

No crying the blues from blueliners

Depleted corps plays well at home but now comes stiffer road test

By Gordon McIntyre, The Province January 29, 2010

Talk about road trips.

Brad Lukowich ticked off the cities one by one: Rockford, Ill., Peoria, Ill., Milwaukee, Chicago, Grand Rapids, Mich., and back to Chicago and Milwaukee again before returning home to Cedar Park, Texas.

That's what awaits the Texas Stars, Lukowich's team until he was recalled by the Vancouver Canucks nine games ago on Jan. 9, in the not-too-distant future.

So the veteran defenceman isn't complaining about flying charter to eight NHL cities over these 17 days.

"Texas has a huge road trip coming up during the Olympic break and it's not to Montreal, it's not flying first-class," Lukowich said before the Canucks boarded their flight to Toronto on Thursday. "Let's be honest, this isn't that bad."

Considering they had to pack for two climates -- the snow of the Northeast and Midwest; the sun and sand of Florida -- the players' luggage looked incredibly compact.

Maybe their wives packed and they'll have to buy extra suitcases when it comes time to ball up the dirty laundry and come home again after playing in Minnesota on Feb. 14.

In the meantime, there's lots of road hockey ahead, eight games that could expose the Canucks' depleted, makeshift blueline corps.

Nolan Baumgartner, after a couple of decent outings since being called up from Manitoba on Jan. 23, struggled against St. Louis on Wednesday.

Lukowich got a winning goal against Buffalo on Monday, while Aaron Rome has done as much as you could expect from a depth guy.

But that's all been at home, where the Canucks' defence has been able to get the job done by committee and where the Canucks have the last change. On the road, opponents will exploit matchups.

"That's fine with me," Lukowich said. "Me and Baumer have been around a long time, we've seen a lot of these guys already."

"If we are matching [top] lines, we've got to buckle down in our end."

Willie Mitchell (22:36 per game) stayed in Vancouver with a concussion and Kevin Bieksa (21:48) is weeks away from playing, but Sami Salo (19:38) flew with the Canucks and hopes to play at Toronto on Saturday.

In their absence, Christian Ehrhoff's ice time has soared past 28 minutes from his usual 24.

"Everybody who's come in has played really well," Ehrhoff said. "And personally, I like to play that much. It's a great challenge and it's fun."

What helps the Canucks is the three subs are veterans, guys who don't panic. The one game the Canucks called up Evan Oberg, the youngster got on the ice for just 5:24.

"They know what they bring and they stay within that," associate coach Rick Bowness said. "They bring a stabilizing effect, it's not a rookie coming in and running all over. And it's not a guy who's unsure of himself."

Bowness, who oversees the D, said his main focus is not over-playing Ehrhoff and Alex Edler, while keeping Shane O'Brien's minutes between 18 and 22.

"That's what I do, that's how I manage it," said Bowness.

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Raymond's double trouble develops

Sky's the limit once high-flying winger adds more playmaking skills

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 29, 2010

It wasn't a criticism of his line-mate. In fact, Mikael Samuelsson was applauding the skill set of Mason Raymond in anticipation of the Vancouver Canucks winger taking his game to a higher level.

"If I'm going to say something, he's great and don't get me wrong," cautioned Samuelsson before the Canucks departed Thursday on an eight-game road trip. "He can be really, really good. But he needs to use other players, too, and he's starting to do that now. And that's key for the whole line."

What Samuelsson was stressing is that Raymond can't be a one-trick pony. His blazing speed puts defenders on their heels. But when he adds a playmaking element to those bolder forays into the slot, he becomes double trouble. That will be imperative on a trip where the onus for the opposition will be on shutting down the Canucks' top line and NHL scoring leader Henrik Sedin.

"When you know a guy is going to take it himself all the time, it's not going to do anything for you, even if he's really fast," added Samuelsson. "A defenceman knows how to play that, even if you have sick skills. But when you start to use each other, that's where I see the most improvement [in Raymond] and I think we find each other better now.

"He's a good player and he could be even better, I think."

Following a two-goal outing in a 3-2 victory over the St. Louis Blues on Wednesday, Raymond was praised by coach Alain Vigneault for putting in extra time with skills coach Glenn Carnegie. It should ensure that his career-high 20 goals are not a mirage, that he's far removed from being a healthy scratch on 10 occasions last season and managing just 11 goals.

Raymond has shouldered the weight of expectation since his speed had everyone salivating at training camp three years ago. Slight in stature yet skilled with the puck, it has taken time for him to add strength and confidence. After all, a hat-trick performance in Calgary on Dec. 27 was followed by a 10-game goal drought. Rather than sulk, he worked even harder and is even playing the point on the second power-play unit amid a rash of injuries on the back end.

"I don't know if it's anything specific," shrugged Raymond. "It's working with skills and getting out there any time you can to improve. I don't really base everything on statistics. You can play very well and not come away with any points, but things are going well."

Perseverance paid off with Raymond's second goal against the Blues. After taking a pass from Ryan Kesler, he streaked down the left wing, faked a slapshot and then whipped a quick wrist shot past goalie Ty Conklin high on the short side.

"I don't think I did anything out of the ordinary except shoot the puck, really," Raymond said when told Kesler thought the shot was one only a few in the league could convert. "For me, I've done that since I've been five. It's nothing different for me."

Still, it was impressive. And it makes you wonder if 30 goals this season aren't out of the question.

"There's no doubt I could do this at any time, but this is only my third year in the league," said the 24-year-old Raymond, who's a restricted free agent next summer. "You go through growing pains to learn to become a pro and for me it's just that every year. The game is changing and speed is a big factor. You can back Ds off and [Wednesday] was one of those games.

"It's funny. There are games where you feel it is open and games where it's a lot tighter."

If that scoring trend can expand to the third line, then the Canucks could have a memorable pre-Olympic trip. Pavol Demitra had four shots against the Blues and thought he had scored a second-period goal that went off the post, hit Conklin in the back and dropped down on the goal line.

"All three of our lines right now seem to have a lot of speed and passing, and that makes it hard for the other teams to handle," said third-line centre Kyle Wellwood. "You can play the game a little faster and I thought last game we were quicker on the puck and making plays."

Following the Blues win, the division-leading Canucks were third overall in goals scored (171), fourth on the power play (22 per cent) and sixth in goals against (127). Formidable numbers for their foray into Toronto on Saturday.

"Teams will consider it a big win to beat us now and that's what we want going into buildings," said Wellwood.

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Will Luongo ever give it a rest?

Goalie is a talented workhorse -- and, sometimes, that's a concern

By Jason Botchford, The Province January 29, 2010

Vancouver Canucks GM Mike Gillis understands that if he has a goalie who is leaking oil, it won't matter how many goals Henrik and Daniel Sedin score.

"They could change the name of the game from 'hockey' to 'goalies', the position is that important," Gillis said.

It's why everyone is always prying under the hood, trying to get a look at Roberto Luongo's engine, worried about his playing time.

He often brushes it off like lint. But it's an issue and may be the Canucks' most critical one.

The biggest question facing Gillis about his goalie is not, "Can Luongo play 82 games in a season?" It's, "Should he ever play 70?"

"How many games do you think Roberto is going to play?" Gillis volleyed back when asked about his playing time.

That depends. How close will the Canucks be to the playoff line in March? How much do they want to win their division? Will they be in a position to make a run for a top-two seed?

Each of those questions is based primarily on the premise the Canucks can't win without Luongo. They may need to.

No matter how good he feels or how much he wants to play -- and he admittedly only sees a need to sit out in back-to-back games on the road -- it's hard to dismiss some history lessons.

The last time a goalie played 70 games and made it out of the second round was 2003. In the six seasons since, the 70-game post has been hit 22 times.

Among the list of 22 are some of the best goalies in the game on some of the NHL's best teams.

Brodeur and two of his Vezina-winning seasons are on the list. Miikka Kiprusoff, who won a Vezina and backstopped some good teams in Calgary, is on the list. So too is Evgeni Nabokov, the backbone of the San Jose Sharks.

Not one of them in the past six years was able to win two rounds of the playoffs after playing 70 games.

In fact, Brodeur is the only 70-game goalie to win two playoff rounds since 1998.

And remember, he's blessed with road trips which are shorter than rides to the cottage.

"We're aware of it," Gillis acknowledged. "We are aware of the workload and are monitoring it. We're looking at around 65 games for [Luongo] this season."

That's out the window. Luongo has already played 46 games. There are 29 left and only injury will keep Luongo from playing more than 20 of them.

Twenty-four more starts puts him at 70 games played, which right now looks inevitable.

"That [65] was our goal from the outset," Gillis said. "But you got to get in the playoffs. It's great to speculate about going far in the playoffs or to the finals, but you have to get into the playoffs first."

There's the rub. If the Canucks are pursuing a playoff spot, division title or a top seed, how can they start a backup who hasn't played in weeks, possibly months? But play Luongo too much and everything else could be moot. The risk being he won't have the gas to make it through multiple playoff rounds.

Currently, Luongo has started 24 games in a row and could start every game on this eight-game trip.

"Everyone seems to be so worried about this trip," Gillis said. "It's actually quite good. The travel is good, the spacing between games is good."

But what happens after the Games? The Canucks play 21 games in the final 40 days of the season.

"It's the post-Olympic trip which is most concerning to us, where we have three back-to-backs. He won't play in all those games," Gillis vowed. "The Olympics will play a part in it. But how much activity he'll get in the Olympics is still to be determined.

"We'll see where we're at after this road trip in terms of the standings and we'll manage it from there, based on what he does in the Olympics."

The numbers indicate Luongo is more than fine.

He has been in a nice groove, going 23-8-2 since November with a 2.08 GAA and a .928 save percentage.

But you can't always tell when a player needs maintenance.

Luongo has shown signs recently he could use a rest. There was a bad goal against Dallas, a bad game against the Minnesota Wild and several alarming plays against the Blues on Wednesday.

Nitpicking? You bet. Watch any goalie for signs of fatigue long enough and you will find them.

A hesitant glove hand, a bad angle, a five hole left an inch too open, or a poor read.

It happens every day, and in nearly every game. You are dealing in fractions of seconds and if a goalie is off at all -- either mentally or physically -- he's vulnerable.

But history shows if teams don't play it safe with their goalies during the season, they are sorry in the playoffs.

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Being Alex Burrows, sort of

Weinhandl tops list to play with twins at Games

By Tony Gallagher, The Province January 29, 2010

Back in Turin when the Swedes won the hockey gold, interest in who played with the twins was pretty much limited to a few obsessive compulsive fans and the two Sedin households.

They were third-liners, and the likes of Peter Forsberg, Mats Sundin, Daniel Alfredsson and Henrik Zetterberg were all still very much in their prime, and who got on with Daniel and Henrik was a matter for the trainer and well down the interest pecking order.

But the Swedish hockey world has changed dramatically. Right now who gets to be Alex Burrows wearing the three Cronas as they try to defend their Olympic championship is garnering quite a bit of interest and it looks as though the twins have been asked to keep their comments to a minimum. While they claim not to care and have mentioned the name Loui Eriksson themselves, both have been guarded in what they say. And as far as we know, the two have not encouraged Burrows to go Brett Hull and Adam Deadmarsh on Canada and become a Swedish citizen so as to get to play in the Olympics after not even being invited to this country's orientation camp. But Burrows should probably consider his options.

Right now the prevailing wisdom is that 30-year-old former Wild and Islanders right winger Mattias Weinhandl will get the nod given that nobody else can figure out why he would have been named to the team otherwise. It's turning out he's having a pretty good goal scoring season in the KHL with 22 goals and 54 points in Moscow Dynamo and might well have earned his selection on merit this year.

But the real reason he's on the team is that he played on the same line with the Sedins during the lockout in Modo and the trio had considerable success, and when the team was named in December, Daniel hadn't been back from injury that long and nobody had quite realized how much these guys were going to take off. But Weinhandl can finish, even if he can't dig out and turn over pucks like Burrows, so he still has a chance. Ditto Eriksson. Great finish around the net, and that's what intrigues the twins and why they mention his name.

"That would be great to play with those guys, but we'll have to see," Eriksson says, not really wanting to make waves.

"That's a coach's decision, but there's only the one practice and right now I'm guessing I'm going to be with Mattias Weinhandl, at least that's what people are saying back home."

Well if in fact those two are going to be together, then perhaps it will be Alfredsson playing with the Sedins in a sort of Mikael Samuelsson, right handed shot finishing role. Patric Hornqvist also must be considered with his meteoric rise although he was originally slated to be on the fourth line with the fading Samuel Pahlsson and the slumbering Fredrik Modin.

"Samuelsson actually played some shifts with them in Turin," says veteran Swedish hockey player Gunnar Nordstrom, before confessing he really couldn't remember. "At the time nobody was really paying much attention. Now it's a different story."

"We actually played mostly with (longtime Farjestad captain) Jorgen Jonsson in the last Olympics," says Henrik of the now retired right winger who played one season with the Isles and Anaheim although his defence-man broker Kenny did 10 years in the NHL. "But it should be interesting to see who it is. We have to play our best no matter who they choose."

Before the Sedins crashed the headliner list, Zetterberg and Nicklas Backstrom were going to be together on the top line despite both being centres along with Tomas Holmstrom, the latter trying to recover from a broken bone in his foot in time to be ready. And if Holmstrom wasn't going to make it, Forsberg was expected to get that spot. With Holmstrom looking like he'll be up and running, Forsberg is now pencilled in to play with Alfredsson and that leaves Eriksson the most likely winning candidate given the Sedins top billing and the fact the tournament is on their home sheet of North American sized ice here in Vancouver.

No matter what coach Bengt-Ake Gustafsson decides however, it can't be any surprise he's stepping down as national coach after the Olympics to turn things over to a younger man. The salary isn't commensurate with this kind of aggravation and evidently National junior coach Per Marts is welcome to it.

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Eight games and 18 days of pampering

Latest edition of the Canucks travel in luxury compared to their predecessors

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 29, 2010

It may be the longest road trip in Vancouver Canuck history, but any suggestion that it will be the toughest the team has ever faced would get a spirited argument from the likes of Harry Neale and Orland Kurtenbach.

Neale, the former Canuck coach and general manager, and Kurtenbach, the team's first captain and later its coach, can both remember their respective teams being exhausted during the six- and seven-game trips that were a regular staple of the Canuck schedule in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Back then, there was no firstclass chartered plane, stocked with a selection of fine food and beverages, waiting to whisk you to the next city. Usually, it was back to the team hotel and then up at 6 or 7 a.m. to catch a commercial flight the next morning.

"There is no comparison as far as travel is concerned," Neale said Thursday from his Buffalo home. "None at all."

The Canucks left Thursday morning on an eight-game trip that begins Saturday night in Toronto. And while it will be the most consecutive games ever played on the road by a Canuck team, Neale and Kurtenbach believe some of the trips in their day were even more challenging.

"Not that an eight-game road trip is ever a day at the beach, but these days you travel by charter and you can alter the times you want to leave," Neale said. "Sometimes you want to leave after the game and sometimes you want to leave the next day."

"I think the toughest thing we had going back to the 1970s was flying commercial," added Kurtenbach. "It's not the games that kill you, it's all the waiting around at the airports."

The Canucks didn't have to do any of that on Thursday. The team's Air Canada charter departed from a private hangar at the South Terminal. There was no security maze to go through. The players and coaches pulled their cars up to the door, walked onto the plane and settled into their oversized seats.

The Canuck players realize that life on the road really isn't that tough, what with the five-star hotels, hefty per diem and rock star treatment on their private plane.

Veteran defenceman Brad Lukowich, who recently spent some time in the minors, put the trip into perspective Thursday morning.

Lukowich noted that his former AHL team, the Texas Stars, has a seven-game trip coming up.

"They go on the road for like three weeks and it's not to Montreal and it's not to Toronto," Lukowich said with a smile. "It's to places like Rockford [Illinois]. And it's not flying firstclass. Let's be honest with each other, it's not that bad. Come on, guys."

The biggest decision most of the players had to make for this trip was what to take. The trip includes some winter wonderland stops in Eastern Canada and Minnesota, but the Canucks also will spend about five days in Florida.

"You have to have some swim shorts and then you've got to bring your winter jacket, so it's a little awkward," said defenceman Christian Ehrhoff. "I did take a couple of days to plan it in my head so I don't forget anything. I hope I have everything."

"I have got a ton of things," added winger Mikael Samuelsson. "I usually pack 10 minutes before I go. [On this trip] I packed everything last night."

Most of the Canuck players were hauling at least one large suitcase. The fact many of them are heading off on vacations after this trip during the Olympic break further complicated the packing process. The Canucks head out on a six-game trip after the Olympic break and don't play again at General Motors Place until March 13.

Lukowich approached his packing somewhat differently. He tried to take as little as possible, even though the team is visiting eight cities on its 18-day odyssey.

"I think you go the other way and say what can I get by with," he said. "Then you look at the cities and it's like, man, you are going from one extreme to the other, so I just left a little bit of room in this bag in case I have to get another layer or something. It's going to be a fun trip."

After Toronto, the Canucks visit Montreal, Ottawa, Boston, Tampa, Sunrise, Fla., Columbus and Minnesota. There's no question it is a gruelling trip, but other than one back-to-back, the games are spaced out nicely.

While Neale was Canuck coach in the 1979-80 season, the team had a seven-game trip that included three back-to-backs and made stops in St. Louis, Colorado, Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, Washington and Toronto. The team lost all but one of those games.

"You have to remember that for a chunk of my time in Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary weren't in the league and Winnipeg wasn't in the league so the closest two teams were St. Louis and Los Angeles and commercially you couldn't go directly to St. Louis," Neale said.

"And the rosters are bigger now. We couldn't dress six defencemen and 12 forwards ... Luckily enough for Vancouver they have got a good team, they are getting healthy and going on this trip with some confidence they have earned with their wins at home. That makes a lot of difference."

There is a downside to all this charter air travel, though.

"It would be nice if we could collect some miles on these flights," Ehrhoff joked.

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Band-Aid blue-liners do their part to thwart rivals

Rome, Lukowich and Baumgartner thriving under pressure

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 29, 2010

No Willie Mitchell, no Sami Salo, no Kevin Bieksa. No problem.

It seems rumours of the Vancouver Canucks' demise on defence have been greatly exaggerated. The team, now riding a season-best six-game winning streak, hasn't missed a beat without three of its top five defencemen.

Associate coach Rick Bowness, who looks after the Canuck defence, credits depth defenceman Aaron Rome and recent call-ups Brad Lukowich and Nolan Baumgartner for that.

"Those three guys that we brought in, they are veterans and know how to play the game," Bowness said Thursday before the team departed for Toronto, where the Canucks kick off a franchise-record eight-game road trip on Saturday night.

"They know their strengths and they understand the game and they understand to stay within what you do well. And that is what they have all done a very good job of."

In nine games since his call-up from Texas in the AHL, Lukowich is plus-seven. He scored a game-winning goal against Buffalo earlier this week and also has an assist. Baumgartner is even through his first three games since being summoned from Manitoba and is averaging about 14 minutes a night.

Rome is plus-three in his last five outings.

"They are all very competitive guys, they are all true professionals," Bowness said. "There is a stabilizing effect, it's not a rookie coming in and running all over trying to do too much, and it's not a guy who is unsure of himself and what he brings to the table. They know what they bring and they stay with that."

The job figures to get harder on the road, where the Canucks will no longer have the benefit of last change. The opposition will look to exploit Vancouver's banged-up back end.

"That's fine," Lukowich said. "Me and Bomber [Baumgartner] have been around a long time so we have seen a lot of these guys already. If we are matched against top lines you just have to buckle down if you are in your end and get the job done."

Bowness has been riding Christian Ehrhoff, Alex Edler and Shane O'Brien hard in recent games. Ehrhoff played more than 28 minutes and scored the winner in Wednesday night's 3-2 win over St. Louis.

"Everyone has one or two top lines and you know you want to have Christian out there or OB [O'Brien] or Alex, or whoever is going well that night," Bowness said. "Icings become a big factor. You ice the puck and you lose total control of matchups. All those little things come into play."

Ehrhoff loves the extra minutes. "Personally, I like to play that much," he said. "For me, it's a great challenge and it's fun."

Mitchell, who has missed the last five games with a concussion, did not make the trip Thursday. Salo, who has sat out three games with a groin problem, was on Thursday's flight and is expected to practise with the team today in Toronto.

"We are hoping he gets through practice tomorrow and can play Saturday," Bowness said of Salo. "If not, Tuesday [in Montreal]."

Bieska, out since Dec. 29 after slicing ankle tendons in game in Phoenix, is likely gone for at least another month.

ICE CHIPS: The Canucks have sent winger Jannik Hansen to Manitoba for a conditioning stint ... The Moose dispatched forward Eric Walsky to the Victoria Salmon Kings. Walsky was a free-agent signing last spring out of Colorado College by the Canucks.

NEXT GAME

Saturday at Toronto Maple Leafs

4 p.m.

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Hansen gives Moose a boost

By [KEN WIEBE](#), QMI Agency

When you're mired in a season-long five-game losing streak, good news is always welcome.

There's no question the Manitoba Moose were smiling when they learned yesterday that right-winger Jannik Hansen had been assigned to them by the Vancouver Canucks for a conditioning stint that could last up to two weeks.

"We certainly can use the skill, anytime you can get a player of that quality at this time of the year, we're looking for him to be a little boost for us," said Moose head coach Scott Arniel. "(Hansen) hasn't played a lot of games recently and he wants to be sharp and get his game up to where it needs to be. For us, it's a bonus because we know him. It'll be an easy adjustment."

Hansen, 23, should be in uniform tonight when the Moose face the Worcester Sharks in the fourth game of a six-game eastern swing.

"We'll throw him right in there," said Arniel, whose club has scored only 11 goals and given up 32 during the past five games. "He's such a good skater and if he has the puck, he'll push the defence back. He's shifty and he's a real good penalty killer. You can use him in a large role and we're going to try to take advantage of that."

Hansen, who was chosen 287th overall by the Canucks in the 2004 NHL Entry Draft, has 34 goals and 78 points in 124 games with the Moose.

The speedster from Denmark has five goals and nine points in 24 games with the Canucks this season.

"He's a fast guy out there and last year when he came down for those two games (on a conditioning stint), he was a difference-maker," said Moose forward Guillaume Desbiens. "He's going to get a lot of ice time here and I'm sure he'll be excited about that. We're more than happy to get him down here."

The Moose played much better in Wednesday's 3-1 loss and are hoping to build on the effort going into the rematch with the Sharks tonight.

"We played hard and did a lot of good things. In saying that, you don't want to lose hockey games," said Arniel. "We had every opportunity to win (Wednesday). We had five breakaways in the game, outchanced the opposition, didn't give up a lot against. We made two mistakes and they ended up in our net.

"When things are going good for you as a group, you get bounces and pucks are going in when they shouldn't and when times are tough, it's vice-versa. We're giving up untimely goals and missing open-net chances. It's something we've got to work ourselves through."

With three games left on the road trip, the Moose hope to salvage some valuable points.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to get our confidence level back to where it was before the losing skid," said Desbiens. "Obviously (Wednesday) was a better game, but it's not going to get us in the playoffs or to the top of our division. We took a big step, but we have to take it up a couple more notches to get those points."

To help make room for Hansen, the Moose assigned rookie right-winger Eric Walsky to the Victoria Salmon Kings of the ECHL.

Walsky has two goals and 11 points in 37 AHL games this season and should benefit from the additional ice time at the ECHL level.

Defenceman Mathieu Schneider flew to Vancouver yesterday to get a second opinion on the knee injury he sustained Monday and it's possible he might need surgery to repair meniscus damage.

If surgery is required, Schneider could be on the shelf for 4-to-6 weeks, rather than the 7-to-14 days which was the original diagnosis.

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Canada's NHL Olympians will immerse with other athletes

The Canadian Press

By **Chris Johnston**, The Canadian Press

Steve Yzerman and Mario Lemieux shared a room on the eve of one of the most important games in Canadian hockey history.

There was no five-star resort for Team Canada at the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City and there won't be at the Vancouver Games either.

Instead, the millionaire hockey players will be staying in the Olympic village alongside speedskaters, snowboarders and other athletes competing in Vancouver. The accommodations

aren't exactly spartan but they're not quite as fancy as the places NHL teams typically call home on the road.

Team Canada is in a different tax bracket than your average Olympian. Its combined player income is more than US\$120 million this season.

The C\$1-billion Olympic village in Vancouver will be converted to condos after the Games. Of the 1,100 units available, 737 will be available as condos, with the remaining used as affordable housing and rental properties. Condo prices range from \$450,000 to \$10 million.

Yzerman, Team Canada's executive director, enjoyed his two stays at the Olympic village.

"It was fine," Yzerman said in a recent interview. "It was clean. I shared a room with Mario Lemieux in Salt Lake and we had two single beds. It was just plain, but it was totally fine. They came in and cleaned it up every day."

His opinion seems to be shared by other hockey players who have participated in the Winter Games. In fact, many view it as one of the more charming parts of their overall Olympic experience.

Team Canada has called the village home in every Olympics involving NHL players - Nagano in 1998, Salt Lake City in 2002 and Turin in 2006. And there wasn't much of a discussion about whether that tradition would continue in Vancouver.

"Hockey Canada, the players, the whole hockey movement wants to stay in the village and be a part of the Olympic Games," said Hockey Canada vice-president Johnny Misley, who is overseeing the organization's logistics for Vancouver.

"The simple answer to that one is why wouldn't we?"

Compare that to U.S. basketball's "Dream Team," which elects to arrange its own Olympic accommodations and famously stayed on a luxury cruise-liner during the Athens Games in 2004.

When the NBA stars first competed at the Olympics in 1992, the U.S. team's decision to take up occupancy at a \$900-per-night hotel rather than the Olympic village made big news in Barcelona, prompting outspoken basketball star Charles Barkley to remark: "I'm a black millionaire - I've earned the right to stay where I want to stay."

The U.S. basketball team called the five-star Inter-Continental Hotel home during the Games in Beijing two years ago.

One of the benefits of staying in the village for Team Canada is its relative privacy. [Sidney Crosby](#) had fans following him to dinner during a recent road trip in Vancouver so one can only imagine the type of attention he and his teammates might receive if they wander into the city during the Olympics.

That probably won't happen very often because pretty much everything they need is provided at the Olympic village _ food, gym equipment, access to television and the Internet and, of course, a bedroom. Most importantly, fans and the media aren't allowed in.

As a result, Yzerman refers to the village as an "oasis"; Misley calls it a "sanctuary."

"It's a stress-free environment during what is a stressful Olympic Games," said Misley. "It's a chance for them to just sort of decompress and have a getaway, that's what it's meant to be. It's a place to prepare, get ready and rest and then go back in the competitive fishbowl that is the Olympic Games."

Of course, the hockey players do tend to stand out when they are in common areas such as the cafeteria. Canadian figure skater Patrick Chan and short-track speedskater Charles Hamelin have already said they hope to meet Crosby.

However, Team Canada defenceman Chris Pronger says the hockey players don't mind the attention they receive from other athletes in the village.

"They watch us play and follow hockey like most Canadians," said Pronger, set to compete in his fourth Olympics. "They'll ask questions and kind of want to see how you prepare and how you focus and what you do to get ready for games. It's a chance for them to kind of pick our brains."

Besides, the admiration goes both ways. Yzerman and Pronger both recall the excitement of seeing a Canadian athlete return to the village with a medal following their competition.

It's something hockey players from other countries experience, too. Swedish forward Daniel Alfredsson has been to three Olympics and thoroughly enjoys the camaraderie.

"That's part of the great experience about the Olympics, mingling with all of the other athletes and talking to them about how their competition and practice and lead-up to the Olympics has gone, just sharing stories," said Alfredsson. "Especially with fellow athletes from your own country as well, we don't see them during the year.

"It's just a great atmosphere, a lot of anticipation. You can tell when people ... have an event day or not because the intensity is there and it's a lot of fun to be a part of."

The experience is so good that a few members of the hometown Canucks plan to make the short move to the Olympic Village during the Games.

Goaltender Roberto Luongo is looking forward to joining the other 22 Canadian players at Olympic village, which is located on False Creek near B.C. Place.

"I'm part of Team Canada, you know what I mean?" said Luongo. "You want to take in the whole experience, right? You want to be with your teammates and other athletes as well."

Added Canucks defenceman Christian Erhoff, set to compete in his third Olympics for Germany: "That's my choice, I want to be with the team. The Olympic village is always special to see all the other athletes. It's always a nice atmosphere so I definitely want to be part of that."

Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson hopes that some of the players might pick up a tip or two while being immersed with other Canadian athletes. He figures it could end up being a mutually beneficial situation.

"Hey, maybe (a hockey player) can say something that'll help a luge athlete to win and vice versa," said Nicholson. "There's a lot of people that are surprised that the men's team stays in the village. But no, they want to stay there and they want to be just like the other Canadian Olympians."

[Sign of struggling times as Hansen shipped to Moose on conditioning stint](#)

By [Ben Kuzma](#) Thu, Jan 28 2010

Vancouver Canucks winger Jannik Hansen has been re-assigned to the Manitoba Moose of the AHL for a conditioning assignment.

Under terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, the Dane can't be on a conditioning loan for more than 14-consecutive days, which covers most of the Canucks' current eight-game, 16-day road trip which opens Saturday in Toronto.

Hansen, 23, has been a healthy scratch the last four games and 10 of the last 14. He has just nine points (5-4) in 24 games and is on a two-way contract that expires after this season. Management will also have to determine if Hansen fits into their future plans at the March 3 trade deadline or next summer.

Last season, Hansen had 21 points (6-15) in 55 regular-season games and appeared in two postseason games. Hansen has also played in 124 career games with the Moose along with 62 penalty minutes.

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