1060
7	Switzerland	2280	6 1040	7	China	1505	6 1040
8	Slovakia	2190	7 1020	8	Kazakhstan	1475	7 1020
9	Germany	2170	8 1000	9	Japan	1460	8 1000
10	Belarus	2165	9 960	10	Slovakia	1450	Division I
11	Norway	2135	10 940	11	Germany	1395	9 960
12	Latvia	2105	11 920	12	Norway	1340	10 940
13	Denmark	2045	12 900	13	Czech Republic	1315	11 920
14	Austria	1890	13 880	14	France	1285	12 900
15	France	1865	14 860	15	Latvia	1250	13 880
16	Italy	1825	15 840	16	Austria	1230	14 860
17	Kazakhstan	1815	16 820	17	Great Britain	1180	Division II
18	Ukraine	1775	Division I	18	Italy	1170	15 840
19	Slovenia	1745	17 800	19	Croatia	735	16 820
20	Hungary	1700	18 780	20	Slovenia	725	17 800
21	Japan	1665	19 760	21	DPR Korea	595	18 780
22	Poland	1535	20 740	22	Denmark	570	19 760
23	Great Britain	1510	21 720	23	Netherlands	545	20 740
24	Lithuania	1485	22 700	24	Bulgaria	540	Division III
25	Netherlands	1420	23 680	25	Australia	180	21 720
26	Croatia	1370	24 660	26	Belgium	160	22 700
27	Estonia	1340	25 640	27	Hungary	155	23 680
28	Serbia	1275	26 620	28	Korea	150	24 660
29	Romania	1240	27 600	29	Iceland	145	25 640
30	Spain	1165	28 580	30	New Zealand	140	26 620
31	Bulgaria	1025	Division II	31	Romania	135	Division IV
32	Mexico	985	29 560	32	Estonia	130	27 600
33	Korea	905	30 540	33	South Africa	125	28 580
34	Turkey	830	31 520	34	Turkey	120	29 560
35	Australia	810	32 500	35	Spain	0	30 540
36	Belgium	740	33 480	36	Ireland	0	31 520
37	Iceland	665	34 460	37	Poland	0	Division V
38	China	640	35 440	38			32 500
39	New Zealand	565	36 420	39			33 480
40	Israel	565	37 400	40			34 460
41	DPR Korea	485	38 380	41			35 440
42	Ireland	445	39 360	42			36 420
43	South Africa	440	40 340				
44	Greece	400	Division III				
45	Luxembourg	390	41 320				
46	Mongolia	315	42 300				
47	United Arab Emirates	165	43 280				
48	Bosnia & Herzegovina	50	44 260				
49	Armenia	0	45 240				
			46 220				

■ ■ With every new ranking year, the system drops the points that a nation gained from tournaments played five years ago, while the value of the points from years 2, 3, and 4 are decreased by 25 per cent.

Example: Value of the gold medal
 Year 1: 100% value -- 1200 points
 Year 2: 75% value -- 900 points
 Year 3: 50% value -- 600 points
 Year 4: 25% value -- 300 points
 Year 5: 0% value -- 0 points

In this year's calculation the results from the 2007 season have now been dropped.

We are the champions in the world: Wrapup



1 MEXICO CITY. Team Iceland gained promotion to Division II following a 4-3 shootout victory over Mexico in the 2011 IIHF World U18 Championship Division III Group B, held at the Lomas Verdes ice rink in Mexico City.

Both teams played well throughout the tourney, combining to outscore their opponents 82-13. South Africa came in third after a 3-2 victory over Israel.



2 NEWCASTLE. The Dutch women's national team celebrates after winning a closely fought game against the host Australians, claiming the 2011 World Women's Championship Division III for the Netherlands, in Newcastle, Australia.

The game, a tightly played 3-2 affair, was won on the stick of forward Julie Zwarthoed, who potted the only goal in the shootout to claim the victory. Her teammate, Claudia van Leeuwen, was named Best Goaltender of the championship.



3 SOFIA. The Polish women's hockey team began their international careers in impressive fashion, steamrolling over most of the competition and winning the inaugural World Women's Championship Division V, held in Sofia, Bulgaria.

After opening their country's first international women's hockey game ever with an emphatic 23-0 win over Ireland, the Poles next ran over Bulgaria 19-0 before meeting their match in the round-robin game against Spain. The game went back and forth but Poland finally came out with a 5-4 win when the tournament's top forward, Karolina Pozniowska, scored the game winning goal in overtime.



4 BRASOV. The Austrians have made their way back to Under18 Division I with five wins in five games and an impressive 56-3 goal record. The Eagles showed that they didn't want to belong in Division II any longer than necessary, as they encountered no difficulties in any of the five games of the Division II Group A, played in the brand-new Brasov Arena in Romania.

The tightest game was the first one, a 5-1 win against Croatia. The Austrians steamrolled over their competitors from Serbia (12-0), Estonia (10-0) and New Zealand (21-0) before facing host Romania for the deciding game between the two undefeated teams. Captain Patrick Obrist and his linemate Alexander Cijan had two goals each in an 8-2 victory.



DOMESTIC MASTERS. The Sheffield Steelers (5) in Great Britain, CH Jaca (6) in Spain and Skautafelag Akureyrar (7) in Iceland won their national championships in March.

Photos: Ulises Gutiérrez Bonilla, Mark Bradford, Bonchuk Andonov, Kis Jancsi, Sheffield Steelers, Luz Stella Ramirez, Sigurgeir Haraldsson



RESULTS SUMMARY

World Women's Championship Div. III

Newcastle, Australia February 1-6

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Hungary-Croatia, Slovenia-Netherlands, Australia-Belgium, etc.

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Netherlands, Australia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Belgium.

World Women's Championship Div. V

Sofia, Bulgaria March 14-19

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Poland-Ireland, Bulgaria-Turkey, Turkey-Spain, etc.

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Poland, Spain, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ireland.

World U18 Championship Div. II, Grp. A

Brasov, Romania March 19-25

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes New Zealand-Serbia, Croatia-Austria, Romania-Estonia, etc.

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Austria, Romania, Croatia, Estonia, Serbia, New Zealand.

World U18 Championship Div. III, Grp. B

Mexico City, Mexico March 13-19

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Ireland-South Africa, Israel-Mexico, Iceland-Israel, etc.

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Iceland, Mexico, South Africa, Israel, Ireland.

European Women's Champions Cup Final

Lugano, Switzerland February 25-27

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Ilves-N. Novgorod, Lugano-Aisulu, N. Novgorod-Aisulu, etc.

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Ilves Tampere, SKIF Nizhni Novgorod, HC Lugano, Aisulu Almaty.

2011 Asian Winter Games

Astana & Almaty, Kazakhstan January 28-February 6

Men's Top Division

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Chinese Taipei-Korea, China-Japan, Japan-Chinese Taipei, etc.

Final Standings

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Kazakhstan-12 points, Japan-9 points, etc.

Men's Premier Division

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Thailand-Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia-Bahrain, Mongolia-Kuwait, etc.

Final Standings

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Kyrgyzstan-18 points, United Arab Emirates-15 points, etc.

Women's Tournament

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Korea-Japan, DPR Korea-Kazakhstan, China-DPR Korea, etc.

Final Standings

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Kazakhstan-11 points, Japan-9 points, etc.

Universiade 2011

Erzurum, Turkey January 27-February 6

Men's Tournament Playoff Round

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Kazakhstan-Japan, Canada-Slovakia, Russia-Czech Republic, etc.

Semifinals

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Belarus-Kazakhstan, Russia-Canada.

Bronze Medal Game

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Kazakhstan-Canada.

Gold Medal Game

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Russia-Belarus.

Women's Tournament Playoff Round

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Finland-Slovakia, Canada-USA.

Classification Game

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Great Britain-Turkey.

Bronze Medal Game

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Slovakia-USA.

Gold Medal Game

Table with 3 columns: Country, Points, and Record. Includes Canada-Finland.

For the latest tournaments, go to IHF.com/scores



Asian Winter Games host Kazakhstan won both the men's and women's ice hockey events. Photo: Dmitri Skegin

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Switzerland is Europe's attendance magnet

Swiss league overtakes Swedish Elitserien, SC Bern continues to own top crowd numbers

SC Bern tops the European attendance ranking for the tenth consecutive season. This year, Switzerland not only has the most attended hockey club in Europe, but also the most attended league, as the National League A (average 6,306) has overtaken the Swedish Elitserien (6,160).

The average regular season attendance of the defending Swiss national champion SC Bern increased by 147 to 15,856. This is by far the highest number in Europe. In the league ranking, the Russian KHL has overtaken the German DEL for the third spot

Eisbären Berlin (German DEL league) remains second with 13,946 fans while two other German clubs – Adler Mannheim and Kölner Haie – as well as Sweden's Frölunda Gothenburg all fell below the 10,000 mark for the first time in five years.

Eisbären is the club with the highest capacity percentage among the top-ranked teams with 98.2%. The corresponding number for SC Bern is 92.6%.

A new surprise number three on the list is Dynamo Minsk from Belarus. The KHL club moved to the new Minsk Arena that was built last year in view of the 2014 IIHF World Championship and they averaged 10,538 fans. The Minsk team took a gigantic leap as it was ranked 61st last year.

Medvescak Zagreb also made a big jump. The Croatian club that played its second season in the Austrian league entered the ranking last year, when it was 35th, but

improved to 13th this year with an average of 7,837 fans.

The overall league rankings changed slightly thanks to new arenas. While Dynamo Minsk was a driving force in the KHL's overtaking of the German DEL – the Russian league is now ranked third in Europe averaging 5,785 fans – the Swiss National League A took over the first position from Sweden.

The average in the Swiss league increased from 6,181 to 6,306 mostly thanks to the new arena of EV Zug, which advanced from 68th to 29th in the ranking. The Swedish league follows with 6,160 fans per game, 30 less than last year.

The Swiss NLA is now the league with the highest average attendance in Europe and the second worldwide behind only the National Hockey League. The Swiss league, the Swedish Elitserien, the Russian KHL and the German DEL follow behind the NHL and ahead of the American Hockey League, the second best-attended league in North America.

The International Ice Hockey Federation publishes the European rankings annually after the end of the regular season in Europe's top leagues. The list is based on the numbers published or submitted from the leagues.

The calculations include top-tier leagues from 16 European countries as well as some teams from second-tier leagues and from the Asia League.

TOP 50 EUROPE ATTENDANCE FIGURES 2010-2011

Table with 6 columns: Rank, Previous, Club Name, Country, Average attendance, Attendance by capacity. Lists top 50 leagues and clubs.

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE TOP LEAGUES - EUROPE AND ASIA

Table with 3 columns: Rank, Country - League Name, Average Attendance. Lists average attendance for top leagues.



Photo: Martin Merk

The KHL's Dynamo Minsk (arena pictured) made a huge jump in the 2011 European attendance rankings, coming from outside the top 50 last year to now third overall.

2002's Golden boy assumes next challenge

After winning a World Championship, Peter Bondra now seeks new glory as Slovakia's GM

By Adam Steiss

■ ■ Ask any Slovak who knows anything about hockey, and they will be able to tell you where they were when Peter Bondra scored the goal that won the gold medal for Slovakia in the 2002 IIHF World Championship.

The former NHL star is among Slovakia's best hockey exports, tallying 892 points in 16 years playing mostly for Washington. A prolific goal scorer, he dominates the Capitals' record books and is considered one of the top offensive players of the 1990s.

However, perhaps no other goal held as much significance as his game winner against the Russians in 2002. *Ice Times* caught up with Bondra, now a GM with the Slovak national team, to discuss the country's gold medal win and his hopes for the upcoming world championship.

Peter Stastny called the 2002 gold medal the biggest thing to happen to Slovakia since the country's independence. Was it a fitting description?

Absolutely, it was definitely a pivotal moment for our nation. After we split from the Czech Republic we basically started at the bottom of the C group and had to play our way up to the elite group, and just a few years later we had won a World Championship. That was something amazing for the country and the biggest accomplishment for us as a hockey nation.

You've had a long and illustrious career in the NHL, but where did this particular victory rate amongst your experiences as a hockey player?

It was certainly a unique one. I would say that the gold medal victory was one of the highlights of my career, no question about it. The way we celebrated, how our people greeted us when we returned from Sweden, and how everybody all over Slovakia was so excited about it is something I will remember for the rest of my life.

Peter Bondra's Fact File

- Born: February 7th in Luck, Ukraine
- Began pro career with VSV Kosice (SVK).
- Registered 892 points in 1,081 NHL games, including 19 career hat tricks.
- A 5-time NHL All-Star, Bondra is one of only 24 Europeans who have played 1,000 or more NHL games.
- International Career**
- 2002 Worlds-Gold
- 2003 Worlds-Bronze
- 1996 World Cup of Hockey
- 1998, 2006 Olympic Games
- Games Played: 28
- Goals: 18, Assists: 4, Points: 22

What was the reception like when you returned to Slovakia following the victory?

Phew! It was crazy. Thousands and thousands of people were waiting for us at the airport when we arrived, with more downtown as we paraded through the capital. If you were a hockey fan or not it didn't matter, it seemed like everybody across the country was united in celebration.

Since 2002 there's been a few ups and downs for Slovak hockey, however just last year the national team had a surprise fourth place finish at the Vancouver Olympics. What is it about the Slovak style of play



GLORY MOMENT: Bondra (12) and Richard Lintner (41) celebrate seconds after Bondra scored the decisive 4-3 goal against Russia in the 2002 World Championship in Gothenburg, Sweden.

that enables Slovakia to be a consistent contender in international hockey?

The Olympics allowed us to field our top national team, with guys like (Marian) Gaborik and (Zdeno) Chara. But while it was good that we had the best roster available, we still managed to play well and more importantly to play as a team. We fell just short of bringing a medal, but we did manage to surprise other teams and give ourselves a chance.

What are some of the challenges associated with being a GM of a national team?

There's always something that comes up with this job. My goal is to get the team ready for all the events and to make sure that they do not have any distractions from their preparation. It's not just about bringing up top quality players but also to make sure that they work well together as a team. This takes both time and patience, especially with the World Championships since you don't exactly know who will be available until very close to the tournament.

What kind of support are you expecting from the fans?

There's a lot of pressure coming from the home crowd but it should be a lot of fun. We hope that fans will act as our seventh player on the ice, giving us plenty of vocal support. Slovak fans know their hockey and I'm sure the games are going to be loud.

One of the venues in Slovakia will be in Kosice, where you began your pro hockey career. For those who aren't familiar with the city would you describe it as a hockey town?

Yes, definitely. Our national teams played a few exhibition matches there and there is always a big crowd. It's a really nice place to watch and play hockey and I really enjoyed my time there as a player. For anyone who hasn't been there, I can assure them it's definitely a hockey town.

What do you think about the new arena in Bratislava?

I think it's a beautiful arena, and what I like most about it is the seating. The seats are arranged very steeply so that they don't go far away from the ice. So all of the arena seats have good views of the ice and you can see very well from each seat. With 10,000-plus seating it's great that every fan who goes to the game will be pretty close to the ice.

Were you happy with the team's performance during the 2011 Slovakia Cup?

Yes, I was pleased with success of the team in the tournament. However, I feel as though there is always room for improvement. It is always great to win, but I know the potential of our team and ultimately, we could have played even better.

Any players in that tournament who stepped up and made a case for themselves to be on the World Championship squad?

Yes, there are a few players that really proved themselves to me. But, of course, their performance at one tournament does not guarantee placement in the World Championship line-up. It's my job to monitor them throughout their seasons and to take a comprehensive view of their performance in their respective teams as well as in our preparation games for the World Championships. We want to create healthy competition.

Have you received any advice from people who have worked in a similar role?

Any chance I see David Poile, the GM of the Nashville Predators and of Team USA, I always try to pick his brain. He was the GM of the Washington Capitals when I began playing there. I have tremendous respect for him; he is very experienced in this type of position and always has great advice to offer.

What does the team need to do to beat Slovenia in the first game and succeed in Group A?

I think the key to winning against Slovenia for us will be to score the first goal. This kind of jump-start will hopefully alleviate some pressure off the players so that they can perform to the best of their ability. Slovenia is a good team, and they deserve to be in the elite group. In terms of overall success in Group A, I think a good start to the tournament will hopefully build confidence with each game we play. I have faith that our team is capable of great things.



For the full interview, go to IIHF.com/Bondra