

# Second coming of a Russian sparkplug

## Canucks hope red-hot Shirokov can light a fire with team's suddenly ice-cold offence

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 18, 2011

Just over a year ago, he teased us. Sergei Shirokov arrived from Russia with a superb skill set, a seemingly permanent smile etched upon his face and very little English.

He was the darling of that 2009 Vancouver Canuck training camp and some fans dreamed of Shirokov being the second coming of the Russian Rocket, Pavel Bure.

He wasn't, of course, and after making the team out of training camp, Shirokov lasted all of six games before being sent to the Manitoba Moose. Now, at last, he is getting a second chance to fulfil his NHL dream.

The suddenly goal-starved Canucks recalled Shirokov from the Moose and the 24-year-old winger will be in the lineup tonight when Vancouver closes out its five-game road trip against the Colorado Avalanche.

He is still smiling.

"They called me at about 10:30 last night to go pick up my gear and fly to Denver," he said Monday after skating with a handful of his new teammates at the Pepsi Center. "I was pretty excited."

Shirokov's English has improved and so, apparently, has his game. He left Winnipeg as one of the AHL's hottest players. In his last game Saturday night, he had a goal and an assist to set a Moose franchise record by recording points in his 12th straight game.

He is also a much more complete player, according to Lorne Henning, the Canucks' assistant general manager who sees a lot of the Moose games.

"To his credit he's worked at it," Henning said. "He has lost some weight and his skating has picked up at least half a step."

Shirokov had a disappointing camp this past fall and his fitness test results weren't exactly off the charts. His defensive game also needed work. The word back-check was not in his vocabulary.

Moose coach Claude Noel has spent considerable time working on some of the deficiencies in Shirokov's game.

"He works both ends of the ice now," Henning said. "Claude had numerous meetings with him early and Sergei has bought into it. He tracks pucks, he is finishing his checks, competing hard. He has a smile on his face, he's positive and bubbly. Between him and [Moose goalie] Eddie Lack I don't know who smiles more."

In English that remains a work in progress, Shirokov sounds proud of the strides he's made in the defensive parts of his game.

"I started learning last year, too," he said of his new backchecking skills. "But this is pretty different, European hockey and this hockey. This year I understand all the stuff and it is a little bit easier for me. I work all the time on my game, in the D zone I watch tape, coach tells me what I need to do better and how I need to play."

Shirokov was Vancouver's sixth-round pick in the 2006 NHL entry draft. He spent four seasons playing for CSKA Moscow in the Kontinental League before walking away from a \$500,000 tax-free deal to head to North America to chase his NHL dream. He is in the final year of a two-year, two-way contract with the Canucks. After his disappointment last year, he said he never really considered not returning for the second year of his contract.

"I signed contract for two years and it is my dream to play in NHL," he said. "Last year at finish of season I want to play in this league and not fly back to Russia."

Tonight, he figures to play on Vancouver's second line, most likely replacing the slumping Jeff Tambellini, who has gone 10 games without a point.

"We see him as a skill player, an offensive player, to fill an offensive role for us," said Canucks assistant coach Newell Brown. "We have heard he is playing real well, we have good reports about him. He has a great attitude, is skating real well and producing, so we are looking forward to seeing him in our lineup."

Shirokov leads the Moose with 16 goals and 33 points in 39 games. He has been getting lots of ice time since Cody Hodgson and Jordan Schroeder were sidelined with injuries.

"Sergei has got a lot of pop," Henning said. "I think since all those guys got injured, Cody and Schroeder, he has been double-shifting because they only have 11 forwards. He has really picked up his game, working both ends of the ice. His skating has picked up and he has been by far the best forward down there."

Shirokov feels much better prepared this time around.

"I am ready this time. I know what I need to do on the ice and I am ready to go and play."

## **Third-line's offence is so last year**

# **Not a happy new year for Malhotra, Torres or Samuelsson who have yet to score in 2011**

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 18, 2011

There's no truth to the rumour that the Vancouver Canucks have issued an all-points bulletin seeking information on the whereabouts of their third line.

But perhaps they should.

Manny Malhotra, Raffi Torres and Mikael Samuelsson have gone missing. Or at least their offence has.

And they're not alone. It seems like Ryan Kesler has been skating with invisible wingers lately on the team's second line. Both Jeff Tambellini and Mason Raymond are mired in slumps.

"I think you go through those periods," Canucks general manager Mike Gillis said Monday. "We have had the toughest part of our schedule this year. Guys have been injured, like Mason. We are not concerned about it because we know they are good players. You go through segments like that and we are confident they are going to come out of it and be just as good as they were before, if not better."

The third-line numbers aren't pretty: Malhotra has no points in nine games and one goal in his last 18 games; Samuelsson has no goals in 11 games and just one point in that span; and Torres has no goals in nine games.

On the second line, Tambellini has gone 10 games without a point and Raymond has no goals in his last eight games and no points in his past six.

"It happens, we are in the real meat part of our schedule right now," added Vancouver assistant coach Newell Brown, who oversaw the handful of Canucks who skated Monday at the Pepsi Center. "It's been a pretty taxing trip and we've had a lot of guys putting in a lot of minutes and flipping time zones and playing a large number of games in a short time and I think that kind of adds up over that period of time.

"That's why we are not skating today, we want to bottle up all our energy for the final game of our trip and hopefully finish on a positive note and have those guys come out with lots of energy tomorrow."

Russian winger Sergei Shirokov, who was called up Monday from Manitoba, figures to replace either Tambellini or Raymond on Vancouver's second line tonight.

Although Tambellini has not been scoring, Gillis defended his play Monday.

"In Washington [on Friday night] I felt it was one of his strongest games this year. He finished every check, he had opportunities ... he has been doing all the little things, he just hasn't gotten a whole lot of luck, but he has been doing all the small things he has to do stay in the league."

**POWER OUTAGE:** Vancouver's vaunted power play has also begun to sputter. It has gone 1-for-12 in the first four games of this trip.

"I think we had good chances last night," Brown said of Sunday's game in Minnesota, when the Canuck power play went 0-for-4. "We haven't had as many opportunities the last few games. I think we have had the chances, maybe we have lacked a little bit of the movement we like to see. But it goes in ebbs and flows throughout the season and hopefully we can get back on track [tonight] and pot a couple."

**COLD SHOULDER:** Defenceman Andrew Alberts was icing his injured right shoulder Monday, but still doesn't know how long he will be out of action. The team hopes it is just a mild separation.

"We'll see the doctors when we get home and we'll know more then," Alberts said.

The injury occurred in the first period of Sunday's game in Minnesota when Alberts was run into the side boards by Wild winger Brad Staubitz.

"I saw a guy coming at me, I moved the puck and the next thing you know somebody else hit me," Alberts said. "I got up and knew something was wrong and went right to the bench. I have done something like this before, but the timetable is unknown."

The injury to Alberts, a Minneapolis native, occurred in front of about 40 family and friends.

"They're like, 'Geez, is that all you got, two shifts.' It was good to see them, but I wish I could have played more."

**ICE CHIPS:** Alberts' injury means rookie Chris Tanev will play his first NHL game tonight. Tanev thinks the presence of other Manitoba teammates like Aaron Volpatti and Sergei Shirokov will help ease the nerves. "It definitely helps a bit," he said. "You know these guys. I have been with Sergei for four months, Volpatti for two or three." ... Tanev, Shirokov, Volpatti, Raymond, Sami Salo and Roberto Luongo were the only Canucks to skate Monday. Luongo is scheduled to start tonight's game against Colorado ... The Canucks have won all four games this season against the Avs, who trail the Canucks by 12 points in the Northwest Division.

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## **It's a scoring slump not likely to last**

### **Tough schedule, injuries taking toll on morale**

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 18, 2011

As if holding down a regular spot in the talented Canucks lineup wasn't hard enough, here comes Sergei Shirokov, who has been tearing up the AHL and has eyes on pushing for one of the wingers' jobs.

They could use some pushing. Production from the Canucks' forwards has collectively combusted and vanished like a puff of steam. Only three forwards, Ryan Kesler, Alex Burrows and Daniel Sedin, have scored in the past seven games.

But getting shutout twice in three games could just be a small hiccup for the Canucks juggernaut, which is waist deep in talent.

Jeff Tambellini's dream season may just be undergoing some temporary turbulence, rather than turning into a mirage. Mason Raymond may just be suffering from a baffling case of bad luck instead of, actually you don't want to know.

Mikael Samuelsson should be just fine when he finally works through the injuries which have been gnawing at him for most of the year. Jannik Hansen's goal-scoring skills are improving, slowly. We think. And the third line is probably just sagging and not going inert.

In the end, Vancouver is in a scoring slump and it was inevitable even if it doesn't seem routine.

"We're not concerned because we know they are good players," GM Mike Gillis said. "You go through segments like that. We're confident they're going to come out of it and be just as good as they were before, if not better. We've had the toughest part of our schedule this year. Guys have been injured, like Mason."

It should not be lost on anyone that the Canucks are still leading the NHL and are 7-2-1 in their past ten. A couple of shutouts is just a blip.

They may be unconcerned but that doesn't mean they're disinterested. Shirokov wasn't recalled to spell Tanner Glass on the fourth line, to mix it up for a night or two. Vancouver is looking to trigger offence.

It's understandable, considering the defence is going to be stretched with both Aaron Rome and Andrew Alberts out with injuries. Rome, already sidelined with an MCL strain, was joined on the injured list by Alberts whose shoulder was slightly separated Sunday. Alberts could miss 2-3 weeks, but the team won't know until he has an MRI back in Vancouver.

It leaves rookie Chris Tanev on a third pairing with Keith Ballard, meaning more minutes for the top four. That's when fatigue and mental mistakes become issues. It puts more on forwards. Daniel Sedin and Kesler can't do all the scoring, though they are obviously willing to try.

There are several lineup scenarios for the Canucks with Shirokov in Tuesday. The last time Vancouver played the Avs, Raymond started the game on the fourth line and it was Aaron Volpatti who was a healthy scratch as the Canucks countered Colorado with speed throughout their lineup.

The Canucks suggested Monday Shirokov will be in their top six. The two most obvious candidates for him to replace are Raymond, who hasn't registered a point in seven and Tambellini, who has gone ten games without a point. After a terrific first half, some are wondering if he's hit a wall.

"No, in fact in Washington I thought it was one of his strongest games this year," Gillis said. "He finished every check. He had opportunities. The game in New York, I think it's very difficult to evaluate a game like that. The way they played in combination with how bad the ice was, I think it's very difficult to say a guy should finish on that opportunity when the puck was bouncing all over the place for everybody. He's been doing all the little things, he just hasn't been getting a whole lot of luck. He's been doing all the small things he has to do to stay in the league."

There is reasonable evidence to suggest the Canucks are going to struggle for a bit. They're in the midst of their toughest stretch of travel for the season. Their defensive depth is gone. The law of averages is chasing them. As good as they were in the past six weeks, there will be blow back. No team can keep that going.

The Canucks have been carried for a couple weeks by their two centres, a goal-scoring defence and great goaltending. Their wingers, in general, and their third line, specifically, have done next to nothing.

At some point, that will change. The struggling players will come out of their trance.

That makes it at least worth considering the possibility that maybe it happens soon. If it does, the Canucks will keep on rolling without missing a beat.

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Tickers to a great time

Does it seem like forever since the Canucks last won a game? Easy, people, it hasn't been that long. But there's a certain amount of hand-wringing going on. We know that.

And we're here to talk. Today at 2 p.m. Hockey fans know the place: our White Towel blog, at [thewhitetowel.ca](http://thewhitetowel.ca). Jason Botchford, in Denver for tonight's Canucks-Avalanche game, will be there. So will Tony Gallagher and Jim Jamieson. We'll talk it out, people.

If you love the Canucks, and you're keen about that nutty Orca Fin, head to [facebook.com/theprovince](https://www.facebook.com/theprovince), where you can enter our Starting Lineup contest and be eligible to win Canucks tickets.

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## Shirokov all set for test

**'I feel in pretty good shape. I am ready,' he says**

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 18, 2011

It took more than 15 months, but Sergei Shirokov has worked his way back to the NHL.

By work we mean skated his tail off, learned how to back check and realized his dream of being a regular NHL player is dependent, almost solely, on his commitment to off-ice discipline and on-ice preparation.

Questions about his fitness, which dogged him in the preseason when he failed fitness tests, must be considered answered for now. Not only has he been carrying the Manitoba Moose during a 12-game points streak, a franchise record, he's been doing it with Moose coach Claude Noel regularly double shifting him.

It was enough to make the Russian prospect an AHL all-star. The Canucks hope it's enough to prop up their disintegrating secondary scoring. The Canucks recalled Shirokov Monday, bringing him to Denver where he's set to be in the lineup against the Colorado Avalanche tonight. Not bad for a forward who confounded Canucks coaches and fans in September when he showed up for camp and couldn't meet fitness standards.

"My tests were a little bit lower than these guys," Shirokov said. "They told me to work hard and I did. I work hard on the ice, and off ice.

"I feel in pretty good shape now. I am ready."

He was not ready in September. There was concern he was wasting his gifts and he does have some significant skills even if they won't come screaming off the ice at you. Undersized and without high-end acceleration, Shirokov can make up for it with vision and fluid hands. He was the surprise star of the 2009 preseason when he made the team because he looked well-equipped to play with the Sedins.

But this year his VO2 max test scores cost him any chance of making the Canucks.

Vigneault said in September: "Maybe he didn't do the right things in the summer. I'm not sure what happened. He was under what is acceptable. He wasn't that much under, but he was still under."

Canucks assistant general manager Lorne Henning said Shirokov has made some significant strides in both his cardiovascular performance and his skating.

"I think since all those guys got injured, Cody (Hodgson), (Jordan) Schroeder, he has been double-shifting because they only have 11 forwards," Henning said. "He has really picked up his game, working both ends of the ice.

"He has been by far the best forward down there."

Shirokov will be given an offensive role with the Canucks, assistant coach Newell Brown said, which puts him in the top six.

"We see him as a skilled player, an offensive player, to fill in an offensive role," Brown said. "We've heard he's been playing real well. We've got good reports about him. He's had a great attitude. He's skating real well and producing."

Shirokov said he's a different player than the one who wedged his way into Vancouver's opening night roster in 2009. He played just six games before a disappointing demotion. Since, he's learned how to back check, he said. That may come in handy Tuesday against a ravenous forechecking team like Colorado.

"I'm harder (on the) back check," Shirokov said. "I started learning last year too. But it's pretty different for (a) European. This year, I understand all stuff. It's a little bit easier to me."

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## **Tanev's rise through ranks has really been remarkable**

The Vancouver Sun- Kurtenblog

A few thoughts and observations while the Manitoba Moose wonder where everyone went ...

The Markham Waxers are a team in the Ontario Junior Hockey League. If you're not familiar with the junior-hockey hierarchy, the OJHL is Junior A, one level below the CHL (major junior), which is the league the Vancouver Giants belong to. The OJHL is the same level as the BCHL, which the Surrey Eagles and Langley Chiefs belong to. And below that you have the New Jersey Devils.

Anyway, two years ago Chris Tanev was a member of the Waxers. Tonight he's expected to make his NHL debut for the Canucks in Colorado.

Between Markham and Vancouver, the 21-year-old defenceman played a year for the NCAA's Rochester Institute of Technology (not to be confused with ITT Technical Institute, with campuses in Seattle and Everett, call 1-800-ITT-Tech for a brochure) and he's spent this season with the Manitoba Moose of the AHL.

It's debatable whether Tanev is actually ready for the NHL, but his rise up the ranks is pretty remarkable. If he's not done improving, the Canucks might have them something.

-Now that the Canucks have lost a few games, it's time to start calling a couple of them to the carpet.

Mikael Samuelsson has one assist in his last 11 games.



Mason Raymond is pointless in his last six, with one goal in his last 11.

Neither are on pace to match last season's production.

To be fair, there are others who haven't been producing much offence lately -- like Manny Malhotra, Raffi Torres and Jeff Tambellini -- but Samuelsson and Raymond don't win faceoffs and kill penalties like Malhotra, and they're not cheap reclamation projects like Torres and Tambellini.

There are also legitimate excuses. Raymond's had to deal with a broken thumb, plus he doesn't get to play with Ryan Kesler anymore on the power play. Similarly, Samuelsson hasn't skated as much with the Sedins, particularly on the power play. In fact, both have logged less time with the man advantage as the Canucks have loaded up the first unit, featuring the twins and Kesler, and ridden it to great success.

Still, there have been too many games when you don't even notice Raymond and Samuelsson, and not in the good way, like when a defenceman quietly gets the job done. For the last little while, Raymond and Samuelsson have quietly got nothing done.

-Is Matt Duchene the most underappreciated young talent in hockey? The third overall pick in the 2009 draft leads the Avs with 43 points, good for 14th in league scoring heading into Monday's action. Two days ago, he turned 20.

-And now, five players who have more goals than Alex Ovechkin: Milan Lucic, Nikolai Kulemin, Jeff Skinner, Andrew Ladd, and Justin Williams.

-On Saturday, the Boston Blazers lacrosse team held a halftime competition at TD Garden.

The winner of the competition was to be the one who gave the Blazers' mascot, Scorch, the best lap dance.

The three female contestants were scantily clad.

The music that played was a rap song called "Low."

Some of the lyrics to that song are as follows: "She had them Apple Bottoms jeans/ Boots with the fur/The whole club was looking at her/She hit the flo'/Next thing you know/ Shawty got low low low low."

It is Ed Willes's favourite track.

Shockingly, the competition did not go over well with most fans, especially those who brought their kids to the game.

On Sunday, the Blazers were forced to issue an apology, stating that the "halftime act for Saturday's game was clearly not executed according to plan," which sort of makes you wonder

how it was drawn up in the first place. Like, at what point did the plan stop being executed properly? Because a plan to provide quality family entertainment rarely goes so off the rails that a mascot ends up getting a lap dance. That is one plan gone seriously awry.

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# Canucks Gameday

By Gordon McIntyre, The Province January 18, 2011 7:25 AM

CANUCKS (29-10-6) AT AVALANCHE (23-16-6), TODAY, 6 P.M., PEPSI CENTRE

TV : SNET; Radio: TEAM 1040

## THE SETUP

### THE CANUCKS:

The Canucks will be happy to put tonight's game to bed and return to a four-game homestand leading up to the all-star break. A win would make them 3-2 on the road this outing.

### THE AVALANCHE:

Owned by the Canucks, going 0-3-1 against their division rival and, after seemingly staying with Vancouver point-for-point for a while, falling 12 points back in the Northwest race.

## THREE THINGS TO WATCH

1 Power forward Chris Stewart (11-14-25 in 24 games) is back after missing seven weeks with a broken hand and is skating with Tomas Fleischmann and Matt Duchene on the top line.

2 The Avs feel they can beat Vancouver with team speed. "We're a skating team so it's a matter of playing our game instead of playing to what they want us to do," said North Vancouver's David Jones on Monday.

3 Despite the Canucks' 4-0-0 record against the Avs, the games have been close. "They've been tight," said Avs coach Joe Sacco. "The bottom line is we're going to take care of our own business. We have to worry about ourselves."

## BY THE NUMBERS

21: The number of games Stewart missed before playing Friday. "I thought my legs were really good. Little stuff with my hands ... it wasn't there," he said.

## INJURIES

### CANUCKS:

D Sami Salo (Achilles); RW Rick Rypien (personal); D Andrew Alberts (shoulder); D Aaron Rome (knee), 3-4 weeks; C Alex Bolduc (shoulder), 4 weeks

### AVALANCHE :

C Ryan O'Reilly (shoulder); D Kyle Quincey (shoulder); D Kyle Cumiskey (concussion); RW Peter Mueller (concussion), injured reserve.

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# CANUCKS TRY TO UPEND AVALANCHE AGAIN; OILERS HOST WILD

## THE SPORTS NETWORK

Sports Network) - The Vancouver Canucks have hit a bit of a rough patch since their club-record 17-game point streak came to an end. A matchup with the Colorado Avalanche could help them get right back on track.

The Northwest Division-leading Canucks aim for a fifth victory in as many meetings this year with their closest division competitor tonight in a battle at the Pepsi Center.

Vancouver has lost two of its last three in regulation since a 14-0-3 run from Dec. 8-Jan. 11, getting shut out in both setbacks. The Canucks are still a point up on the Flyers and two ahead of the Red Wings for the most in the NHL, and their 64 points are good enough for a 12-point advantage over the second-place Avalanche in the division.

The Canucks' point streak ended last Thursday with a 1-0 setback at the New York Rangers, and after a victory at Washington the following night, they fell to 2-2 on a five-game road trip with a 4-0 setback at Minnesota on Sunday.

Vancouver fired 32 shots on net, but came up empty, while Cory Schneider allowed four goals on 25 shots faced.

"We didn't help ourselves at all. That's kind of what it came to," said Vancouver defenseman Keith Ballard. "There were a few scrambles in front of their net that probably could have went either way and they went their way tonight."

Ballard's unit has also taken a hit as of late. After recently losing defenseman Aaron Rome for 2-to-3 weeks due to an MCL sprain, fellow blueliner Andrew Alberts suffered a shoulder injury in the first period of Sunday's loss and did not return.

The Canucks have played well at both ends of the ice in their season series with the Avalanche so far, outscoring them 13-7 in taking all four meetings. Vancouver has also won eight of its last nine versus Colorado overall as well as four straight and six of the last seven played at the Pepsi Center.

Roberto Luongo should get the start tonight for the Canucks and is 3-0 with a 2.00 goals-against average in three starts versus the Avs this year.

With just two games left this year versus the Canucks -- the two clubs wrap their season series on March 16 in Vancouver -- the Avalanche would love to get two points tonight and win for just the fifth time in their last 13 games. Colorado is just 4-6-2 since a six-game win streak from Dec. 10-19 and is barely holding on to the eighth spot in the Western Conference.

The Avs' most recent test was also in Minnesota, where they recorded a 4-1 win on Friday. Craig Anderson made 32 saves and Milan Hejduk was one of four different goal scorers.

"It was a good team effort tonight," Hejduk said.

Forward Chris Stewart also returned to the lineup for the first time since Nov. 27, when he suffered a broken hand in a fight versus the Wild. He had missed the last 21 games and was Colorado's leading scorer before the injury.

While Stewart returned, forward Ryan O'Reilly left Friday's game on a stretcher after going head-first into the boards in the second period while chasing down a loose puck. He was taken to St. Paul's Regions Hospital, where he was alert and able to move his extremities.

Colorado did receive good news on O'Reilly as his shoulder injury will not require surgery, though it will sideline him for a few weeks.

Defenseman Kyle Cumiskey could return tonight in time for the start of Colorado's five-game homestand. The blueliner hasn't played since Oct. 30 due to a concussion.

Colorado has lost six of its last eight at home (2-4-2), while Anderson is just 2-9-1 with a 3.39 GAA in his career versus the Canucks.\

### **Minnesota Wild at Edmonton Oilers**

(Sports Network) - The Minnesota Wild are hoping a victory over the NHL's top team can jump start a winning streak.

The Wild will look to avoid a letdown this evening against the club with the fewest points in the Western Conference as they visit the Edmonton Oilers and Rexall Place.

The Oilers will try to take back home-ice advantage tonight after posting a 1-4-0 mark on a recent road trip. Edmonton closed out the swing on Sunday in Anaheim with a 3-2 loss.

Rookie Magnus Paajarvi and Sam Gagner scored 26 seconds apart late in the second period for Edmonton, while Nikolai Khabibulin stopped 25 shots in his eighth straight loss.

"We thought tonight we did a good job of sustaining cycles and keeping the puck in their end. We made it difficult on them," Gagner said of his line.

Edmonton, which is last in the West with just 35 points, will play its next three games at home, where it has lost four of its last five.

Khabibulin, who hasn't won since Dec. 16, is 4-9-2 with a 2.54 GAA versus the Wild franchise.

Minnesota had been outscored 13-2 in losing three straight before a big 4-0 victory over visiting Vancouver on Sunday. The Canucks lead the NHL with 64 points, while the Wild are tied for 10th in the West with 49 points.

With both Jose Theodore and Niklas Backstrom battling injury, Anton Khudobin made his third career start and second straight, notching 32 saves for his first career shutout.

"They play 60 minutes. It doesn't matter what the score is," said the 24-year-old Khudobin. "They just play as hard as they can. I was ready for that."

Matt Cullen matched a career high with his third short-handed goal of the season, while Andrew Brunette, Martin Havlat and John Madden also scored in the victory.

Minnesota now opens a four-game road trip and it is unknown who will get the start in net. Theodore is questionable with his ailment, while Backstrom was able to dress as the backup on Sunday. He hasn't appeared in a game since Dec. 31.

Backstrom is an outstanding 16-2-1 with a 1.76 goals-against average versus the Oilers, while Theodore is 5-10-0 with a 3.72 GAA. Khudobin has faced them just once in relief, stopping all nine shots faced for a victory in his NHL debut on Feb. 4 of last season.

The Wild picked up a pair of 4-2 victories over the Oilers back in October, with their 4-2 triumph at Edmonton on Oct. 21 snapping a seven-game winning streak by the home team in this series.

The triumph also halted Minnesota's three-game slide at Rexall Place and was its third win in the last four meetings overall.

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## **VANCOUVER AT COLORADO**

SPORTS NETWORK

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While Stewart returned, forward Ryan O'Reilly left Friday's game on a stretcher after going head-first into the boards in the second period while chasing down a loose puck. He was taken to St. Paul's Regions Hospital, where he was alert and able to move his extremities.

Colorado did receive good news on O'Reilly as his shoulder injury will not require surgery, though it will sideline him for a few weeks.

Defenseman Kyle Cumiskey could return tonight in time for the start of Colorado's five-game homestand. The blueliner hasn't played since Oct. 30 due to a concussion.

Colorado has lost six of its last eight at home (2-4-2), while Anderson is just 2-9-1 with a 3.39 GAA in his career versus the Canucks.

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## **Prospects' time has come for Canucks**

***MATTHEW SEKERES***

Vancouver— From Tuesday's Globe and Mail

The Vancouver Canucks will have both Chris Tanev and Sergei Shirokov in the lineup Tuesday against the Colorado Avalanche, a rare opportunity to cast an eye toward the future and what the NHL team might look like when the Mike Gillis era finally starts delivering prospects.

Tanev is replacing Andrew Alberts and Aaron Rome, who have rotated as the sixth defenceman before going down with injuries in the past week, while Shirokov takes Alexandre Bolduc's roster spot and is expected to skate on the second line with Ryan Kesler.

“It provides us with an opportunity to see how our drafting, how our development program, and how our minor-league team are operating,” Canucks assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said when asked about two prospects making their season debuts in the same game.

When he took over as general manager almost three years ago, Gillis stressed the importance of keeping draft picks and developing young players. He repeated that again at training camp this season, but his regime has nearly been shutout when it comes to integrating prospects. The lone exception is fourth-line winger Aaron Volpatti, a college free agent who is beginning to realize a regular shift, albeit with upside limited to a bottom-six forward.

“We should be beginning to realize the fruits from our specific drafts,” Gilman said. “It’s an evaluation process, and three years in, the jury is still out. ... We’re still looking for a player we drafted to come in and have an impact.”

Neither Tanev, 21, nor Shirokov, 24, were drafted by the current management group, but both are staring at big windows of opportunity. The players they are replacing are more than day-to-day, meaning they should receive extended trials for regular duty.

“I’m going to try and prove that I can play at this level,” Tanev said from Denver. “I don’t know if it’s easier because I have a few games. I’ll get the first one under my belt and see where it goes.”

Shirokov was drafted by the Dave Nonis regime, but it was Gillis’s team that convinced him to spurn Continental Hockey League riches and see if he could play in the NHL. Nearly 18 months into his North American tenure, the Russian winger is set to receive his second NHL audition, after making the team and lasting just six games coming out of camp last year.

If he doesn’t stick this time, than one wonders whether the KHL will start looking more appealing. And if he is here to stay, then the Canucks suddenly have more options – say wingers Mikael Samuelsson and Raffi Torres – when it comes time to shed salary and make cap room for injured defenceman Sami Salo.

Gillis has most certainly boosted the number of prospects in the Canucks system, which had been laid barren by several trades designed to produce long postseason runs. Three Swedes – goaltender Eddie Lack, defenceman Peter Andersson and winger Anton Rodin – are making good progress, as are defenceman Yann Sauvé and Kevin Connauton with the American Hockey League’s Manitoba Moose.

But the two jewels in the crown – first-round selections Cody Hodgson and Jordan Schroeder – have been slower to develop.

In Hodgson’s case, the former top prospect is snake bit. He’s on the verge of returning from a broken orbital bone, suffered on Dec. 9 when a teammate accidentally struck him with a high stick in practice. That came on the heels of a troublesome back injury, which cost the former Canadian junior 18 months. If not for the injuries, Hodgson might be an NHL player by now.

Schroeder, meanwhile, has had a slow adjustment to pro hockey after two years at the University of Minnesota. He has been shelved with a high ankle sprain, but is nearing a return. It would come as a surprise to see him in the NHL this season.

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## **Canucks 'reward' Shirokov**

**By KEN WIEBE, QMI Agency**

WINNIPEG - The way Sergei Shirokov was playing at both ends of the ice, it was only a matter of time before he was going to get another chance with the Vancouver Canucks.

Turns out that time is now, as the Canucks recalled the Russian forward on Monday and plan to insert him into the lineup on Tuesday night as they close out a five-game road trip at the Pepsi Center against the Colorado Avalanche.



Shirokov was the surprise story of training camp in 2009, earning an opening-day roster spot and appearing in six games (no points) before being demoted to the Manitoba Moose of the American Hockey League.

Shirokov managed 22 goals and 45 points with the Moose in his first season in North America and after a mediocre start to this season, the sixth round pick (163rd overall) of the Canucks in the 2006 NHL Entry Draft has really hit his stride of late.

Along with riding a 12-game point streak, Shirokov (who leads the Moose with 16 goals and 33 points in 39 games) is doing more than just play in the offensive zone and that change hasn't gone unnoticed.

"He's ready," said Moose head coach Claude Noel. "He's shown that he's a pretty reliable two-way player that plays with skill and has finish. I'll be interested to watch him play. I look forward to it."

The growth in Shirokov's all-around game has been impressive.

"It's nice to see him get rewarded. He really deserves it, he's been one of our most consistent players the last few weeks," said Moose winger Guillaume Desbiens. "I found him really tough to play with last year because he was just getting adjusted to the North American style of play. Now he's really changed his game."

Moose centre Mario Bliznak heard the news from Shirokov firsthand and was thrilled to share in the excitement.

"It's good for him," said Bliznak. "He called me right after the Canucks game (Sunday night) and said he got the call. I was so happy. He was playing really well for us. He's got lots of points and he's been working hard. He stepped up his game. Not only is he playing well offensively, he's playing well in the defensive zone too. That's going to help him. He's a good all-around player. Hopefully, he'll do well."

Reports suggest Shirokov should get an opportunity to play an offensive role during this recall, meaning he might even get a shot with Ryan Kesler and Mason Raymond.

With Canucks defenceman Andrew Alberts suffering a shoulder sprain on Sunday night against the Minnesota Wild, it looks like rookie Chris Tanev will make his NHL debut against the Avalanche as well.

Tanev, who was recalled from the Moose on Sunday, is expected to be paired with Keith Ballard.