



## Canucks to decide on lead Swede in backup goalie battle

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun

VANCOUVER — A lot can change between now and training camp, but it's shaping up to be a battle of the Swedes for the backup goalie position with the Vancouver Canucks.

The Canucks confirmed a Swedish weekend newspaper report on Monday when they announced the signing of goalie Joacim Eriksson, a highly regarded 23-year-old who this past season helped lead Skelleftea to the Swedish Elite League championship.

Eriksson is expected to compete with fellow Swede Eddie Lack at training camp for the backup job behind Cory Schneider.

The Canucks could also acquire an experienced NHL backup either via free agency or in the expected trade of goalie Roberto Luongo, so it is far from a given that Lack or Eriksson will land the job.

"As you know our goaltending situation at this point is in flux," assistant general manager Laurence Gilman said Monday. "But we think that Eddie Lack and Joacim Eriksson both have the talent level to compete for the backup role."

Eriksson, who signed a two-year entry level deal with the Canucks, posted terrific numbers last season with Skelleftea. He went 21-9-0 with a 1.67 goals-against average, a .931 save percentage and five shutouts in 30 regular-season games. In 10 playoff games, Eriksson's numbers were off-the-charts good: a 1.06 GAA and a .952 save percentage.

"This player was highly sought after," Gilman said. "There were a number of teams vying for his services. We identified him early. (European scout) Lars Lindgren was very much pushing us to sign him ... we tried to sign him last year, actually. I saw him play in November and he's a very good goaltender, very athletic."

It is rare for European goalies to come to North America and step right into the NHL. The smaller ice surface requires an adjustment and most serve an apprenticeship in the AHL, as Lack has done.

But going straight to the NHL from Europe is not without precedent. Henrik Lundqvist went straight from Frolunda in Sweden to the New York Rangers in 2005 and Niklas Backstrom left Karpas in Finland to join the Minnesota Wild in 2006.

"Our belief is that he will compete for the backup position here," Gilman said of Eriksson.

"However, it's always an adjustment for any player coming over to North America from Europe so he may need some seasoning in Utica."

Eriksson was originally drafted in the seventh round (196th overall) by the Philadelphia Flyers.

Before having major hip surgery this past January, it was widely assumed that Lack would inherit the backup job. He is on a one-way deal this coming season at a salary of \$850,000. But his rehab from surgery and the fact he struggled somewhat early last season has some wondering whether he will be NHL-ready this season.

Reached Monday in Vancouver, Lack said his rehab is going well and insisted he will be ready to compete for the backup job in September. He also said Eriksson's signing was not a huge surprise.

"I kind of knew there was one more goalie coming and I kind of put one and one together when I saw some reports in Swedish newspapers," Lack said. "It didn't really catch me by surprise that he signed with the Canucks. It's all right."

Lack and Eriksson know one another and both spent time playing with the Brynas junior and senior teams at different times.

"We got to know each other a little bit and we have some mutual friends, too," Lack said.

Lack said Eriksson's signing does not change anything for him.

"It's going to be like that wherever you play," he said. "You have to earn your spot and I kind of feel like I have paid my dues in the minors now and it's time for me to step it up a little bit and show that I can play in the big leagues now."

Lack began skating six weeks after his surgery and said he will ramp things up in mid-July. He plans to spend almost the entire summer in Vancouver.

"I am just trying to get 100 per cent healthy and back to the shape I have been in before and just get ready for training camp. I have been here three years now and I kind of feel like this is my time to show something."

ICE CHIPS: Multiple reports have former Canucks coach Alain Vigneault receiving a five-year, \$10-million deal to be the new coach of the New York Rangers ... Gilman would not say if any progress has been made in contract talks with defenceman Chris Tanev, who is a restricted free agent. Teams must make qualifying offers to their RFAs by July 2.

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Tortorella must convince Canucks he can drop some baggage in second coaching interview

The Province

Ben Kuzma

A first impression is lasting. And if it's the wrong one, a second one must be convincing.

John Tortorella should consider commercials for Samsonite because nobody carried more baggage into a second meeting with the Vancouver Canucks than the fiery bench boss. Then again, the former New York Rangers coach made such an impression as a possible successor to the fired Alain Vigneault in his first face-to-face, that he's been granted another audience to convince ownership and management he can temper his approach in a hockey-mad market where every coaching decision is picked over like vultures on a carcass. Los Angeles Kings assistant coach John Stevens deserves and will probably get a second interview with the Canucks based on his body of work as a Philadelphia Flyers head coach and the past two seasons with Daryl Sutter, but Tortorella is that coaching moth willing to fly so close to the flame. You can't take your eyes off him.

Tortorella received as much notoriety in 2004 for the way he addressed the national media as for the way he guided the Tampa Bay Lightning to a Stanley Cup championship. Forced by the NHL to sit before a sea of microphones, he was as abrasive as sandpaper and short, curt and dismissive of queries about his team, the other team or anything. The Boston native went after

them all — big or small — and the side-show circus with the media was often a centre-ring attraction.

“He got a bad reputation and it followed him around and anything that happens is exasperated because of what happened in 2004,” said an NHL source. “But he understands a little better now. He’s not a dumb guy and his rep is on the line. If he screws this up, it’s going to be very difficult to get another NHL job. For the most part, he’ll try and in some fashion he won’t be able to help himself — he’s going to blast somebody — but for the most part he will try.

“When he wants to, he can be the most engaging, fun and interesting guy you’ve ever spoken to. It’s unbelievable. And if you catch him at the right moment and there’s a topic he wants to talk about, he’s great and he laughs and he laughs at himself.”

Tortorella was an assistant coach for the U.S. at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver and got a taste of the appetite for anything hockey related in this market. But that was a two-week tournament. A 41-game home regular-season schedule with 28 media members at practices is going to test the Italian’s patience when soft and mundane queries are tossed his way. Not sure there’s a 12-step program for dealing with those who think a left-wing lock is something you put on a bicycle, but that’s the challenge for the 54-year-old Tortorella if he lands the gig. In Tampa, Tortorella had to sell himself and his team before the Bolts won it all. He dealt with two beat reporters and no columnists and getting the team on the front page of the local papers was tough in a market dominated by the Buccaneers, Rays, NCAA and high school football and NASCAR. In New York, getting on the front page was often about what Tortorella said instead of what his club actually did on the ice – good or bad — because of considerable coverage. And, hey, it’s New York. And that will be the case here.

As much as the local media may recoil and the Canucks don’t believe they need somebody to crack the motivational whip, what they make get in Tortorella is far from a tyrant. He’s better after losses because he won’t go over the top after wins and praise his players to place them in a comfort zone. And he’ll deal with the Xs and Os better after a loss because a good question will probably afford a better answer. He’ll probably still drop an F-bomb because a coach has to believe he’s smarter than the mass media and for Tortorella — a former Atlantic Coast Hockey League winger for the Hampton Road Gulls, Erie Golden Blades, Nashville South Stars and Virginia Lancers — it won’t be about matching wits. He knows. You don’t.

So, how can this all play out the right way in Vancouver?

You have to believe part of the roster favoured setting the accountability bar from within the lockerroom and that it spoke to professionalism of Vigneault and his former players. And Vigneault received a five-year, \$10 million US contract Monday when finally confirmed as the Rangers new bench boss, so it’s hard to imagine he’ll stray from that approach after getting a raise. But you also have to believe part of the Canucks roster is seeking better direction — especially young and impressionable players — and that has to come from within the room and from behind the bench.

Tortorella has his warts. The Rangers were 10th in offence and 23rd on the power play during the regular season and 4-for-44 on the power play in the playoffs where they were eliminated in the second round by the Boston Bruins in five games. He demoted Brad Richards to the fourth line and then didn’t play the struggling centre, but he also accepted blame when the Rangers fell short of expectations. Tortorella didn’t pass the buck. That’s all you can ask for, especially if that quote is delivered in the proper manner.

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Hat Trick: More pipe dreams with Eriksson, Utica Bridesmaids, Tortorella’s 2.0

The Province: The White Towel

Ben Kuzma

Three things to ponder while John Tortorella gets another audience with the Canucks, another twist in the somewhat awkward goaltending situation in Vancouver and tossing the bridesmaid Utica Comets a bouquet:

1. MORE PIPE DREAMS: You never know how much stock to put into Swedish reports of a Canucks signing — a recent false report had U.S. college defenceman Christian Folin heading here — but a suggestion last week that Swedish goaltender Joacim Eriksson, 23, has agreed to a two-year, entry-level deal made sense and was confirmed by the Canucks on Monday morning. He was a seventh-round selection by the Philadelphia Flyers in the 2008 draft and went 21-9-0 last season with a 1.67 goals-against average and .931 saves percentage for Skelleftea of the Swedish Elite League.

One look at the crease conundrum and you don't have to look far for depth concerns and understand the Eriksson signing. Aside from the Roberto Luongo trade watch, there's also the Eddie Lack surgery rehab watch and watching what the Canucks might do at the June 30 draft. Especially after not signing injury plagued 2011 third-round pick David Honzik by the June 1 deadline and knowing Joe Cannata needs expected minor-league seasoning.

After suffering a hip injury last November with the Chicago Wolves, Lack didn't play for two months and had surgery Jan. 29. He's expected to be ready for training camp and his contract reverts to a one-way at \$850,000 US in the final year two-year agreement that was a \$650,000/85,000 split between the NHL and AHL in the first year. That's great if Lack is ready to back up Cory Schneider, but even when healthy last season, there was considerable thought that he might not be ready for prime time and needed another year in the AHL. Initially, that wasn't a big concern because the Canucks were expected to land a backup in a Luongo deal or dip into the murky unrestricted free agents waters next month and pluck a veteran stopper as a short-term fix. Then came the Lack surgery and now comes more uncertainty, but he should battle Eriksson for the starting job in the AHL. Then again, insiders say Eriksson might be the best stopper out there who's not playing in the NHL. He'll obviously be at the Young Stars tournament in Penticton in September to gauge just where he's at. In the short term, the Canucks can go the UFA route to help Schneider and in the long term with seven goalies ranked to go in the first two rounds on June 30, they may want to take a look.

2. UTICA BRIDESMAIDS: They're called the Comets and that's appropriate because the Canucks' new AHL club could burn brightly — 500 season tickets were sold Saturday — and then disappear from sight in a six-year relocation agreement that has out clauses. It's no shock that Utica, N.Y. was down the list of desired locations for the Canucks to house the Peoria Rivermen, who were purchased from the St. Louis Blues on April 18. Canucks general manager Mike Gillis explored keeping the club in Peoria, Ill., but the city sought a supply fee arrangement that would allow the money-losing club (\$400,000 US last season) to operate at a break-even budget. Another option was striking a territorial agreement with the Abbotsford Heat to operate a rival AHL club at Rogers Arena — or a financial agreement for the Calgary Flames farm team to move to Utica — and the Canucks were also keen on the Key Arena in Seattle. That bid was vetoed because it's been out there for a while now that if financing falls through by the June 25 deadline to keep the Coyotes in Glendale, Ariz., the NHL club could have new owners and play out of the antiquated Key Arena until the city's new arena is constructed. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has met with the Seattle mayor and an NHL club to pair with an NBA franchise in a new building trumps a minor-league team in a city that already houses the WHL Thunderbirds.

3. TORTORELLA 2.0: John Tortorella is getting a second interview with the Canucks this week to replace the fired Alain Vigneault after the blustery bench boss apparently knocked it out of the park in his first meeting. Not surprising. The fired New York Rangers coach has won a Stanley Cup, will push any buttons to maximize performance and that will resonate with ownership and management — even though some of the Rangers' problems this season sound so familiar here. A reliance on great goaltending and struggle to score goals led to the Rangers being 10th in offence and 23rd on the power play during the regular season and 4-for-44 on the power play in the playoffs. Yet, there's something about the fiery Tortorella approach that's tempting — like putting your hand too close to a flame — to see if you get a rush or burned in the process. We've documented for weeks what a Tortorella hiring here would mean — the good, bad and possibly ugly — but it's a story that simply won't go away. And if Torts can somewhat soften his approach in a media-mad market, he might have a leg up on the job.

Expect Los Angeles Kings assistant coach John Stevens to be granted another interview. With NHL general manager meetings on Wednesday in Boston, this process could stretch out unless Mike Gillis is already convinced he has his man and just needs to take the process forward face-to-face.

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Canucks sign Swedish free-agent goaltender Joacim Eriksson

By Jim Jamieson, The Province

The Canucks have added to their goaltending depth with the signing of Swedish free-agent Joacim Eriksson.

In a deal that came to light in Europe on the weekend and announced by the Canucks on Monday, Eriksson fits somewhere behind No. 1 Cory Schneider. Just where will depend on if the Canucks get a goalie back in the anticipated trade of Roberto Luongo and the health of minor-league prospect Eddie Lack.

Eriksson, 23, had excellent numbers for Skelleftea of the Swedish Elite League the last two seasons. The six-foot-one, 189-pounder posted a record of 21-9-0, a 1.67 GAA, a save percentage of .931 and five shutouts this past season as Skelleftea won the championship. In 10 playoff appearances, Eriksson recorded a 1.06 GAA and a .952 save percentage. Two seasons ago, Eriksson had a GAA of 1.82 and a save percentage of .932 in 33 games.

Canucks assistant GM Laurence Gilman said Vancouver tried to sign Eriksson a year ago, but the goalie felt he wasn't ready yet for the jump to North America.

"This year, he was highly pursued by a half-dozen teams, so we were pleased to get him," said Gilman. "He's a big goalie and he's very athletic."

Eriksson was drafted by Philadelphia in the seventh round in 2008, but the Flyers lost his rights when they failed to sign him. The Flyers were one of the teams in the hunt this year to get him back, but were outbid by Vancouver.

Eriksson was signed to a two-year entry level contract for \$925,000 per year and a lesser amount in the minors.

Lack was the heir apparent to be the NHL backup next season, but hip problems shut him down in late November and he had labrum surgery in January that finished his shortened season.

Gilman said he expects Lack to be fully recovered and fit for training camp and that it's a reasonable assumption that Lack and Eriksson would compete for the NHL backup job —

assuming the status quo. The Canucks other goaltending prospect, Joe Cannata, played his first year of pro hockey last season and likely needs at least another year in the minors.

Lack is entering the final year of his contract — which changes from a two-way deal to a one-way, meaning he'll be earning \$850,000 in salary with a \$750,000 cap hit. Gilman said the scenario of Lack earning \$850,000 in the minors will have no influence on the backup competition.

Former Canucks captain Markus Naslund, now the GM of Modo in the SEL, said he believes Eriksson is a good signing.

“He’s played well,” Naslund told The Province from Ornskoldsvik. “His team won the championship this year and went to the final last year, so he’s playing for a strong team as well. He’s an athletic goalie who catches right.”

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#### CANUCKS SIGN SWEDISH GOALTENDER ERIKSSON

The Canadian Press

VANCOUVER - Vancouver Canucks have signed goaltender [Joacim Eriksson](#).

The six-foot-one, 189-pound goalie played Skelleftea, champions of Sweden's Elitserien, last season. He posted a record of 21-9-0 with a goals-against average of 1.67, a save percentage of .931 and five shutouts through 30 games.

He added a 1.06 GAA and a .952 save percentage in 10 playoff games.

The native of Gavle, Sweden was originally selected by Philadelphia in the seventh round, 196th overall, in the 2008 NHL draft.

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#### **Vigneault agrees to five-year deal with Rangers**

Sportsnet.ca

Former Vancouver Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault has agreed to a five-year contract worth \$10 million to become the New York Rangers' new head coach, Hockey Central Insider John Shannon has confirmed.

Vigneault was fired by the Canucks on May 22 after seven years as the team's coach. Prior to that, the 52-year-old spent over three seasons as coach of the Montreal Canadiens.

The Rangers have been searching for a head coach ever since they fired John Tortorella on May 29.

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**New York Rangers to name Alain Vigneault coach: Report**  
By QMI Agency

John Tortorella is out and Alain Vigneault is in.

The New York Rangers have hired the former Vancouver Canucks bench boss to be their next head coach, agreeing to a five-year, \$10-million contract on Monday, TVA Sports' Louis Jean reported.

Speculation grew Friday night after Vigneault, who was thought to be the leading candidate to fill the coaching vacancy with the Dallas Stars, withdrew his name from consideration despite having a reportedly sizeable offer on the table.

Tortorella, meanwhile, is believed to be in contention for Vigneault's former job in Vancouver.

Vigneault has coached 806 NHL games with the Montreal Canadiens and Canucks over parts of 11 seasons. He was fired by Canucks on May 22 after the team was swept by the San Jose Sharks in the opening round of the playoffs.

Vigneault coached the Canucks to the Stanley Cup final in 2011, only to lose in seven games.

VIGNEAULT TO BE NAMED NEW HEAD COACH OF RANGERS

TSN.ca

The New York Rangers will name Alain Vigneault the team's next head coach.

According to TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger, Vigneault inked a five-year, \$10-million deal with the Blue Shirts.

On Saturday, TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie reported that Vigneault had an agreement in place with the team and that only minor contract details were still to be finalized on the deal.

Vigneault notified the Dallas Stars on Friday that he was withdrawing himself from consideration for their head coaching position.

Vigneault guided the Canucks to a berth in the 2010-11 Stanley Cup Final and twice captured the Presidents' Trophy alongside six Northwest Division titles with

Vancouver. He was fired on May 22 after the Canucks were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs for the second straight year.

The 52-year-old Vigneault posted a 313-170-57 regular-season record over seven seasons in Vancouver, but only had a 33-32 record in the postseason.

John Tortorella was fired by the Rangers on May 29, after losing in the second round of the playoffs to the Boston Bruins.

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