

Shirokov shoots and scores

Manitoba call-up doesn't disappoint but dominates

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 19, 2011

Slight in size, unremarkable when skating, Sergei Shirokov proved a player doesn't need either to have some dominating shifts in the NHL.

With English that's still spotty, Shirokov let his game do the talking Tuesday. He scored his first NHL goal with impressive dangle and the lucky touch of one Henrik Sedin. After missing on several second-period chances, Shirokov turned to his captain and asked Henrik to grace his stick with his touch. On the next shift he scored.

"I had a few chances, I could have scored on three or four good chances, and finally Henrik touched my stick and I scored a goal," Shirokov said.

It made it a second period he will never forget, even if Roberto Luongo would like him to.

The goal punctuated a terrific shift from the Russian, who made a convincing argument he has come a long way from training camp when he disappointed everyone because he couldn't meet basic fitness standards.

He was unrelenting when cycling the puck behind the net. He kept it alive in the offensive zone on two nice plays until Avs defenceman Ryan Wilson misplayed a rebound. It left Shirokov all alone in front, where he fluidly went forehand-to-backhand before tucking the puck under Craig Anderson.

Shirokov was smart too, having seen both of the Canucks' first two goals beat Anderson through the same spot.

"I went to backhand and shot the five hole because two guys scored through his five hole," he said. "I was really tired after the shift."

It was enough to wipe the fitness slate clean.

"For my standpoint, that's all behind us," head coach Alain Vigneault said. "The young man went to Manitoba, turned the page on what happened in training camp and has worked real hard and made himself into their best player.

"That's why he's here. He deserved to get called up and [Tuesday] he had a real good first game."

Having just three forwards score in seven games, the Canucks called on Shirokov, who had a 12-game points streak in Manitoba, to pull the trigger on some offence.

That was obviously a good move as his points streak just hit 13. So was a meeting Moose head coach Claude Noel had with Shirokov in December in Oklahoma City after a 4-2 loss. Noel later told reporters: "There was not a lot of love there between him and I."

Whatever Noel's message -- and it had to be a derivative of "you're blowing it kid" -- it worked.

"I think about I need to work every single shift, every single second I'm on the ice," Shirokov said. "To help the team win games."

Shirokov looked nothing like the player who played six ineffectual games after making the Canucks coming out of the 2009 preseason.

"I played six games and had zero points," Shirokov said. "I think this is a little easier for me [now]."

Chris Tanev, the other rookie inserted into the lineup, said Tuesday was the Shirokov he's seen in Manitoba since December.

"He played really well," Tanev said. "He had a lot of chances. He worked hard. He's led us up front in Winnipeg. He scored and I'm really happy for him. He's got some good hands and can shoot the puck quick. He's a good player."

Rare opportunity to see Sedin brothers face off against each other

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 19, 2011

Having the Sedins on separate teams at the all-star game probably qualifies as a cheap plot device.

Nevertheless, consider us interested. These guys have been playing together longer than Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen. Daniel Sedin would like it to stay that way with news Swedish defenceman Nicklas Lidstrom will be one of the captains, along with Eric Staal.

The respective captains and alternate captains for each team will participate in a player draft on Jan. 28 that will determine the rosters for the two teams.

"I think Lidstrom should pick all Swedes," Daniel said. "That's a given. Hopefully he goes for the Swedes."

The Sedins have never played against each other in a hockey game. Forget playing on different teams, they've barely played on different lines since they were 12 years old.

"We got split a few times by Crow [Marc Crawford], and AV [Alain Vigneault] has done it a couple times, too," Daniel said. "It's happened but just a handful of times."

They are, however, not unfamiliar to competing.

"Not in hockey, but in other sports," Daniel said. "We're pretty even at everything. Even tennis, that's probably what we're most even at."

Henrik Sedin said he'll look into the possibility of a trade if Staal picks one Sedin and Lidstrom picks the other.

As for competing outside hockey, Henrik said: "It happens every day. Ping-pong, whatever. Chess, it doesn't matter."

Best game in a while, but . . .

Two crummy second-period goals by Colorado mess up a good performance

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 19, 2011 7:09 AM

Here's a disclaimer on Tuesday's game:

Roberto Luongo hasn't lost in regulation since Dec. 5 and is 10-0-3. They are great numbers that reflect consistently great goaltending for six weeks. They should at least soften the blow of Tuesday's 4-3 overtime loss, a game the Canucks could have won if not for two crummy second-period goals, which both gave the lead away.

Too bad, because the Canucks played their best game in about two weeks, out-skating and out-chancing the Colorado Avalanche more and more as the game wore on, even though it was in lung-straining altitude and their 11th game in 19 nights.

It ended a five-game, 10-day road trip with the Canucks disappointed at the 2-2-1 they lug home.

"The way we've been playing we would expect more for ourselves than a .500 road trip," Luongo said.

"We want to be better than a .500 road club. We set that as a goal, especially earlier in the year when we were struggling a little bit."

To be fair to Luongo, the Canucks had plenty of chances to win. They were shut out in the third period despite outshooting the Avs 12-5, and then in overtime Craig Anderson made a sensational stop on Christian Ehrhoff during an epic Sedins shift.

In overtime, the twins ended up falling victim to their own puck-possession game, wearing themselves out in the offensive zone on a long 56-second shift. When the puck turned the other

way, Henrik Sedin had nothing left as he tackled John-Michael Liles. David Jones scored the winner on the resulting power play.

"It's been up and down, that's for sure," Daniel Sedin said of the trip. "We had two-and-a-half good games, and two-and-a-half bad games.

"I think [Tuesday] was probably our best game, even though we only got a point. We go home with a pretty good mindset."

The Canucks were undone on their penalty kill, giving up three power-play goals, and to his credit Luongo wasn't hiding.

"We weren't sharp on the PK as a five-man unit, myself included," Luongo said. "We could have been better. That was probably the deciding factor in the game."

The key moment came after Sergei Shirokov's first NHL goal, which he scored with 1:45 left in the second. It put the Canucks up 3-2 and appeared to snag momentum.

But Luongo coughed up the lead just 1:03 later when a Milan Hejduk ice-glider squeezed under him for a power-play goal. Luongo looked down at his pads, seemingly in disbelief.

"As soon as I went to stop with my skate he shot it right away, so I didn't have time to fully close the five hole," Luongo said.

It was disheartening both in its timing and in the way it crept under him and into the net. But it was not the goal he'd most like back.

After two power-play markers got the Canucks out front, the Avs tied it 2-2 12:46 into the second when Luongo whiffed on a Hejduk shot that went off the end boards. It landed in Jones' lap with Luongo out of position. It was a painfully easy Colorado goal.

"Once the shot missed the net, I slid back to my post, but it kind of took a funny hop off the boards and hit the side of the net," Luongo said. "Obviously, I didn't read that correctly off the side of the net and it went right on their guy's stick."

It was unfortunate for Luongo, who had made a couple of nice saves earlier. One was on Matt Duchene in the slot. On the other, he got his stick on a Kevin Porter penalty-shot attempt. Porter was oddly awarded the penalty even though Kevin Bieksa appeared to make a sensational defensive play on him, taking his stick off the puck during a breakaway.

"It would have felt better to win, that's for sure," Henrik Sedin said. "We got five points on [the road trip]. It's not great, but it's not bad. We haven't played our best hockey, so getting away with five points out of 10, we'll take it with the way we've been playing."

Coming into the game, the Canucks had looked bad enough in getting shut out twice in three games that head coach Alain Vigneault changed his forward lines. He put Jeff Tambellini and

Mason Raymond on his fourth line, and promoted Shirokov, who went from the AHL to the Canucks' second line in a day.

The coach expressed some exasperation in the morning with the team's lack of secondary scoring, which precipitated the unorthodox lineup.

"I've been fairly patient here as far as helping them work through that," he said. "We just decided to make a few changes."

Vigneault liked how his team responded in the end. "In my mind we out-chanced them badly in the second and the third and could have easily scored in the third, but their goaltender was real good," he said.

"Unfortunately we got caught on a long shift in OT where we had to haul one of their players down, and they made us pay for it."

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NEXT UP

VS. SAN JOSE SHARKS

Thurs., 7 p.m., Rogers Arena TV: SNP Radio: Team 1040

Sharks centre Patrick Marleau has racked up his 1,000th game and likes being in one town. The No. 2 overall pick in 1997 has played his entire 13-season career in San Jose. Luckily for the Canucks, SJ hasn't been meeting expectations.

Raymond does little things in harder areas as effective fourth-line centre

The Province January 19, 2011

Challenged by his coach who said he had to be better, Mason Raymond was just that Tuesday. Centring a fourth line may not be where he expected to be playing in January, but Raymond responded with more willingness to do the little things which have helped Jeff Tambellini stay in the lineup despite going 11 games without a point. "I thought he went to those harder areas," head coach Alain Vigneault said of Raymond. "I thought that whole line there was effective when we used them and we gave them more ice time."

Raymond had three shots on net and just missed on a breakaway, playing 12:14. Before the game, Vigneault had a tough message for Raymond, who was playing out of position and in a limited role.

"I think his process, there are a few areas where he needs to focus on," Vigneault said. "[He needs to be] a little quicker getting in on the forecheck, a little bit better on the puck protection.

"Things that he knows. He's been watching some of his games lately, he knows he can be better for us."

Tanev leans on wise words

Veterans offer encouragement as blue-liner makes NHL debut

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 19, 2011

As Chris Tanev sat at his dressing room stall moments before Tuesday night's game, with the butterflies in his stomach in full flight, his new Vancouver Canucks teammates understood exactly what the 21-year-old rookie defenceman was going through.

They had all been there before.

No one ever forgets his first National Hockey League game and the nerves that preceded it.

"It's a unique feeling because you are excited, you are nervous, you don't know what you are supposed to do out there," said defenceman Kevin Bieksa. "So there are a whole lot of different feelings and emotions probably going through his head right now. He just has to stay calm and play his game. That's what got him here."

Bieksa's first NHL game came at home midway through the 2005-06 season against the Los Angeles Kings. It didn't begin quite the way he had hoped.

"At the start of the game I took a penalty and I gave Brendan Morrison a suicide pass 10 seconds in," Bieksa said. "So I had a tough start. I'm sure Chris is going to do better than that."

Fellow defenceman Keith Ballard, who was paired with Tanev on Tuesday night, made his NHL debut the same season as Bieksa as a member of the Phoenix Coyotes. His memories of that game are more positive than Bieksa's.

"I was nervous the whole day," he said. "I couldn't sleep, anything. But it was exciting, too. I just remember how fast everything seemed. I remember thinking, 'Wow, this is a step up.' "

Ballard's debut came on the opening night of the season, in Vancouver of all places.

"I actually scored a goal," he said.

That was good, but the Coyotes ended up losing 3-2 to the Canucks.

Ballard spent some time talking to Tanev at Tuesday morning's game-day skate, attempting to calm his nerves.

"I am just trying to make him feel comfortable," Ballard said. "There's a reason he is here. He has obviously done some things very well. The thing is, do the things that made you successful. He is a very good player and you have to stick with your strengths."

Tanev appreciated all the advice and positive words of encouragement he received from his teammates before the game.

"Just be myself out there, that's what everyone is telling me," Tanev said.

"That's what I am going to try and do."

It's been 10 years since winger Mikael Samuelsson made his NHL debut with the San Jose Sharks. But time hasn't faded the memory of that special night.

"I was nervous, first of all," he said. "I didn't play too much, like four or five minutes. The game [against Calgary] ended 0-0. But I was thrilled because I never thought I would actually play an NHL game."

Samuelsson has gone on to play 584 since then, including Tuesday night's game against the Avalanche.

Forward Jannik Hansen actually made his NHL debut in the playoffs against Dallas in 2007.

"I don't know if there was any extra pressure because it was the playoffs," Hansen said. "I really didn't have anything to compare it against."

But there were plenty of nerves.

"Obviously you don't want to make any mistakes," he said. "You try not to be noticed, especially for anything bad. I think it's more about just getting through the first couple of shifts.

"After that, it's the same game you have been playing for so long. It's just a matter of touching the puck a little and then it gets easier as the game progresses."

Coach V high on Tambellini, not so much on Raymond

By Brad_Ziemer 18 Jan 2011

DENVER -- Alain Vigneault is sticking with Jeff Tambellini, who is mired in a 10-game points drought.

The Canuck coach is less enamored with Mason Raymond's game of late.

Although Tambellini and Raymond (left) were both demoted to the fourth line for Tuesday night's game against the Colorado Avalanche, Vigneault said before the game that he remains high on Tambellini.

"As far as Jeff's process, he is one of the guys that has had the best process," Vigneault said. "He is getting Grade A chances, he's finishing his checks, he is one of our best hitters up front."

Vigneault sounded more concerned about Raymond's game. Raymond has gone eight games without a goal.

"With his process, there are few areas where he needs to focus on," Vigneault said. "He needs to be a little bit quicker getting in on the forecheck, a little bit better on the puck protection. He knows, he has been watching some of his games lately and he knows he can be better for us. At the end of the day, we need him to be better. He's a real good hockey player and we need him to find ways to contribute."

Canucks blow lead to fall to Avalanche in overtime

Vancouver forced to settle for a single point in Colorado

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 19, 2011

DENVER — Five games, five points. Daniel Sedin figures the Vancouver Canucks got just about what they deserved from their cross-continent journey that ended here Tuesday night with a 4-3 overtime loss to the Colorado Avalanche.

"It has been up and down, that's for sure," he said of the trip. "Two and a half good games and two and a half bad games. It's tough, if we win this one tonight we would have been 3-2 and we should be pretty happy with that."

Trouble is, the Canucks really didn't get what they deserved at the Pepsi Center, when they had to settle for one point when they should have had two.

"I think tonight was probably our best game," Sedin said. "Even though we only got a point, we can go home with a pretty good mindset."

A rare off night by their penalty-killing unit, which surrendered three goals, and some spotty goaltending from Roberto Luongo cost the Canucks, who couldn't hang onto three one-goal leads. Vancouver outshot the Avs 43-30.

Fittingly, Colorado won it in overtime while on a four-on-three power play, with Henrik Sedin off serving an interference penalty.

"We gave them three goals on their power play," said Vancouver coach Alain Vigneault. "When we took penalties they made us pay for it."

Henrik was forced in overtime to haul down Colorado defenceman John-Michael Liles from behind as he broke free in the neutral zone. On the subsequent power play, David Jones scored his second of the night, knocking home a rebound off a Tomas Fleischmann shot.

"I liked the way we played," Vigneault said. "I thought our guys competed really hard. In my mind, I thought we outchanced them in the second and third and could have easily scored in the third, but their goaltender was real good. Unfortunately, we got caught on a long shift in OT there and we had to haul one of their players down and they made us pay for it."

Luongo stopped a penalty shot midway through the second by Avs' centre Kevin Porter, who Kevin Bieksa had interfered with from behind while on a breakaway. It appeared to be a marginal call.

But Luongo gave up two goals in the second he should have had. Both of them came shortly after the Canucks had grabbed a lead.

Ryan Kesler had put Vancouver in front 2-1 at 10:15 of the second on a power play, when he tipped in a Christian Ehrhoff point shot. But less than three minutes later, Luongo misplayed a wide Milan Hejduk shot that bounced off the end boards. Luongo went to play the puck but it skipped past him and right onto the stick of Jones, who flipped it into the empty net.

"Once the shot missed the net I slid back to my post and it kind of took a funny hop off the boards and then hit the side of the net," Luongo said. "I didn't read that correctly off the side of the net and it went right on their guy's stick."

Sergei Shirokov, with his first NHL goal, put Vancouver on top again at 18:15 of the second when he pounced on a loose puck in front of the net and put a backhand shot between the legs of Colorado goalie Craig Anderson.

But that lead lasted only a minute. Hejduk, on another Colorado power play, beat Luongo from the slot at 19:18 of the second with a shot he probably should have had.

"He (Paul Stastny) fed it across and I was sliding and as soon as I went to stop with my skate he shot it right away," Luongo said. "I didn't have time to fully close the five-hole there."

The teams exchanged power-play goals in an evenly played first period. Shirokov drew a penalty on his first shift when Colorado defenceman Matt Hunwick was called for hooking as Shirokov attempted to retrieve a puck behind the Avs' net. Alex Edler beat Anderson from the left faceoff dot at 2:43 to open scoring.

With Alex Burrows serving a hooking penalty, the Avs tied it up at 15:41 of the first. Hejduk found a pinching Liles, who beat Luongo stick side from the deep slot.

So the trip ends with a win on Long Island, a win in Washington sandwiched between a pair of shutout losses in New York and Minnesota, and Tuesday night's overtime loss.

"Except for the Minnesota game, where I think our energy level caught up to us a bit with the number of games we have played lately, I thought the other four places we went to we battled real hard," Vigneault said. "We expect more from ourselves than a .500 road trip, but you also have to look at the process and how our guys compete and from that standpoint I was real happy."

So were the Avalanche, who beat the Canucks for the first time in five tries this season.

Jones credited hard work by Fleischmann for his second overtime winner of the season.

"It was a great play by Flash to take it to the net," Jones said. "I had good position on my D-man and he made a great shot and it was off the pad. It was pretty much uncontested and a wide open net. That's pretty exciting to beat those guys."

The Avs now trail the Canucks by 10 points in the Northwest Division standings.

ICE CHIPS: Winger Aaron Volpatti was Vancouver's lone healthy scratch. . .The Canucks chartered home after the game and begin a four-game homestand Thursday night against the San Jose Sharks. . .Luongo has stopped both penalty shots he has faced this season.

Shirokov impresses this time

Some Sedin magic rubs off on first goal

DENVER — Apparently, Henrik Sedin has the magic touch.

It was late in the second period of Tuesday's game against the Colorado Avalanche and Sergei Shirokov had created at least three Grade-A scoring chances he was unable to convert.

So when he sat down at the bench after a shift, a frustrated Shirokov asked team captain Henrik Sedin to touch his stick.

"I had three or four good chances [where] I could have scored and finally Hank touched my stick and I scored a goal," Shirokov said after Vancouver's 4-3 overtime loss at the Pepsi Center.

Shirokov gave every indication he is going to make good on his second chance with the Canucks. He scored a goal, drew a penalty on his first shift of the game and had six shots on goal.

Apparently all that talk about how well he was playing with the Manitoba Moose in Winnipeg wasn't just talk.

“ I think it gives me more confidence for other games,” said Shirokov, who looked right at home on a line with Ryan Kesler and Mikael Samuelsson. “ Last year, I played six games and I had zero points.”

Shirokov was called up Monday after setting a Moose franchise record by registering points in 12 straight games.

“ He was good, he is poised with the puck and he created a lot of chances by himself,” Daniel Sedin said. “ That line was good. It was good to see.”

His goal came late in the second when he pounced on a loose puck and put a backhand shot through the legs of Colorado goalie Craig Anderson. Shirokov kept the puck, but wasn't sure what he was going to do with it.

“ It's in my bag right now. It's the first puck. I will keep it.”

And the Canucks will keep Shirokov if he keeps playing the way he did Tuesday. The fact he showed up at training camp this past fall in less than ideal shape is now ancient history, according to coach Alain Vigneault.

“ The young man went to Manitoba, turned the page on what happened at training camp and has worked real hard and made himself into their best player,” Vigneault said. “ That is why he is here. He deserved to get called up and tonight he had a real good first game.”

LINE DANCE: Vigneault juggled his lines Tuesday night. Jeff Tambellini and Mason Raymond dropped down to the fourth line and played with Tanner Glass. Jannik Hansen joined Manny Malhotra and Raffi Torres on the third line.

“ I thought Mason's line tonight had some chances, they used their speed and skill the right way,” Vigneault said. “ Manny's line, some shifts were good, some other ones needed improvement.”

GOOD START: Vigneault was satisfied with the play of rookie defenceman Chris Tanev, who played his first NHL game.

Tanev logged 12: 49 of ice time playing alongside Keith Ballard.

He broke up a three-on-one rush with three minutes left in the third period.

“ For a guy stepping into a real tough environment against one of the most skilled teams in the league, I thought he did all right,” Vigneault said.

Jones lifts Avs in OT

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER -- David Jones scored two goals, including the winner 2:52 into overtime, as the Colorado Avalanche snapped a four-game skid against Vancouver by beating the Canucks 4-3 on Tuesday night.

John-Michael Liles and Milan Hejduk also scored for the Avalanche, who have won three of their last four.

Jones lunged at the puck to score the decisive goal on a power play after Tomas Fleischmann sent a pass into the goal crease.

The Canucks had nearly killed off the interference penalty to Henrik Sedin before Jones knocked home his 16th goal of the season.

Colorado netminder Craig Anderson finished with 40 saves.

Alexander Edler, Ryan Kesler and Sergei Shirokov scored for the Canucks as the Western Conference leaders wrapped up a five-game road swing with a 2-2-1 record.

Vancouver defenceman Keith Ballard had a solid scoring chance midway through the third period but his shot rang off the post.

The Avs also killed off an interference penalty against the Canucks in the third. Vancouver possesses the top-ranked power play unit in the league on the road this and had already scored twice with a man advantage.

After a tepid start, the game heated up midway through the second as the teams combined for four goals.

Each time the Canucks grabbed the lead, the Avs answered right back.

Kesler scored his 25th of the season when he redirected a shot from Christian Ehrhoff past Anderson midway through the second period.

Moments later, Kevin Porter was hooked from behind by defenceman Kevin Bieksa on a breakaway and awarded a penalty shot, only to fire it wide of the net.

But Colorado tied it when Jones tapped in a rebound after Hejduk's shot sprang off the back boards and past a surprised Roberto Luongo.

Shirokov scored his first NHL goal, knocking in a loose puck through the pads of Anderson and giving Vancouver yet another lead at 3-2.

Just 22 seconds later, the Avalanche tied it again as Hejduk's wrist shot trickled past Luongo on a power play.

Edler didn't take long getting the Canucks on the board, scoring on a power play 2:43 into the game as he beat Anderson from the left circle. Edler has two goals in the last three games.

Liles scored later in the period, launching a wrist shot over the shoulder of Luongo. It was Liles' first goal since Dec. 7.

Colorado juggled around one of its lines with forward Ryan O'Reilly out at least two weeks after injuring his shoulder crashing headfirst into the boards against the Minnesota Wild last Friday.

T.J. Galiardi stepped in and played centre for O'Reilly on Tuesday.

NOTES: Although nearing a return, D Kyle Cumiskey missed his 35th straight game with a concussion. Avs coach Joe Sacco said after morning skate that Cumiskey still "needs a couple more days." Cumiskey has been sidelined since Oct. 30. ... Avs F Brandon Yip was a healthy scratch. ... The Canucks were without Ds Andrew Alberts (right shoulder) and Aaron Rome, who will miss two-to-three weeks with a knee injury. ... Liles finished with two assists.

Avs edge Canucks in overtime

PAT GRAHAM

DENVER— The Associated Press

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Alexander Edler, Ryan Kesler and Sergei Shirokov scored for the Canucks as the Western Conference leaders wrapped up a five-game road swing 2-2-1.

Vancouver defenceman Keith Ballard had a solid scoring chance midway through the third period, hitting the post with a shot.

The Avs also killed off an interference penalty in the third period, something that hasn't been easy to do against the Canucks, who possess the top-ranked power play unit in the league on the road this season and had already scored twice with a man advantage.

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But Colorado would add the equalizer when Jones tapped in a rebound after Hejduk's shot sprang off the back boards and past a surprised Roberto Luongo.

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Sedin gets snubbed

MATTHEW SEKERES

Globe and Mail Blog

Posted on Wednesday, January 19, 2011

The Swedes are not like us. There are cultural difference that must be respected.

Remember that, Canucks fans, as you read further.

Because if the Swedes valued hockey as much as we do, than they might one day beat us in an international tournament of consequence (shootouts don't count), at which point we would hold a Royal Commission on the sorry state of "Our Game" and Sweden could, in turn, make fun of us. (See how the cycle of cultural misunderstanding spirals out of control?)

Anyways, the land of blonde models and do-it-yourself furniture named its 2010 athlete-of-the-year recently, and it was not Canucks centre Henrik Sedin. He may have become just the second Swede to win the Hart and Art Ross trophies (Peter Forsberg in 2003) but that, alas, was not good enough for the good people of Sweden.

Sedin finished seventh.

The winner was swimmer Therese Alshammar, a world-record holder who won three medals (two gold) at the European Long Course Championships. One report described Alshammar's win as an upset because it was a Winter Olympic year, and because she vanquished Sweden's 2010 gold-medal winners in cross-country skiing, biathlon and curling.

The gold medallists finished second through sixth. Then came Sedin.

The Swedes call it the Jerring Sports Achievement Award, and it is presented by the country's public radio service. It is a glorified popularity contest, voted on by the public through calls and texts. Alshammar garnered more than 30 per cent of the vote.

Baffled by this result, we reached out to Swedish contacts (one national-level coach, one hockey journalist) for an explanation.

The coach said that some Swedish sports federations wage get-out-the-vote campaigns, and urge their members to vote as many times as possible for their athlete of choice. The hockey federation doesn't do that.

The coach added that Sedin was further hurt because the NHL goes head-to-head with biathlon and cross-country skiing on television every Sunday.

The journalist said that Alshammar's win has created a huge controversy, but not because she trumped Sedin. Our agent tells us that the big controversy was the exclusion of Sweden's top sportsman, Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who wasn't even nominated!

Asked for his take, our correspondent said: "Apparently, the Swedish population doesn't understand the greatness of being the best player in the NHL. We are a people on skies."

And we are a people on skates.

Again, cultural differences. They must be respected.

Shirokov scores, but Canucks lose

By Sports Network

DENVER -- David Jones scored two goals, including the game-winner in overtime, to lift the Colorado Avalanche to a 4-3 victory over the Vancouver Canucks at Pepsi Center.

Vancouver captain Henrik Sedin was called for interference 59 seconds into the extra session. As the ensuing power play was winding down, Tomas Fleischmann kept control of the puck in the left circle and dished to the middle for Jones. A sprawling Roberto Luongo got a skate on Jones' first bid, but the Avalanche forward buried his own rebound at 2:52.

John-Michael Liles and Milan Hejduk both registered a power-play goal and two assists for Colorado, which has won three of its last four games. Craig Anderson made 40 saves.

"We battled back and I don't think we started quite as quick as we wanted to," Liles said. "But we got to our game in the second half of the first period. We picked it up and we battled back. That's a tough team to play. We got some timely goals tonight, which was huge."

Alexander Edler, Ryan Kesler and Sergei Shirokov scored for the Western Conference-leading Canucks, who have lost four of six. Luongo stopped 26 shots.

"I don't think we played our best game but at the same time, we rarely give up three power-play goals and that's what happened tonight," Sedin said.

After Edler and Liles traded power-play goals in the first period, the Canucks struck again with the man advantage when Kesler got his stick on Christian Ehrhoff's one-timer from the point midway through the contest.

Less than a minute later, Luongo denied Kevin Porter on a penalty shot to preserve the lead, but Jones tied it at 12:46 of the second period.

Shirokov's first NHL goal gave Vancouver a 3-2 lead with 1:45 remaining in the frame. Hejduk, though, pulled Colorado even 63 seconds later.

Vancouver outshot Colorado 12-5 over the final 20 minutes of regulation.

Game Notes

Colorado notched its first victory over Vancouver in five meetings this season...Paul Stastny had two assists for the Avalanche...The Canucks wrapped up a five-game road trip...Colorado finished 3-for-5 on the power play, while Vancouver was 2-3...The Canucks fell to 11-2-1 against the Northwest Division.