

# Now it's all about 2010

*Fine performances by Nash, Green et al put them in the mix for Olympic team*

By Chris JOHNSTON

[ QUEBEC ] Let the countdown to the Games begin.

The dry run ended in disappointing fashion with Canada's loss in the gold medal final at the World Hockey Championship, but there's plenty to be taken from here and applied to preparation for the Olympic hockey tournament in Vancouver two years down the road.

In the wake of Sunday's 5-4 overtime loss to Russia, Canadian coach Ken Hitchcock was asked by a foreign reporter if the defeat signalled a changing of the guard in international hockey.

"No," Hitchcock replied flatly, pausing for effect. "Because we've got good players. We've got good players on the horizon.

"We all know that the Olympics are the measuring stick. We all know that. If you're talking about world power, you're talking about supremacy in hockey, you talk about the Olympics."

To that end, this Canadian team did the Olympic squad a favour by regaining top spot in the world ranking. As top seed, Canada will play the U.S., Switzerland and last-place qualifier in the early part of the 2010 Games — meaning it won't face a power like Russia, Sweden or the Czech Republic before the quarter-finals.

That will be helpful when one of the biggest international hockey tournaments ever held in this country gets under way.

It's sure to be an exciting event. There was no shortage of skill at

## The best hockey story of the century is ...

[ QUEBEC ] There probably aren't too many Canadians that will agree with this choice — the top hockey story of the past 100 years belongs to the Americans.

The 1980 Miracle on Ice victory at the Olympics was named the best hockey moment of the century at the International Ice Hockey Federation's gala dinner on Saturday night. Paul Henderson's winning goal for Canada at the 1972 Summit Series was selected as the second best story.

The IIHF compiled a list of the top 100 moments to commemorate its 100th birthday and unveiled the final 10 here at the world championship. It also named an All-Century Team that included Wayne Gretzky at centre.

The Great One was a unanimous selection by the panel of 56 writers from 16 different countries. No other Canadian players were even close to earning a spot on the team. Mario Lemieux finished 13 votes behind Sergei Makarov and Paul Coffey was 13 back of Borje Salming.

There are four Soviets on the team — forwards Valeri Kharlamov and Makarov, defenceman Vyacheslav Fetisov and goalie Vladislav Tretiak.

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this world championship but the Russians will undoubtedly have the likes of Evgeni Malkin and Pavel Datsyuk with them at the Olympics. It's hard to imagine Sidney Crosby, Joe Thornton and



PAUL CHIASSON / THE CANADIAN PRESS

**HEAD HANGER.** Canada's Shane Doan hangs his head following Canada's loss.

Vincent Lecavalier not wearing the Maple Leaf in Vancouver and none of those guys played at this world championship.

"When you get it together in the Olympics and everyone's there, that's the measuring stick," said Hitchcock.

More than 477,000 fans took in games in Halifax and Quebec City, making this the third-best attended world championship in history. This tournament sometimes struggles for attention in

Canada because it is played against the NHL playoffs and is being played overseas. But with the tournament held for the first time in Canada, it's clear that many fans warmed to it.

Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson admitted to being surprised that some of Canada's early games weren't sold out at the Metro Centre in Halifax but that was pretty much forgotten by the time the gold medal game was played at Le Colisee Pepsi in

Quebec. A sellout crowd that included Prime Minister Stephen Harper created an atmosphere that will rival what is seen at the 2010 Olympics.

Having the chance to play in that kind of situation will be beneficial to many down the road.

"It's a real learning experience for our younger players to understand how to deal with the pressure of playing at home," said Hitchcock.

There should be optimism. The top Canadian line dominated this event and Dany Heatley, Rick Nash and Ryan Getzlaf will probably all find themselves getting invitations to Vancouver in 2010.

On defence, Mike Green followed up an impressive season in the NHL with a good world championship and was added to the tournament all-star team along with Nash and Heatley. Six-foot-five defenceman Brent Burns also did himself a favour with a two-goal performance in the gold medal game. Expect him to be part of the conversation when the Olympic team is chosen.

Even goalie Cam Ward will likely receive some consideration after playing well in his second straight gold medal game. The biggest obstacle for him is the fact that stalwarts Roberto Luongo, Martin Brodeur and Marty Turco are still likely to be around.

There's still a lot of NHL games left for every Canadian hopeful to make an impression but good play in the world championship usually counts a little more.

"I think the players know that putting on a good show here helps them in other competitions," Hitchcock said before this tournament started.

It's safe to assume that Steve Yzerman will be given some sort of management role with the Olympic team after assembling the last two world championship squads. His teams compiled a 17-1 record — with the only loss coming in the gold medal game.

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