



Team Canada's Peterborough contingent: Top, left to right: Assistant coach Paul Day; executive director Dean French; board of directors member Bobby Allen. Bottom, left to right: forward Shawn Evans, forward John Grant Jr. and assistant coach Jim Milligan

HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH

TEAM CANADA WINS THIRD STRAIGHT GOLD MEDAL AT 2011 WORLD INDOOR LACROSSE CHAMPIONSHIPS

// By Neil Stevens

The men who won a third straight world indoor lacrosse championship for Canada will have quite a story to tell their grandchildren.

"We took box lacrosse to Europe and we showed them how the best do it," they'll say. "Now kids all over Europe are playing the indoor game."

The 2011 tournament in the Czech Republic capital of Prague drew eight teams and was held overseas for the first time for the expressed intent of growing the sport and in that regard it was a resounding success. One example: a lacrosse-hockey doubleheader in Bratislava, Slovakia, in October is being planned.

"I wouldn't be surprised at all that over the next 10 years this event has 12, 16 or even as many as 20 teams participating," says Stan Cockerton, president of the Federation of International Lacrosse.

Canada's team was impressive on and off the floor.

"This was a great group," says Joey Harris, Canadian Lacrosse Association (CLA) president, from his office in Winnipeg, Man. "They were perfect ambassadors for Canadian lacrosse."

Team Canada's general manager, Johnny Mouradian of St. Catharines, head coach Ed Comeau, Hamilton, and assistants Derek Keenan, Oshawa, and Paul Day, Peterborough, were mainly responsible for player selections.

"When we picked the team quite a while ago, as always, there were a lot of people who questioned players we picked but we picked guys who we thought had talent and character and I think throughout the tournament that showed through," Comeau said following the 13-6 win over the Iroquois Nationals in the game for gold. "We played tough and we played hard but we also played clean and disciplined."

"I'm very proud," he adds, "of our guys and our organization that we were able from start



Matt Vinc, gold medal game MVP

to finish represent not only our country well but also the great game of lacrosse. I'm very proud and pleased with our guys."

The tournament was played in a 4,900-capacity arena with lighting that wasn't the brightest and small dressing rooms but the green carpet on the playing surface was good



Team Canada's Orangeville connection: (left to right) Brodie Merrill, Pat Merrill and Josh Sanderson

and, while weekday games attracted few spectators, there were close to 3,000 on the closing day. Everything was well organized and on-floor officials, who were mostly Canadians and Americans, did a great job under the supervision of Stewart Begg, the CLA exec from Alberta who was head of refereeing.

Canada's players concentrated on developing good habits as they mowed down England, Australia and Slovakia 81-8 in pool play to advance to a semifinal against the United States, which had lost 11-10 to the Iroquois in its pool.

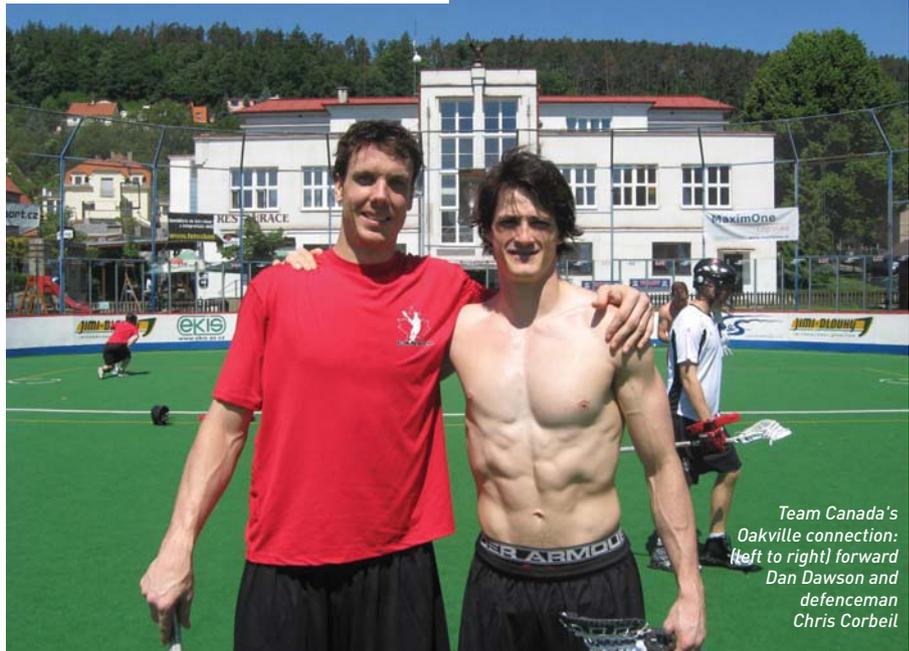
A 5-5 halftime deadlock proved that the U.S. would not easily fall. Comeau's crew concluded that a quick burst to open the third quarter was needed and Rhys Duch of Victoria and John Grant Jr. of Peterborough got it done with goals 42 seconds apart that put Canada ahead to stay. At 11-7 in the fourth quarter, Dan Dawson of Oakville got two quick ones to erase any doubt. It wound up 15-10.

Dawson and Duch finished with four goals each, Grant three, captain Colin Doyle of Kitchener two and Jeff Zywicki of Nepean and Jeff Moleski of Prince George, B.C., one each.

U.S. coach Tom Ryan said goaltender Matt Vinc of St. Catharines was the difference. One thing was for sure: U.S. indoor lacrosse has come a long way.

"I feel we're right there," Ryan said. "In our games against the Iroquois and against Canada, we were not a good enough team to win but, hopefully, in the next four years we'll keep getting stronger and can show a little better in the final result."

The Nationals dumped the Czech Republic 19-6 in the other semifinal. They'd lost the



Team Canada's Oakville connection: (left to right) forward Dan Dawson and defenceman Chris Corbeil

2007 final in overtime, 15-14, and were eager for another shot at Canada.

"We've been looking forward to this for a long time," said captain Sid Smith of Six Nations. "We're preparing for a battle."

The Czechs were coached by former Toronto Rock captain Jim Veltman of Stouffville and had in their lineup goaltender Kurtis Wagar of Whitby as well as Chet Koneczny of Owen Sound, Jamie Plunkett of Peterborough and B.C. product and Rock defenceman Kyle Ross. Veltman's boys pulled off the tournament's biggest upset, 12-7 over England.

In the game for bronze, the U.S. defeated the Czech Republic 16-7, and then it was the Iroquois-Canada final.

Rory Smith of Mimico took a run at Jeff Shattler and was sent off for five minutes for a high hit on the Calgary pro loop MVP. Cory Bomberry of Six Nations whipped in a sidearm bullet during the power play in the sixth minute, but Canada's man-down unit allowed no more.

Jordan Hall of Surrey, B.C., tied it when he wiggled around his check and picked a top corner behind goalie Mike Thompson of Akwesasne. Vinc made more huge saves and Hall put Canada up 2-1 when he dove from behind the net to tuck the ball behind Thompson late in the first quarter.

Canada's superior speed took over and four straight goals early in the second quarter followed: Dawson scored off a long pass from Brodie Merrill; Pat Merrill, the older of the Orangeville brothers, intercepted a pass and fed Brodie for a breakaway goal; Shawn Evans of Peterborough struck on a fast break; and Josh

Sanderson of Orangeville cashed in off a pass from behind the net from Doyle to make it 6-1.

Thompson hurt his left knee in a pileup and Angus Goodleaf of Kahnawake, Que., came in. Canada led 9-2 at halftime and 12-4 after three quarters.

Vinc's goaltending would earn him the game MVP nod.

Hall, Dawson, Evans, Sanderson and Duch finished with two goals each and Brodie Merrill, Doyle and Grant got one each as Canada improved to 17-0 in indoor tournament history.

For the Nationals, who won silver for the third time, Bomberry scored twice and Shattler and Six Nations pals Dean Hill, Roger Vyse and Cody Jamieson once each.

“I’M VERY PROUD OF OUR GUYS AND OUR ORGANIZATION THAT WE WERE ABLE FROM START TO FINISH REPRESENT NOT ONLY OUR COUNTRY WELL BUT ALSO THE GREAT GAME OF LACROSSE.”



NLL and World Champions: (left to right) Stephan Leblanc, Sandy Chapman, Colin Doyle and Pat Merrill



Burlington grads with Team Canada: (left to right) head coach Ed Comeau, forward Stephane Leblanc and team aide Sean Ferris

“They played hard and they’re a great team,” said Comeau. “We gained momentum early and kept it going.”

Doyle performed the captain’s role impressively throughout the tournament.

“It feels good to win the gold,” he said. “We earned it. We were a great team. There’s no doubt about that. Our roster was stacked with talent. This was a team that came here for a purpose and was focused and driven. It was an unbelievable experience with these guys.”

Casey Powell of the United States was named tournament MVP but it could just as well have been Vinc.

“Matt Vinc stood on his head,” said Jamieson.

It was a long-awaited championship for Vinc.

“Losing in the NLL definitely left a bitter taste in my mouth but I had an opportunity to come out here and get to play with arguably

the best team in the world,” said the 2010 and 2011 NLL goalie of the year. “It’s definitely a great feeling. It’s going to make the summer a little bit easier.”

Grant earned his third world indoor gold in his 42nd international game

“I’m just lucky and proud to be on this team,” he said. “When you’re surrounded by such excellent lacrosse players, it’s just a thrill to be on the floor with them.”

Dawson also was on the victorious 2007 team.

“This is probably the best group I’ve ever played with — from the organizing committee to the coaching staff and the players,” he said. “It was the best lacrosse I’ve ever been a part of.”

Sanderson agreed.

“This was probably our best game of the tournament,” he said after getting his gold medal. “Vino held us in there while we were finding our

legs and after that we played really well.”

Kyle Rubisch of Brampton was one of Canada’s many first-timers.

“I was honoured to be on the team and then to actually win the championship with this group of guys, from the staff to the coaches and players, is awesome,” said the musclebound defenceman. “When you can come together and win something like this for your country, it’s something special for sure.”

Bill Greer was elated.

“It couldn’t have been a better week and a half for us here,” said the Oshawa defenceman. “It was the experience of a lifetime.

“I’m just so thrilled I was able to be a part of it and for the rest of my life I’m going to be able to say I was a world champion playing for Canada. It doesn’t get any better than that.”

Smith returned home minus an upper front tooth.

“I never actually won anything in my life so it’s great to win something with Team Canada,” he said.

A lot of Canada’s players are deep into summer league play now and some are opponents.”

You wish you could play with these guys a little bit longer,” Brodie Merrill said of his Team Canada mates. “It was really a great group.

‘I’d played with some of them in the past and some of them for the first time and we were all in it for the right reasons. We played by the principles the coaches set out for us so it was very rewarding to win the gold again.”

Equipment man Ward Sanderson, a former Vancouver senior star, shuttled players and staff between their hotel and the arena and offered his evaluation. “This was the greatest team ever put on a lacrosse floor,” said Sanderson.

There are a lot of people agreeing with him. ♦