



## MACCABI HOCKEY TRYOUT ATTRACTS TALENTED PLAYERS

By **Paul Lungen, Staff Reporter** - June 18, 2012 > 3343 1 Comment



When 22 Canadian skaters take to the ice in Metulla next summer to compete in the Maccabiah Games, they'll be wearing official Team Canada sweaters – the same uniforms worn by Canadian teams at the Olympic Games and World Championships.

Hockey Canada has given Maccabi Canada the green light to use the jerseys, along with other hockey apparel, said Alex Voihanski, manager of Maccabi's Team Canada. It's a testament to the stature possessed by the Maccabiah Games and signals to players that the event is held in high esteem, he said.

Judging from the quality of the competition at tryouts last week, Team Canada should have plenty of good players to justify using Team Canada uniforms.

About 50 skaters took part in scrimmages at the Pavilion sports complex north of Toronto. Among them were professionals or NHL draftees; NCAA Division I and III players, plus junior and major junior players. They auditioned in front of a battery of Maccabi coaches, headed by former NHL bench boss Mike Keenan.

The coaching staff, which includes OHL coaches Greg Gilbert (Saginaw) and Mike Polino (Peterborough), was suitably impressed, said Voihanski. There's an embarrassment of riches in the Jewish community when it comes to high-end

hockey talent, he said.

In addition to the players vying for a spot on the "open" team, another 90 or so tried out for the under-19 squad. Mario Cicchillo, head coach of the Toronto Junior Canadiens and coach of the under-19 team, said a lot of AAA to A calibre players were on hand. Two weeks before, at tryouts in Montreal, 27 kids showed up; 11 skaters and three goalies made the cut to the second round of tryouts.

"Quite a few could play on the Junior Canadiens. I think we've got a pretty good crop here in Toronto," said Cicchillo, who served as head coach of Team Ontario at the World Under 17 Hockey Challenge in 2009.

Junior hockey will be making its debut at the Maccabiah Games in 2013, though the "open" version has already been a medal sport at the Games. In 1997 Canada won a gold medal in the sport. The Canadian team was loaded with quality players, led by AHL skater Harold Hersh, the brother team of Mikhail and David Nemirowsky (David played for a time with Florida Panthers before ending his career in the KHL), ex-NHLer Brian Wilks and bolstered by youngsters (and future NHL draftees) Michael Henrich and Cory Pecker.

As in 1997, the United States is expected to provide Canada with the stiffest competition. Israel and France round out the competition.

Judging from the quality of players at the tryout, the Canadians should be good starting from the goal out. Among a talented group of netminders, Daniel Altshuller possesses the most impressive hockey resume. Altshuller plays for the Oshawa Generals of the OHL and is rated by NHL Central Scouting 12th among North American goalies heading into the 2012 entry draft.

Playing for the Nepean Raiders in the tier two Central Canadian Hockey League in 2011, he was selected to the OHL-dominated Team Ontario and backstopped the squad to a gold medal in the World Under-17 Tournament. Later, he was Canada's number one goalie at the Ivan Hlinka Memorial Under-18 Tournament, where he won another gold medal and was named player of the game in the final game.

Others vying for goaltending duties include Cody Rosen, a New York Islanders draft pick who plays for Clarkson University in the NCAA, and Kevin Kliman, who played for Brown University. Two other prospects who could not attend the camp include Mark Segal, a goalie with Vancouver Giants of the Western Hockey League from 2009 to 2011, and Josh Tordjman, who played two games for the Phoenix Coyotes during a four-year AHL career. He now backstops EC Red Bull Salzburg in the Austrian Hockey League.

Up front, brothers Michael and Adam Henrich stood out at the tryouts with their size, skating and skill. Michael was a first-round pick, 13th overall, by the Edmonton Oilers in 1998 – the highest ever for any Jewish player – while Adam was selected 60th overall by Tampa Bay in 2002. They play in the Italian pro league and two years ago were on the same team and led the Asiago Lions to a championship.

Zach Hyman, drafted by the Florida Panthers in the fifth round in 2010, played for the University of Michigan this past season. Zach Sternberg, a defenceman with Lake Superior State of the NCAA stood, out as did Andrew Calof, a centre for Princeton University.

Dylan Smoskowitz, who played the last two years with the Barrie Colts and Benjamin Rubin, who played for Patrick Roy's Quebec Remparts in 2006-07 and in France this past season, were also impressive, Voihanski said.

"Rubin had an excellent camp," he said. "Playing in Europe has done wonders for him... He has NHL-calibre skating."

A number of players who were unable to attend the tryouts are still in the running for the final roster, Voihanski said. Among them are Winnipegger Jacob Micflikier, who plays for the AHL Hershey Bears; Vancouver native Trevor Smith, second leading scorer on the Calder Cup champion Norfolk Admirals; Barrie Colt Daniel Erlich, and Ethan Werek, a 2009 second-round pick of the New York Rangers who played last season with the Portland Pirates of the AHL.

Voihanski said he plans to reach out to Calgary Flame Mike Cammalleri, but believes injury concerns and prohibitive insurance costs make the participation of NHL players unlikely.

Still, no one has yet turned down his offer to participate in the tournament.

"We've gotten very enthusiastic responses from the players. A lot of guys were into the fact it's a real Maccabiah tournament where you walk into a stadium in front of thousands of people," he said.

Players are also impressed with the quality of coaching. "They'll be playing for a staff they've never played for their entire lives. Between the coaching staff, the opportunity to represent Canada and [the fact] it's the Maccabiah Games, the response was tremendous," he said.

At the rink, the enthusiasm was apparent. Matt Silcoff, 19, took part in the World Cup of Jewish Hockey in Metulla three years ago. A left winger who'll attend Middlebury Collegiate, a Division III school in Vermont next fall, he said that "it's a good level of hockey. There are a lot of good players here fighting for a few spots."

Adam Henrich said he was excited to hear hockey was returning to the Maccabiah Games. "It's a pretty big tournament, and it's an honour to play for your country, your religion," he said.

Henrich spent 10 days in Israel on a personal trip two years ago and hopes to return on the same team with his brother. "Ideally, that's what we're here for," he said.

Dustin Laren, 22, played for Canada at the World Cup of Jewish Hockey. "It was one of the most fun trips of my entire life. Everyone's so close, you're in Israel and you have the chance to represent Canada as a hockey player. It's unbelievable," he said.

Unfortunately, not all the prospects will make the final 22-man roster or five-man reserve unit. Fourteen guys were thanked for their efforts after the first day of scrimmage and didn't return for the second.

That still leaves a core of about 35 players whom the team's management will monitor over the next few months. The deadline for submitting a roster for the Games is May 31, 2013, and a decision on the Canadian team won't be made until next winter – sort of like Hockey Canada's timetable for the Olympic Games, Voihanski said.