



MIKE KEENAN NAMED MACCABI CANADA COACH

By **Paul Lungen, Staff Reporter** - February 14, 2012 > 4387 > 0



Stanley Cup winner Mike Keenan has agreed to coach Maccabi Canada's hockey entry at the 2013 Maccabiah Games in Israel.

Keenan will lead a team that is expected to include pros from the AHL and ECHL, as well as NCAA and junior-calibre players. They will face opposition from the United States, France and Israel as Canada tries to repeat its gold-medal performance from 1997 – the only time hockey has been a Maccabiah sport.

"I'm really excited about it. It's a place I've never been," Keenan told *The CJN*. "It will be a new experience, a new opportunity to learn about [Israel] first hand. It will be very interesting."

The addition of Keenan gives Maccabi Canada's hockey program instant credibility, said Alex Voihanski, general manager of the team and the primary person charged with finding players.

Keenan is a highly respected hockey man whose experience in pressure-cooker situations is second to none. In addition to winning the Stanley Cup with the New York Rangers in 1994, he coached in the finals two other times and was

behind the Canadian bench in the 1987 Canada Cup. That was a team that featured superstars Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and Mark Messier in their prime – arguably the best Canadian team of all time, Voihanski said.

"It is tremendous for us to be led by a coaching legend," said Team Canada hockey chair Mark Goodman. "Mike has all of the attributes that we were looking for when we started this process, and the players will benefit greatly by having him around."

Voihanski, who also serves as director of hockey operations for International Scouting Services (ISS), learned of Keenan's availability through the Rangers. ISS has a relationship with the team, and Keenan is part of the MSG Network's broadcast crew for Rangers games.

Keenan was contacted and became interested in the Maccabiah Games position as he learned more about the event.

"To get somebody like Mike is off the charts," Voihanski said. Not only does it enhance the event's stature, but "it tells young guys it's a huge event."

Keenan said visiting Israel is something he has long intended to do. He was a close friend and colleague of Roger Neilson, who for years ran a summer hockey school at the Canada Centre rink in Metulla. "I was asked to go to Israel and participate in the camp with Roger Neilson, but I didn't have the time," Keenan said.

Both Neilson and Keenan coached the Peterborough Petes in the OHL at different times and worked together for the St. Louis Blues in the mid '90s. "We had a longstanding relationship and friendship, and we talked quite a bit about Israel," Keenan said.

Keenan said he has had ties to the Jewish community since the 1970s. He coached at Toronto's Forest Hill Collegiate for five years, and made contacts with members of the Jewish community. He remains friends with many. His first wife is Jewish, and his daughter was raised in the Jewish faith.

Keenan's former mother-in-law was a Holocaust survivor. He said he travelled to Poland in the 1970s and visited the Warsaw Ghetto and Auschwitz after hearing so many of his mother-in-law's stories about her wartime experiences.

Taking on the coaching position "is an opportunity to give back to a people I've been linked to for many years," he said.

Voihanski believes Keenan's presence will make it easier to recruit high-end talent. Keenan has lots of contacts in the NHL, and his recommendation about players could make the difference in some careers. "If I want to get noticed, being coached by a legend could open doors," Voihanski suggested.

Tryouts for the team will be held in Toronto, Montreal and probably Winnipeg, some time in June. The tryouts will be open to anyone, but it appears that successful candidates will have to be something more than good beer league players.

Voihanski has already compiled a list of 72 skaters playing in Europe, as well as in the AHL, ECHL, divisions 1 and 3 in the NCAA, and major junior and tier II junior players.

There's a wealth of hockey talent in the Jewish community, Voihanski said. "If I'm a player, young or old, I'd be chomping at the bit to become part of the team."

Some of the 72 who might expect invitations are the likes of the Henrich brothers, Michael and Adam, who are playing professionally in Italy; David Nemirovsky, who retired this year after a career in Moscow playing in the KHL; Jacob Micflikier, one of the leading scorers in the AHL with the Hershey Bears, and a couple of NHLers.

Voihanski believes it will be difficult to recruit NHL players because of insurance issues, but Trevor Smith (Tampa Bay) and Mike Cammalleri (Calgary) will likely be invited, he said.

In 1997 Canada sent a stacked team consisting of pro and major junior players. Coached by Stanley Cup winner Jacques Demers (who won in 1993 with the Montreal Canadiens), it defeated the United States in the gold-medal game.

Voihanski expects the Americans will once again ice a strong team of NCAA players. They'll be even stronger if several NHLers agree to play, among them Jeff Halpern (Washington), Mike Brown (Toronto) and Dylan Reese (New York Islanders). Mathieu Schneider, who's been retired for a couple of years, could be enticed to play for the Americans, he suggested.

Rounding out the tournament will be France, which should be able to put together a team with two good lines, as well as Israel.

Also on tap will be a masters tournament for players over 40 and a competition for kids 18 and under. Gary Kalk is in charge of the juniors, while Farrell Miller will put together the masters team, Goodman said.