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Portland: hot on the ice

By Paul Danzer
Of the Emerald

A milestone for ice hockey in the United States is on tap for May 7-15.

But it won't take place in the Northeast where the glut of National Hockey League teams battle for the Stanley Cup. It will be in Portland where four of the best junior hockey teams in North America will battle for the coveted Memorial Cup.

Now the Memorial Cup tournament will be played outside of Canada for the first time in its long and illustrious history. And it is only appropriate that Portland is the site for the event.

After all, Portland was the site of the first professional hockey game ever played in the United States. That game took place in 1912, and in 1914 the Portland Rosebuds, forerunners of today's Chicago Black Hawks, nearly brought the Stanley Cup to the Northwest in a showdown with the Montreal Canadiens.

In the fall of 1975 Portland became the site of another ice breaking event when Brian Shaw brought major junior hockey to Portland. The Edmonton Oil Kings moved to Portland and the Portland Winter Hawks were born.

Since that day, the Winter Hawks have been known for firsts.

The Hawks have finished in the top two spots of the Western Division of the Western Hockey League every year except one, when they finished third. They have never failed to make the WHL playoffs, and last spring they brought the first junior hockey league title to the United States by claiming their first WHL crown.

Junior hockey is the training ground for the NHL. The age bracket for junior hockey is 15 to 20-year olds. Players are drafted out of the Canadian Major Junior Hockey League (the WHL is one of three leagues in the CMJHL) the same way the National Football League and National Basketball Association draft talent from NCAA teams.

Portland is also the No. 1 team in this area. Only four players in



Photo by Mark Williams

Ken Yaremchuk is maneuvering the Portland Winter Hawks toward another division title in the Western Hockey League.

the club's seven-year history have graduated from the club without being drafted. Last year, two of the top five players drafted were Portland Winter Hawks. Defenseman Gary Nylund signed a healthy contract with the Toronto Maple Leafs after being taken second in the draft. Ken Yaremchuk, a nifty center who is a key member of this year's Hawk squad was picked fifth overall by the Philadelphia Flyers.

"I think the four weeks or so I had up in the NHL helped me a lot," Yaremchuk says of his experience in the Flyers training camp last fall. "But, as you can see, I'm not up there right now so I still need to learn a lot more about defensive play and all that. And, hopefully next year I'll give it another shot."

Portland is glad to have "The

Weasle," as he is affectionately called, shooting for the Hawks this winter. Yaremchuk is the team's leading scorer and a key reason why the high-scoring Hawks are comfortably atop the WHL Western Division.

A good example of Yaremchuk's value to the Hawks came just 20 seconds after rival Kamloops tied last Wednesday's WHL showdown at 4-4 early in the third period. He took the puck at the blue line and skated in on Kamloops goalie Martin Wood. After faking a shot, he slid the puck across the goal mouth where teammate Cam Neely waited to slam it into the net. The goal put the Hawks ahead to stay en-route to an 8-5 win.

Seconds later Yaremchuk was snuffed after creating a great opportunity, but the ensuing scramble resulted in another Portland goal. Yaremchuk, whose older brother Gary is a Toronto Maple Leaf, put the icing on a three-point game with a steal and solo goal with 2:23 to play.

That sent the 7,131 fans at Memorial Coliseum into their eighth frenzy of the evening.

"The fans here are just unreal," says Yaremchuk, noting that the MC is sold out several times a season with more than 10,000 fans cheering on the young players. Not surprisingly, with an average of about 7,000 fans a game the Hawks also top all of junior hockey in attendance. In fact, no one else is even close, an ironic fact with a sport whose hot bed is Canada.

"We go to play in Nanaimo or Kelowna where they have 800 to 1,500 people," notes Yaremchuk. "That's a difference of 6,500 people. It's great to play front of a lot of people. It gets your momentum going in the dressing room and it gets you pumped up."

Rookie center Alfie Turcotte came to the Hawks from Nanaimo in a four-for-one deal over the Christmas break. He is second on the team in scoring, and a good example of the kind of

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CHINESE NEW YEAR EVENING

Time: Feb. 27, 1983 - Sunday

Dinner starts at 6:30 p.m.

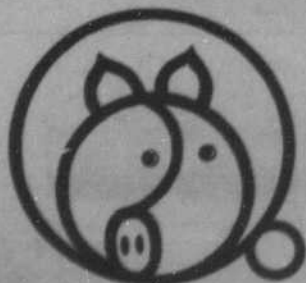
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