



ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

DECEMBER

Something to think about!

Roy MacGregor National Post

Dave Chan, National Post

Canada's avengers

One day after Canada's junior squad fell to the Finns in Moscow, a team of 11-year-old boys from Ottawa answered the nation's call for revenge. They then stood and listened



Contrary to appearances, it was Helsinki Jokerit that fell to Ottawa South West Storm at the Bell Canada International Hockey Festival in Ottawa yesterday. The Canadians won 4-0 and displayed many of the skills their elder brethren were lacking in Moscow recently.

OTTAWA - Think of it as a little revenge. Very little -- averaging maybe 4-foot-8 and, perhaps, a hundred pounds -- but allow Canadian hockey fans to take their solace wherever it might be found. Yesterday afternoon, one day after Canada fell 5-2 to Finland at the World Junior Hockey Championship being held in Moscow, comfort lay in the Corel Centre on the outskirts of Ottawa, where Finland fell 4-0 to Canada. It was a game that featured quick skating, smart passing, inspirational team play, tight checking, creative hockey and -- most significantly of all -- an ability to finish. This, please note, all from the Canadian side. The Finns, on the other hand, were slow and lumbering, uncertain what to do with the puck, incapable of helping each other out, negligent in their passing -- and so unable to finish that pucks were flying off sticks and over nets and into corners and, in one breathtaking moment, off the outside of the goalpost. Ottawa South West Storm 4, Helsinki Jokerit 0. "I thought they'd be better," said little Jason McCarthy, the swiftest and most creative of the Canadians. So, too, did the Finns. Jokerit, after all, is the team of Teemu Selanne, the great Finnish Flash who now plays for the Anaheim Mighty Ducks of the National Hockey League. It is the club that forever seems to challenge for or win the Finnish elite league championship, and the club that has sent so many players off to the NHL. Jani Rita, the speedy junior who gave the Canadians such trouble in Moscow is a Jokerit product and was once the star pupil of Kim Borgstrom, coach of the little team that has come to Ottawa this week for the second annual Bell Canada International Hockey Festival. "Big arena, little rink," Borgstrom said in trying to figure out how his 11-year-olds could come up so short against a local team. They had, of course, never seen such a large arena and such a small

ice surface. The Canadian juniors, on the other hand, have likely never seen such a large ice surface and empty arena as they have this week in Moscow. The tight, North American ice surface (15 feet less wide) proved too restrictive for young players used to both time and space in which to plan their next move. The aggressive Storm were all over them from the drop of the puck and still over them by the end of the game. The baffled Finnish youngsters managed only six shots on net (none of them dangerous) as opposed to 24 (most of them dangerous) for the Canadians. "We have a little bit different way of doing things," Borgstrom said. "This age of boy in Finland, they don't play games like this. We put out five boys, they play for 90 seconds all over the ice, we blow a whistle and the five come off and another five go on." The difference was apparent from the opening faceoff.

Fifteen seconds into the game, the Canadians were all ready changing lines, and the quick changes and high Canadian energy level was simply too much for the visitors. What, then, happens to these kids in the coming years? At 11, it is as if the Canadians have played the game for years, which most have, and the Finns have just discovered it, when, in fact, the Finns have been playing every bit as long as the Canadians. At 11, the Canadians seem, in a game situation, light years ahead, yet the world junior tournament has shown little Finland to be slightly ahead of the Canadians when it comes to such matters as skill, speed and -- that once Canadian prerogative -- goaltending.

By the time they are in their twenties, recent history would suggest it is more likely a player from the Jokerit atoms will reach the NHL before any of the fine young players on South West Storm. Cyril Leeder, the chair of the tournament who is both a former fine amateur hockey player and current father of the! Storm's Dillon Leeder, says it is obvious from a tournament like this

that hockey failure is hardly "bred into us. "It will only change if coaching changes," he is convinced. He is, fortunately, not alone. When the Jokerit atoms practiced the day before, the stands were sprinkled with area minor-hockey coaches busy scribbling notes and diagramming drills. They were astonished at the lateral movement of the little Finns, amazed at their patience when moving in on goal, and impressed with the flow of their practices. It seemed not a minute nor a square foot of ice was wasted. Most impressive of all, perhaps, was the fact that the Finnish coaches hardly needed to say a word and the players never looked for a break.

Practice, contrary to the Canadian experience, was considered both necessary and fun. Storm coach Gary Timm is one of those Canadian coaches trying to change.

His practice ratio is two practices to every game, the reverse ! of the typical Canadian experience. He wants his players "not to be afraid to try things."

He thinks competitive teams in this country play far too many games and insisted his players have Christmas off and forget about hockey unless perhaps -- God willing -- they might like to try a little shinny on an outdoor rink. There is, ever so slowly, new thinking going into this game that means so very much to Canadians, and there may be no better place to look for it than this tournament in Ottawa that bills itself as the largest atom tournament in the world. "The change is on," Leeder believes. For a kid such as Jason McCarthy, the real change this day was merely standing on the ice while the Canadian anthem was played. "We never got that before," he said. With luck, they will one day get it again.