



# IceTimes

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## Czechs set to host WJC

2020 IIHF World Junior preview

IIHF Growing the Game projects



From the IIHF President

## Building the future

By René Fasel

**A new season has begun, with new opportunities driving enthusiasm for ice hockey and a collective passion to grow the game.**

December brings the first slate of IIHF tournaments, starting with the men's U20s. We have already seen some great action on the ice leading up to our first major event, the 2020 IIHF World Junior Championship. Congratulations to Austria on [earning qualification](#) to next year's Juniors!

Earning promotion to the top division of any IIHF tournament is a great milestone in a country's development. It is a statement of merit, showing that a country's ice hockey program deserves to compete among the world's elite.

We have over 80 member national associations, all striving to reach new levels of competitiveness. The goals vary, but the drive to succeed is always the same.

But to reach a new plateau of competition, the road always begins at the development level. This is why in 2017 the IIHF, together with our marketing partner Infront Sports & Media, initiated the IIHF Growing The Game Fund.

Growing The Game is an initiative aimed at encouraging member national associations to create development projects that fit their individual needs and raise awareness for the sport. When it first launched, Growing The Game started with just four pilot projects. Two years later, the IIHF has distributed over 2 million CHF in project financing. We have just approved 11 new projects - proposed by nine MNAs and two committees - that will extend into the 2019 season and beyond.

Realistic project targets, coupled with innovation and creativity, are key elements to a successfully Growing The Game fund project. [You can read more about the newly-approved projects on page 5.](#)

I encourage all our MNAs and Committees to inquire about the Growing the Game Fund and how they can put together a project plan and apply for funds. It has been especially encouraging to see so many projects approved that were proposed by more than one of our members. This type of knowledge-sharing and project-based cooperation can go a long way

towards improving regional ice hockey development. Let us always keep the passion to grow ice hockey, the sky's the limit!

Speaking about passion, the World Juniors take place this year in the Czech Republic, a nation known for a huge hockey fanbase and some very memorable IIHF tournaments. We will be heading to Czech hockey heartland for the 2020 edition, with big fan bases in Ostrava and Trinec getting ready to welcome the world's top international junior ice hockey competition.

As always, the Juniors will serve as a global showcase for the ice hockey stars of the future. [You can read the preview for this tournament on page 10.](#)

In nearby Slovakia, the 2020 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship is set to take place in the capital Bratislava. I commend the Slovak Ice Hockey Federation for stepping up to host this tournament, so soon after the hugely successful 2019 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship. [Read more about the 2020 Women's U18s on page 13.](#)

Lots of hockey coming, enjoy it! As we move into a new decade, we at the IIHF wish all the ice hockey family good health happiness, and plenty of success as we go into 2020 and beyond.



## News and Notes

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The IIHF has released an Event Calendar on its website IIHF.com. The Calendar contains all the confirmed hosts for IIHF tournaments in 2020 and beyond, along with the dates for the International Breaks and the IIHF Congresses.

[Click here to access the IIHF Calendar of Events](#)

### 2020 IIHF ICE HOCKEY U18 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

The IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship comes back to the United States next spring with the 2020 edition taking place in Plymouth and Ann Arbor, Michigan from 16 to 26 April 2020.

Tickets went on sale to the general public today with various packages as well as single-game tickets already available.

[Click here to buy tickets!](#)

The championship, which will be held in the U.S. for just the third time ever, will be staged at USA Hockey Arena in the Detroit suburb of Plymouth and at the Ann Arbor Ice Cube.

“We’re excited to welcome the world to Michigan,” said Pat Kelleher, executive director of USA Hockey. “It’s not often we get a chance to host a world championship at any level and I know fans will enjoy the great level of talent they’ll see from the 10 participating nations.”

Team USA will skate in Group B alongside Russia, Czech Republic, Finland and Germany, while Group A will include Sweden, Canada, Belarus, Latvia and Switzerland. The U.S. has won gold a tournament-best 10 times and has medaled in a record 16 consecutive tournaments, including seven gold medals in the past 10 years.

Players featured in the tournament are the best U18 men’s players internationally, many who go on to be selected in the NHL Draft. Former U.S. players include Jack Hughes, Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel, Patrick Kane, Dylan Larkin and Seth Jones. Other notable international NHL players that previously played in the Under-18 Men’s World Championship include Connor McDavid, Alexander Ovechkin, Nikita Kucherov, Patrik Laine and Kaapo Kakko.

### HOCKEY HALL OF FAME

The annual Hockey Hall of Fame ceremonies took place in Toronto last night as six new members took their place alongside the

legends of the game. These include Players Hayley Wickenheiser, Vaclav Nedomansky, Sergei Zubov, and Guy Carbonneau, as well as Builders Jim Rutherford and Jerry York.

Midway through the ceremonies, outgoing IIHF President René Fasel was called to the podium representing international hockey. “Ladies and gentlemen, madames et messieurs, I stand here as IIHF President for the last time. For 25 years I have had the honour of coming to Toronto for the Hockey Hall of Fame ceremonies, and during that time the IIHF and the Hall have had a special relationship. I want to thank especially Pat Quinn, whose leadership at the Hall only added to his legend, and to Walter Bush, my mentor, who pushed me to build a greater connection between the IIHF and the Hall.”

### WORLD HOCKEY FORUM

The third World Hockey Forum (WHF) took place in Moscow December 13 -14, 2019.

This international hockey gathering saw participation of 870 delegates from different countries. IIHF President René Fasel helped open the event, and commended the WHF as a great opportunity for the large hockey family to gather in a nice and friendly ambiance to discuss major issues in the sport.

IIHF General Secretary Horst Lichtner was among the presenters at the Forum. Lichtner gave a presentation on the IIHF digital media innovations and initiatives that were utilized at the 2019 World Championship in Slovakia. Other topics of the WHF agenda included:

- Finding balance between pro hockey players’ training, their education, and developing player personality in the positive way
- Analysis of national training programs and their impact on growing of amateur and mass hockey
- Use of marketing instruments for ice hockey promotion
- Challenges facing hockey management in modern sports world
- Women’s hockey development & promotion

Besides WHF participants including leading scientists from universities of Canada, China, Russia and USA discussed, discussed urgent problems concerning sports education and opportunities of combining standard academic education with preparing a young player for his pro hockey career. A practical part of the WHF agenda included a two-day coaching clinic and an open master class for young hockey players.

## Obituaries

### JASON COTSMIRE

It is with great sadness and sorrow that the Ice Hockey Association of Thailand is announcing the death of former national team player Jason Cotsmire, who passed away on 1st December 2019 from a heart attack during a practice.



A minute's silence in commemoration of Cotsmire was held during the Southeast Asian Games this week.

Cotsmire was born on 9th September 1969 in the state of Ohio, USA. Thai-American national, he started to play ice hockey when he was 6 years old. Moreover, he was one of the first goalies to play for the Flying Farangs Ice Hockey Club in Bangkok, Thailand.

He made his mark on the ice hockey world when he debuted as starting goalie for Thailand in the 6th Asian Winter Games in Changchun, China, in 2007 and also played at the 7th Asian Winter Games in Kazakhstan in 2011 as well as many tournaments of IIHF Ice Hockey Challenge Cup of Asia.

During his athletic life, he always supported the ice hockey family of Thailand by offering many training courses for kids and youth goaltenders.

### VLADIMIR TSYPLAKOV

Vladimir Tsyplakov, one of the most accomplished hockey players from Belarus, died on Saturday, 14 December, at the age of 50. Cause of death is unknown, but hockey fans have lost a star player far too early with his passing.

Born in the northern mining town of Inta, in the Komi Region of what was then the Soviet Union, Tsyplakov moved to Yaroslavl as a teenager to begin his hockey career. After two years he moved to Minsk, in 1987, and it was during this time that he played on the Soviet Union's gold-medal winning U20 team in 1989 in Alaska, a team that featured, among others, Alexander Mogilny, Sergei Fyodorov, and Pavel Bure.

Five years later, Tsyplakov left for the United States to begin a pro career with the hopes one day of playing in the NHL.

He signed with the Detroit Falcons of the Colonial League for 1992/93, and a year later he moved up to the second tier of North American hockey in the IHL, first with Indianapolis and later Fort Wayne. He produced impressive numbers with the Komets, resulting in his being drafted by the LA Kings in 1995 at the age of 26.

Despite injuries, Tsyplakov played his first NHL games in 95/96 and by the following season was a full-time player with Wayne Gretzky and the Kings. Midway through the 1997/98 season, Tsyplakov joined the fledgling Belarus hockey team for the Olympics in Nagano and helping the team qualify for the final round where they finishing a very respectable 7th.



That 97/98 season was his finest in the NHL. He scored 18 goals and finished with 52 points. He was traded to Buffalo midway through the 1999/2000 season, and after a year and a half with the Sabres he returned to Europe.

Internationally, Tsyplakov played in four World Championships in the top level and two more in Division I, but surely his finest moment came at the 2000 Worlds in St. Petersburg. Belarus defeated the home side, 1-0, and it was Tsyplakov, who scored the game's only goal. To this day, that win remains the one victory Belarus can claim over Russia at any level of play.

His other shining moment came two years later, at the 2002 Olympics, his second and last, in the quarter-finals. That Belarus team stunned Sweden, 4-3, on a late goal, eliminating the heavily-favoured Tre Kronor and eventually giving Belarus a chance for a bronze medal (they finished fourth).

In more recent years, Tsyplakov turned to coaching, mostly as an assistant at various levels. He was head coach of the U18 men's team in 2008 when Belarus placed 9th at the U18 World Championship.

Tsyplakov's legacy can be found in the careers of top Belarus players who followed him to the NHL, inspired by his successes, namely Mikhail Grabovsky and brothers Andrei and Sergei Kostitsyn. Without Tsyplakov's efforts, the others might not have had the inspiration or belief to follow their dreams both to the NHL and to their national team.

# Growing the Game

## Record number of projects approved

By Adam Steiss



**The IIHF has approved 11 Growing the Game Fund projects for the 2019/2020 season, with over 2 million CHF allocated to hockey development for the next three years.**

The IIHF Growing the Game Fund is a program aimed at financing innovative approaches to hockey development by its Member National Associations and Committees.

Each year, the IIHF invites its MNAs and Committees to submit a proposal for a project, together with a budget estimation and timeline. Special consideration will be given to projects/initiatives that demonstrate innovative strategies and realistic targets

Before a funding request is approved, the following conditions must be met:

- It must be different to projects covered by the existing development programs led by the IIHF Committees



*The IIHF Growing the Game Fund has financed numerous developments projects across the ice hockey world.*

- It must have the goal of sustainable development of ice hockey
- It must be submitted with a clear project plan including the complete budgets, the details of the financial funding and the timeframe of the project
- It should provide benefits to more than one MNA or to ice hockey in general and it must have an innovative component and the potential to create a lasting impact.

The Growing the Game Fund approved its first projects back in 2017, with a total of 195,000

CHF going to four different MNAs for development projects.

This year saw a total of 18 project plans submitted for a Growing the Game Fund application, the highest so far in the short history of the program. Successful applicants will be required to provide mid-term and end-of-year progress reports to the IIHF.

A total of 11 projects were approved for the 2020/21 season.

You can view all the latest Growing the Game Fund projects below:

### Project: Hello BeleLux



Proposed by: Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands

Objective: To create a regional manager structure in BeNeLux in order to support and implement recruitment, retention and coach education for volunteer based organizations.

Project description: Expand the **Hello Hockey platform** as a recruitment & promotion tool. The project would also develop and implement a Coach Development Toolset for volunteer based organizations through BeNeLux collaboration. Project funds would also go towards organizing a yearly Seminar "BeNeLux Hockey Day" and develop a BeNeLux Coach Clinics Framework.

### Project: Cross-ice Balkaniada 2020



Proposed by: Bulgaria

Objective: To organize and play a 3-on-3 youth Balkan tournament called Cross Ice Balkaniada.

Project description: The project proposal "BMI" brings together junior ice hockey players aged 13-14 from nine countries that are active in sport in the Balkan region – Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Serbia, Greece, Turkey and North Macedonia. The organizer will be the Bulgarian Ice Hockey Federation, with all of the Balkan Ice Hockey Federations being involved in the promotion, development, integration, facilitation and improvement of hockey level and skills. The Balkiade will run for six days, and include an 8-team tournament played alongside a series of lectures by international and domestic experts on performance, nutrition, training techniques and methodologies for coaches, sport development training for managers, and anti-doping.

#### Project: This Girl Can: Growing the Game via Female Officials



Proposed by: Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland

Objective: To support and expand the potential growth of the female game with a joint Nordic approach to recruitment and education of female game officials.

Project description: The program will cover 3 areas; recruitment, a female-specific curriculum and creating of a 'Top Class' group. The intention is to create positive awareness that a career in officiating offers a young female player. A unique female-targeted education curriculum and resources for the development of female officiating would be created, to target a female approach to personal and professional development.

In addition, a "Project Milan 2026" would be initiated for the development of top-class officials to populate the premier IIHF championship with quality officials from the participating MNAs. The project will be a joint project with other sports (football and handball) in the participating MNAs and will use best practices and instructor expertise.

#### Project: Creation of Baltic Hockey League



Proposed by: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

Objective: Create a Baltic Hockey League which will unite the best men's ice hockey clubs.

Project description: The joint project by 3 Baltic nations is to develop a platform with Baltic Hoc-

key League that will raise the standard of play for club teams and create more opportunities for international games to players from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. The project will have three primary objectives:

1. To get eight teams to participate in BHL in 2020/2021 season. Two teams will come from Estonia and Lithuania and four from Latvia.
2. To get all the games to be broadcasted in online media to create an attractive product for sponsors. Aim is to gather 100 000 stream viewers for all the games combined via online media platforms.
3. Promote ice hockey in Baltic countries.

The Baltic Hockey League would use Growing the Game Fund support to initially establish and sustain the league. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have also agreed to jointly finance the league.

#### Project: Hockey is Variety 2.0

Proposed by: Germany



Objective: New phase for "Hockey is Variety" program

Description: Another pilot project: **Hockey is Variety**, received additional funds for a new

phase. The learn to play program is specifically tailored to help integrate new German citizens, immigrants, and refugees into German society through ice hockey. The second phase would bring in other IIHF MNAs to assist with developing the program further. The DEB would organize a guidebook of best practices for MNAs seeking to implement a similar program in their countries, along with workshops on integration and a seminar on cross-cultural sensitization for ice hockey officials such as coaches and administrators.

#### Project: European U16 Women's Ice Hockey Cup

Proposed by: Hungary



Objective: Development of women's hockey in Europe and Asia with focus at the U16 level.

Description: The Hungarian Ice Hockey Federation together with 10 partner countries and 12 associate partner countries received funding from the European Union for an Erasmus+ project to organize multiple European women's championships and high performance camps between 2020-2022. Growing the Game would support the organization of the tournaments, with the EU funds focused on organizing consortiums, seminars, and workshops, along with educational material for players and coaches.

### Project: FLYING COACHES



Proposed by: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, USA

Objective: The creation of on-going education, certification, support and mentorship among participating MNAs. The purpose is to create teachers and mentors, focusing on coach development with the by-product of youth development and growth.

Description: USA Hockey to supply coaching staff to travel to three geographically challenged MNAs with a series of HDC-style camps. The ultimate goal is to leave behind a legacy of good teaching practices, leading to growth, development, player safety and strong governance. Another aspect of the project will also seek to create a goaltending program and MNA goaltending coaches.

The project will reach approximately 300 coaches and over 1,200 players across 3 MNA's and 2 camps per year. The project will unite four MNAs that previously haven't worked together, creating an on-going relationship that will flourish and continue to work together in other international projects.

### Project: Coaches International Teamwork

Proposed by: Russia Ice Hockey Federation



Objective: Creating a global Coaching Workshop as part of the World Hockey Forum.

Description: The workshop, which has previously been organized by the RIHF since 2016 but was only accessible locally, will be expanded to become a shared platform for coaches from all over the world to deepen their knowledge and share experience.

The RIHF is aiming to make it possible and affordable for the coaches from all the Member National Associations to participate in the Workshop. The idea is to implement an online streaming platform on the website and via an official app. A coach will need to register to confirm his status and have a stable internet connection to join the discussion. Moreover, the application will have a feature to communicate with each other and ask questions to speakers (some will be chosen to discuss during the Workshop).

### Project: International E-Learning platform

Proposed by: Swiss Ice Hockey Federation



Objective: To develop an educational software and provide a server platform for the processing of basic topics, storage space. The platform will offer different ice hockey stakeholders an integrated learning concept that makes optimal use of the currently available possibilities of networking via the Internet or Intranet in connection with "classical" learning methods and media..

Description: The E-Learning platform will be targeted towards players, coaches, referees, officials, and parents. It will employ Independent learning lessons support the training and shorten, respectively deepen the modular trainings and their contents. The platform above all will seek to be efficient, animating, time-saving and individualized. Each lesson has 4 learning fields according to the didactic concept, which are solved one after the other.

### Project: ASPG Plus – Growth, Education and Sustainability

Proposed by: Asia Strategic Planning Group



Objective: Dedicated Asia Men's Youth Camp planned for summer 2020 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Description: The Youth camp for boys aged 10-15 would cover Youth Development (Players and Goalies), Coach Development (Men-

tor Coach, Goalie Coach, Strength and Conditioning Coach), Officiating Development, Team Manager Development. Quota spots for the camp will be available for all 27 ASGP members (incl AUS / NZL).

### Project: Zero Risk

Proposed by: IIHF Medical Committee



Objective: The aim of this project is to develop an integrated measurement system to detect linear and rotational accelerations, impact duration and location to the head of the ice hockey player.

Description: Developing a real-time in-vivo biomechanical analysis for estimating concussion risk in ice hockey. This data is then used to calculate Concussion Probability Index (CPI) with the developed algorithm, which is using information of biomechanical tolerances of the brain tissue. CPI can be used as an objective parameter to estimate concussion risk during the game selecting the players for the medical assessment.

It is theorized that CPI could be capable of estimating concussion probability up 90% accuracy automatically using the scientific evidence.

## CC finale set

### Continental Cup to conclude in Denmark

By Martin Merk



**The IIHF Continental Cup Final will for the first time take place in Denmark. SonderjyskE Vojens was selected as host of the final tournament.**

The Continental Cup Final will take place from 10 to 12 January 2020 in Vojens in the south of Denmark. SonderjyskE was selected among the bids from the applying finalists to host the final tournament.

The hockey team is part of the multi-sports organization Sonderjysk Elitesport with several venues across Southern Jutland including Vojens for ice hockey. The club plays in the 2011-opened Fros Arena with a capacity for 5,000 spectators and recently hosted a third-round tournament of the Continental Cup.

The Nottingham Panthers (Great Britain), Neman Grodno (Belarus), SonderjyskE Vojens (Denmark) and Cracovia Krakow (Po-



*SonderjyskE will welcome Nottingham, Neman Grodno and Cracovia Krakow to Denmark for the Continental Cup Final.*

land) have qualified for the final tournament through the preliminary round and will determine the new Continental Cup winner in a four-team, three-day round-robin tournament taking place next month.

The winner of the Continental Cup will not only hoist the winners' plate but also get the chance to play in the Champions Hockey League of the 2020/2021 season pending formal approval by the CHL Board.

Neman Grodno and Cracovia Krakow advanced from Group F of the 2020 IIHF Continental Cup in Krakow, Poland. Neman was

the first team to secure advancement on after winning its first two games. The Belarusian team was joined by the host club the following night, after a dramatic shootout victory over HC Donbass.

Entering the last game of the weekend, Neman had already finished with five points, Donbass was second with four and Cracovia third with three. There were potential tie-breaking scenarios in play but for the two teams involved it was simple – win and go on, or lose and you're done. Cracovia did just that, defeating Donbass 2-1 in a shootout.

Host club SonderjyskE Vojens and 2017 champion Nottingham Panthers advanced to the IIHF Continental Cup Final – but only after a final day's action that could have seen any of the four teams progress from Group E.

After Ferencvaros, the Hungarian team that qualified from the previous round, sprang a surprise on Saturday by edging the Panthers 3-2, the group was wide open. SonderjyskE led the way with two wins from two games but could still be caught in a three-way tie with the teams from Hungary and Britain. Meanwhile, winless Amiens Gothiques had a theoretical chance if it beat Ferencvarosi on Sunday and Nottingham lost in regulation to produce a three-way tie among the bottom three.

On the final day of competition, Amiens defeated Ferencvaros 5-1. That result assured the SonderjyskE's progress but meant that Nottingham had to take something from the last game to join the Danes in the final four.

But a 4-2 win by Nottingham over the tournament hosts was a win in fact for both teams, who were thus able book their tickets to the final, and in the meantime set up a rematch as SonderjyskE is set to host the final battle for the Continental Cup's trophy plate.

## New legal initiative

### IIHF introduces legal aid program

By Adam Steiss

**Ice hockey players, coaches, team officials, and IIHF Members National Associations (MNA) appearing before an IIHF Disciplinary body will be able to request free legal support if needed.**

The decision to introduce legal aid came thanks to an initiative by the IIHF Legal Department to preserve the right to fair and equitable legal representation for all parties involved in IIHF disciplinary procedures.

Beginning in the 2019/2020 international ice hockey season, any athlete, coach or official belonging to an IIHF MNA – or an IIHF MNA itself – that is involved in an IIHF Disciplinary Board case can apply for free legal support if it is not able to afford it. This support can be for any IIHF disciplinary proceedings, including but not limited to on/off-ice infractions, doping cases, and match-fixing cases.

“This initiative demonstrates a clear commitment to fairness for athletes and all legal defendants involved in IIHF disciplinary cases,” said



*Individuals and/or MNAs involved in an IIHF Disciplinary case and are unable to cover legal fees will be eligible for support.*

IIHF President René Fasel. “Anyone that needs representation in an IIHF disciplinary case but cannot afford it will have access to experienced, professional legal support. I am proud that the IIHF is the first winter sport federation to set this up.”

For defendants that are unable to cover the costs involved, legal support can take the form of pro-bono legal counsel and/or can cover all reasonable costs related to a hearing (such as transport costs to attend the hearing.

The initiation of the program was due in part to create conditions whereby athletes can feel that their cases are being treated with a high standard of professionalism and fairness. The IIHF Pro Bono Counsel agrees to represent the party for free, within the scope of his mandate, before the Disciplinary Body of the IIHF.

“We have decided to move ahead with this program in view of the increasing number of cases where players, coaches, officials and members, due to financial reasons, are unable to secure



*From left: Dino Osmanovic, Carol Etter, Susanah Ng, and Matthew Kaiser are part of the legal team that will provide pro-bono support in IIHF disciplinary proceedings.*

proper representation in Disciplinary proceedings before the IIHF,” said IIHF Legal Director Ashley Ehlert. “We want to make sure that these individuals feel that their rights are being upheld and that they can have confidence that their legal representation is both professional, impartial, and capable of supporting their case.”

Out of a pool of candidates submitted by well-known and respected law firms in the world of sport, the IIHF Legal Department created a list containing five experienced sports lawyers which are available to represent those parties who lack financial means to defend themselves properly in IIHF Disciplinary proceedings. These lawyers have volunteered their time and are in no way affiliated with the IIHF or its Member National Associations. They may not ask the party to pay any fees or expenses, nor accept any payment or other types of financial compensation.

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## Get ready for World Juniors Magic

Previewing the 2020 IIHF World Junior Championship

By Lucas Aykroyd



If you want a snapshot of how fast time goes by and how small the hockey world is, take January 5, 2001.

Pavel Brendl of the WHL's Calgary Hitmen was the top scorer in at the 2001 World Juniors in Moscow. That's also the birthdate of budding star U.S. defenceman Cam York, who hopes to celebrate turning 19 with gold at the 2020 World Juniors.

So who'll rule the U20 scene as the Czechs host the WJC for the fourth time as an independent nation?

Heading into Ostrava and Trinec, we've come full circle. There are no more dynasties like the back-to-back Czech victories in 2000 and 2001 or the Canadian five-peat from 2005 to 2009. Figuring out what'll happen this time is about as simple as holding both Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl pointless on any given night. Still, let's take a shot.

#### GROUP A Ostrava



In Trinec, Sweden and Finland will renew hockey's classic Nordic rivalry on Day One. That



From left: Alexis Lafreniere, Moritz Seider, Yaroslav Askarov, and Cam York are among the top 2020 WJC prospects.

game at the 5,400-capacity Werk Arena could determine first place in Group A.

**FINLAND:** The Finns enter as the defending champs. Led by stud Lukko blueliner Ville Heinola, who began 2019-20 with the Winnipeg Jets, potential 2021 #1 overall NHL draft pick Aatu Raty, and speedy 19-year-old forward Rasmus Kupari, they'll be tough to dethrone.

Yet their marquee talent isn't quite on par with the 2019 winners, let alone 2016's all-stars (Sebastian Aho, Patrik Laine, etc.). Losing Anton Lundell to injury is a blow

for new head coach Raimo Helminen. The 55-year-old IIHF Hall of Famer brings invaluable know-how as a six-time Olympian.

**SWEDEN:** Swedish coach Tomas Montén wants to end a gold-medal drought, dating back to Mika Zibanejad's 2012 overtime winner against Russia in Calgary. Will the Juniorkronorna extend their record preliminary-round winning streak (now at 48 games)?

Truthfully, the Swedes would prefer playoff wins sparked by the "Terror Twins," Lucas Raymond (Frolunda) and Alexander Holtz

(Djurgarden). Their fireworks earned Sweden its first U18 world title ever in April. With NHL-experienced defenders like Rasmus Sandin and Tobias Bjornfot, the Swedes, who last medaled in 2018 (silver), will present a consistent two-way threat.

**SWITZERLAND:** Switzerland, which upset Sweden 2-0 in last year's quarter-final, will be hard-pressed to match its fourth-place finish. Coach Thierry Paterlini will need his NHL-drafted returnees from Canadian major junior hockey to overachieve.

Third-time World Junior participant Valentin Nussbaumer must improve on his three-point outing in Vancouver and Victoria. Big 19-year-old defenceman Nico Gross will tie an IIHF record with his fourth straight World Juniors.

**SLOVAKIA:** The Slovaks are a darkhorse squad, especially with no forwards back from Victoria. After totalling 18 points in 12 U18 World Championship games, forward Maxim Cajkovic (Saint John Sea Dogs) will need to contribute. Netminder Samuel Hlavaj (Sherbrooke Phoenix) sparkled with 32 saves in last year's opening 2-1 loss to the U.S.

Slovakia's 11-2 thrashing of Kazakhstan –


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the last Group A team – in 2019 provides some reassurance that they're unlikely to get relegated.

**KAZAKHSTAN:** The plucky Kazakhs, highlighted by returning forward Andrei Bu-yalski, are just dreaming of surviving again. The team became the toast of Victoria after some great goaltending performances from Demid Yeremeyev. Yeremeyev won't be around this time, so it will be up to someone else to step up to avoid relegation.

**GROUP B**  
**Trinec**



In Group B, the U.S. and Canada, who face off on Boxing Day in Ostrava, are both hungry to win gold for the first time since 2017 and 2018 respectively.

**USA:** On paper, the Americans are probably the favourites, coming off 2019's silver. They feature top Florida Panthers prospect Spencer Knight in net, plus the finesse of Cam York and power of K'Andre Miller on the blue line. Diminutive sniper Cole Caufield (pictured, on left) tied Alexander Ovechkin's single-tournament U18 goals mark (14) at the 2019 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 World Championship, and Trevor Zegras, Alex Turcotte, and others can fill the net too.

**RUSSIA:** Could goalie Yaroslav Askarov take Russia to the Promised Land for the first time since 2011?

It's a distinct possibility after the 17-year-old SKA St. Petersburg prospect's Best Goalie performance at the 2019 U18 Worlds, where the Russians came second.

Coach Valeri Bragin will lean on second-year KHLer Alexander Romanov (CSKA Moscow), whose 8 points earned him Best Defenceman honours as Russia took bronze at last year's World Juniors. Up front, the power and creativity of Vasili Podkolzin and Grigori Denisenko will be key to Russia getting back to the top of the podium in Ostrava.

**CANADA:** Canada's coach is named Hunter for the second straight year, but more is expected out of Dale Hunter, who runs the OHL's London Knights, than Tim Hunter's stunning 2019 quarter-final exit versus Finland.

Gold is attainable for this youthful squad. Not only did NHL teams loan top-flight attackers like Joe Veleno (Detroit) and Barrett Hayton (Arizona), but Alexis Lafreniere and Quinton Byfield, both vying to be the top pick in 2020, are set to strut their stuff.

Defencemen like Ty Smith and Bowen Byram

bring mobility and offensive savvy. If the goaltending holds up, the sky's the limit.

**CZECH REPUBLIC:** The host Czechs are projected to battle newly promoted Germany for the last playoff berth. What happens after that is anyone's guess. If returning goalie Lukas Dostal (Ilves Tampere) shines again, playoff aspirations will grow, and it'll get loud at Ostravar Arena.

Jan Jenik, 19, is enjoying a breakthrough OHL season (Hamilton Bulldogs), and fellow forwards Jakub Lauko (Providence Bruins) and Matej Pekar (Barrie Colts) bring the grit and persistence it'll take to generate a medal surprise.

**GERMANY:** Don't count out the Germans. Anchored by Detroit's first-round pick, defenceman Moritz Seider, and buoyed by a remarkable 17-year-old Adler Mannheim scoring star, forward Tim Stutzle, this group remains an underdog. But hard work and team defence could take new coach Tobias Abstreiter's boys further than expected.

Bottom line? This tournament happens in a heartbeat. Whether you're on the ice, in the stands, or watching at home, make sure you cherish every twist and turn at the 2020 World Juniors.



# All set for Slovakia

## 2020 IIHF Womens' U18 preview

By Andrew Podnieks



**The 13th edition of the Women's U18 World Championship is coming to Slovakia for the first time, and Bratislava is the host city.**

Having just co-hosted last year's World Championship, the Slovak capital is more than ready to welcome the women, who will be playing, like the World Juniors, over Christmas and New Year's.

Canada won gold last year, defeating their arch-rivals United States, 3-2, on a Maddi Wheeler goal in overtime, and although this will be one storyline to follow, there are several others worth noting.

With the North Americans, the other teams in Group A are Finland and Russia, the former beating the latter, 3-0, in last year's bronze-medal game in Obihiro, Japan.

Group B will consist of Switzerland, Czech Republic, Sweden, and Slovakia. The Swedes



Maddi Wheeler scoring a overtime winning goal against USA at the 2019 women's U18 gold medal game.

stunned Canada at the 2018 tournament and went on to win an historic silver medal, but last year they fell to fifth place after losing to the Finns in the quarter-finals. They had previously won four bronze medals at the WW18, and for much of the last decade their WW18 results have eclipsed their results at the senior women's level.

The Czechs have won two bronze medals (2008, 2014), but placed 7th in the last tournament and sixth the previous two. Playing in their neighbours' arena will feel a lot like home for

them, and they are expecting better results. The last time they played for a medal was in 2015, when they finished fourth.

The Swiss have rarely had a particularly strong WW18 team, but they have stayed in the top level for six years, and their ambitions are to make it seven this year. Hosts Slovakia could not have timed things any better.

They have played in Division I-A for the last three years under coach Peter Kudelka, and after two

narrow misses they earned promotion last year and quickly applied to host in 2020. Of course, they hope to leverage the home fans to stay up another year, but the competition will be fierce.

Regardless, it's impossible not to give a large advantage to the North American teams in the top pool. They have proved strong and resilient, and their development programs are so entrenched in their hockey systems that even as the European nations have improved, the North Americans have stayed further ahead. Canada's loss in 2018, though, does suggest cracks might be appearing in that domination.

While the senior Women's Worlds recently went to ten teams, the WW18 is still an eight-team event, and only one team is demoted. The last two teams in Group B play a relegation best-of-three to determine that result, while the top two teams in Group A advance directly to the semi-finals.

This is the first time the tournament will be held at this time of year. Most often it is played in the second week of January, and several earlier editions were scheduled for the first week of the New Year.

This time, however, the preliminary round will start on Boxing Day and the medal games will be played on January 2, 2020.

Robert Hadil / IIHF Images

# Austrians climb up

## Underdogs earn trip to 2021 WJC

By Chapin Landvogt



**It's not too often that a U20 World Championship tournament winner is decided by the first of three games on the last day of the tournament**

But that's exactly what happened at the 2020 IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship Division I Group A tournament winner is decided by the first of three games on the last day of the tournament

Austria successfully defeated Slovenia 4-1. And with that, a modern-day Cinderella story was completed.

It's safe to say that the international ice hockey community certainly wasn't betting on Austria making its way to the 2021 IIHF World Junior Championship. Firstly, the country had to worry more about relegation in recent years than promotion. Then there was the fact that a heavily favoured host Belarus was coming into the tournament with a plethora of players



*Austrian players celebrate after earning promotion to the World Junior Championship for the first time in ten years.*

who have either been drafted by an NHL club or seem to be a hot topic for NHL scouts - and this Team Belarus proceeded to defeat Austria 4-3 on the first day of the tournament. In addition, other opponents included Latvia and Denmark, each of whom had spent recent years playing against the world's best on the top stage.

Austria is heading to the 2021 IIHF World Junior Championship in Alberta, Canada, where the cities of Edmonton and Red Deer will host the event. It's been a long time coming for the Alp republic of Austria, as the program last participated in a WJC in 2010. Depending on

the outcome of the 2020 World Juniors in the Czech Republic, Canada may be hosting a tournament that could have a decidedly German flair to it, as no less than two of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland will be participating, if not all three.

"It's simply fantastic! We battled our way through this tournament and came in with a game plan and ready to do everything necessary to win, from game to game." said Team Austria assistant captain Benjamin Baumgartner "We saw in that first game against tournament favourite and host Belarus, that we were at the same level and the game could have gone ei-

ther way. We had the lead on three separate occasions in the first period alone, but they were able to get the job done over the course of 60 minutes."

The team's promotion was due in no small part to Baumgartner's efforts. Currently playing for HC Davos in Switzerland's National League, where he has 17 points and a +10 in just 20 contests, Baumgartner proved he's truly arriving on the international scene in a big way with five goals and 11 points in the five games played. This was good enough to be named Best Forward of the tournament.

Finishing four points behind Austria was Latvia, which in many ways basically lost out on promotion by one goal. And that's rough when that one goal difference was due to a 2-1 loss to Austria in regulation time in the team's fourth game.

This tournament was a disappointment for Belarus, which not only hosted the tournament, but also played in front of crowds of over 6,000 spectators, with that number exceeding 7,000 on the tourney's final day. Following Belarus in the rankings was Norway, and Denmark. Slovenia finished in last place with just one point in five games, and will be relegated to Division I Group B for 2021.

Vitali Harbatsiuk

## Magyars march

### Dominant performance in Kyiv

By Andy Potts



**Hungary's juniors roared to gold with a perfect performance at the 2020 IIHF Ice Hockey U20 World Championship Division I Group B in Ukraine.**

The Hungarians won all five games, with an aggregate score of 29-16, to top the group ahead of France. The host nation took bronze ahead of Poland following a 7-3 win over Estonia in the last game of the group. Italy finished bottom of the pile and is relegated to the Division IIA.

The key game arrived on Tuesday noon in Kyiv when Hungary took on France. The two nations were already out in front by that stage with a 3-0 record and both knew that victory in regulation would secure top spot. A month earlier, the teams played a warm-up game where Hungary opened a 4-0 lead but had to hold on as France battled back before losing 3-4, and the action in Kyiv followed a similar pattern.



*The Hungarians pose for a team photo after receiving their gold medals at the Division I Group B in Kyiv, Ukraine.*

Pavlo Kubanov

This time, the Magyars scored twice in the opening frame with Levente Keresztes and Marcell Revesz on target in the first 10 minutes. Zsombor Dozci extended the lead in the second period, but France once again began a fightback.

Quentin Tomasino pulled one back late in the middle session and "Les Bleuets" moved ahead on the shot count in the third but could only find one more goal through Samuel Rousseau. Once again, Hungary prevailed by a narrow margin, and this time it was enough to clinch top spot and a return to Division IA after a two-year absence.

Team head coach Marton Vas, whose international playing career came to an end after Hungary's top-level 2016 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship adventure, was full of praise for his players' attitude and performance.

"The guys were disciplined, they all worked hard," he said. "The team did not throw the puck away, they played with maturity and displayed everything good about Hungarian hockey."

"We've done the hard work and it feels good to get the results of that here."

Hungary's leading scorer was 19-year-old Natan Vertes, who had 10 (6+4) points for the tournament. Fully fit once again after missing much of the previous campaign with a broken collar bone, he's also doing well in the NAHL with 21 (14+7) points in 23 games for the Aberdeen Wings.

For France, a disappointing 2019 continues. The juniors came to Ukraine hoping for an immediate return to Division IA after relegation last season. Instead, Pierre Pousse's team had to settle for silver after defeating Poland in its final game of the tournament. This is the first time in 2008 that Hungary's U20s have finished ahead of their French counterparts.

The Poles took bronze and also had the tournaments leading scorers. Jakub Lewandowski topped the charts with 13 (5+8) points ahead of his team-mate Kamil Walega (6+5=11). Lewandowski, 19, is playing his first season in North America with the Sioux Falls Stampede of the USHL after learning the game at hometown team Sokoly Torun. Walega is already mixing it with the men in the Polish championship, where he has 11 (4+7) points from six games for GKS Jastrzebie.

# Thailand triumphs

**Thais roll, Singapore surprises in Manila**

By Andy Potts



**Thailand produced a flawless week of hockey as it powered to gold in the Southeast Asian Games in the Philippines.**

The Thais won all six of their games with an aggregate score of 75-3, sweeping all before them in this five-team tournament.

After cruising through the group stage, Thailand did not allow a goal in the playoffs, hammering Malaysia 15-0 before defeating Singapore 8-0 in the gold medal game. The Philippines, defending champion in this tournament, claimed bronze with a 17-1 success against Malaysia on Sunday afternoon at Mall of Asia rink in Pasay in the Manila region. The fifth team in the competition, Indonesia, failed to advance from the group after losing all four of its games.

Last time at the SEA Games, Thailand lost out in the final against a Philippines team taking its first steps on the international stage after becoming an IIHF affiliate in 2016.



*After cruising through the group stage, Thailand did not allow a goal in the playoffs and claimed gold vs Singapore.*

“We worked really hard since the last SEA Games to turn that loss into a win,” said defence-man Ken Kindborn, the leading scoring in this year’s tournament. “So right now I’m very proud and very happy, but also really humble.”

In 2019, teamwork made all the difference.

“We really stuck to what we have to do as a team,” Kindborn added. “Everyone knows their role and everyone bought into it 100%. We had the right chemistry in everything, from how we eat, what we do off the ice, on the ice, how

we warm up, even how we spend our time off. Everything has been amazing for the four months that we’ve been preparing for this.”

This was Thailand’s second tournament of the season. Last month the kingdom came close to progressing through the opening phase of Olympic Qualifying but lost out to Chinese Taipei in the last 70 seconds of the decisive group game in Hainan, China. Under the guidance of Finnish head coach Juhani Ijas, who also helped develop the national program in the UAE before moving to Thailand in 2016, the team will contest

its second world championship campaign later in the season. After a Division III qualifying campaign last term, Thailand goes to South Africa in April for the Division IIIB tournament.

Despite coming up short in the final, this was a great tournament for Singapore. Before the event, most expected the host nation and Thailand to dominate the conversation about the gold medal, but Singapore had other ideas. In the group phase, it pushed the Philippines all the way, eventually losing 3-5 to two goals in the last minute of a gripping encounter.

In the semi-final, Singapore got its revenge in similarly dramatic fashion. James Kodrowski scored for Singapore with 21 seconds on the clock to seal the country’s first ever victory over the Philippines 4-3 and guarantee a medal.

A bronze medal for the Philippines in the hockey tournament helped the country to top the overall medal-table in this Olympic-style multi-sport event. And success in competition was matched by a positive response to the organisation of the Games.

Kindborn summed up the efforts of the host nation: “It’s been a great tournament and the hosting has been excellent. It all worked perfectly, the hotel, the transportation. The Philippines did a really good job as host.”

Yuka Fukuma

## SA wins in Sofia

### South Africa women ahead of the pack

By Ivan Tchechankov



**South Africa won the 2020 IIHF Ice Hockey Women's World Championship Division III in a dramatic fashion.**

Before the last day of play in the Winter Palace in Sofia there was a possibility for a four-way tie for first place, but the first game on Tuesday destroyed that intriguing option.

South Africa defeated Lithuania 4-2 and finished the tournament with 12 points. And then the long and tense waiting began. In the last game of the tournament Romania (at that moment with 9 points) needed a regulation-time victory against Belgium (6 points) to take first place and get back to Division II Group B. The host team Bulgaria already won convincingly its last outing 5-0 over the team from the Chinese island of Hong Kong and relied on the same development to get the bronze medals with 8 points. But Belgium was playing for silver and had a great support from the South African team on the stands.



South Africa won the 2020 Women's World Championship Division III and will return to Division II play first time since 2013.

Romania had two power plays in a row and five seconds after the second one expired, Ana Voicu opened the scoring in the 14th minute. In the end of the period Femke Bosmans had the equalizer. The second period was decisive with three more goals for Belgium – two in a row by Lotte de Guchtenaere and one by Valentine Maka. Romania's goaltender Andrea Kurko was replaced by Nadina Niciu after allowing four goals on 10 shots, but it was too late for a comeback. In the third Romania had a 14-5 shot-on-goal advantage, but there was just one

goal – 49 second before the end, again scored by Voicu – 2-4. So South Africa won the division ahead of Belgium and Romania.

“We always knew that it would be a tough game for Romania because Belgium looked better as the days were going on. We are grateful for what was happening,” said Andre Marais, the smiling head coach of South Africa.

His team started the tournament on the wrong side – an 11-4 loss to Romania, but then was

able to turn the things around with four consecutive wins: Belgium 4-3, Hong Kong 2-1, Bulgaria 2-1, Lithuania 4-2.

South Africa didn't score a power play goal at all despite 19 chances to do so. The team was next to last in the tournament in penalty killing (72.7%) and save percentage (81.6%), on 4th place for scoring efficiency (13.5%). But they were on the top of the most important final ranking for points and earned the promotion to the Division II Group B for the 2020/2021 season.

This was South Africa's 13th showing at Women's World Championships. In the first seven years (2003-13) there were a total of 3 wins. Andre Marais took over the head coaching job in 2014 and since then the team had five third-place finishes in a row and had two wins every year except the first under him. This time South Africa was triumphant in Sofia and now the country has a top finish in each IIHF category in which it has participated.

Newcomer Lithuania, with Klara Miuller as scoring leader and best forward of the tournament and Emilie Simonsen winning the top goaltender award, moved down to fifth place on the last day with two wins from five games. South Africa's Donne van Doesburgh was named best defender. Hong Kong, China remained winless and finished last.

## CHL semis set

### 3 Swedish teams, 1 Czech in final four

By Derek O'Brien



In the Champions Hockey League quarter-finals, all three remaining Swedish teams won and all three remaining Swiss teams lost.

All that means that the final four includes three Swedish teams and one from the Czech Republic – Mountfield Hradec Kralove.

#### **Frolunda Gothenburg def. EHC Biel-Bienne 7-6 OT (2-3, 4-3, 1-0)**

It seems that Frolunda always finds a way. In the round of 16, the three-time CHL champion equalled a record by overcoming a five-goal deficit on aggregate to beat Farjestad Karlstad. This time, it was a three-goal deficit in the first game on home ice before battling back to make it a more manageable one-goal deficit heading into the second game in Switzerland.

In a wild, back-and-forth game, Frolunda scored twice late in regulation time to win 4-3 in 60 minutes and tie the aggregate score to force



*Frolunda Gothenburg will aim to reach its fifth CHL Final in the six-year history of the Champions Hockey League.*

overtime. On the power play in the extra period, Patrik Carlsson's shot through a screen beat Jonas Hiller for the winning goal.

#### **Lulea Hockey def. Lausanne HC 7-3 (2-1, 5-2)**

After earning a 2-1 win in Lausanne in the first game, Lulea returned home needing only a draw to advance and did better than that, earning a three-goal win to advance to the semi-finals for the first time since that 2014/15 season. Robin Kovacs scored two goals in the first game and Noel Gunler accomplished that same feat in the second.

#### **Djurgarden Stockholm def. Red Bull Munich 8-1 (5-1, 3-0)**

After a decisive win for Djurgarden in the first game, Red Bull Munich faced an uphill climb on home ice. Indeed, after a scoreless first period, Djurgarden won for the second game in a row to win convincingly and finish off the last German team standing – and last year's finalist.

This is the furthest that Djurgarden has ever gone in the CHL, although the team is no stranger to success on the international stage, winning the IIHF European Cup in back-to-back years in 1990/91 and 1991/92.

#### **Mountfield Hradec Kralove def. EV Zug 5-1 (1-1, 4-0)**

In the only quarter-final not to involve a Swedish team, Mountfield and Zug opened with a 1-1 tie in Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic. That set up a return game where Zug dominated the opening period but couldn't beat former NHL goaltender Marek Mazanec, who would go on to record 28 saves for the shutout in this game. Mazanec has now surrendered only two goals in four CHL playoff games as Mountfield scored three times in the second period, eventually winning the game 4-0.

In addition to being the only non-Swedish team left, Mountfield is also the only team left that has never won a European club championship.

#### **Semi-final matchups:**

Lulea Hockey (SWE) vs  
Frolunda Gothenburg (SWE)

Djurgarden Stockholm (SWE) vs  
Mountfield Hradec Kralove (CZE)

The semi-finals will be played over two legs – first games are scheduled for 7/8 January and the return games, a week later, on 14/15 January – with each team playing one game at home.

## Gallery



Austrian forward Maximillian Rebernig scores a goal against Slovenia to help the Austrians win promotion at the 2021 World Juniors.



A Neman Grodno player winds up for a slapshot at the Continental Cup Group F.



Nottingham Panthers and SonderjyskE both reached the Continental Cup final.

## Gallery



During the off-day of the 2020 IIHF Women's World Championship Division III in Sofia, the Bulgarian Ice Hockey Federation and the Mayor of Sofia organized a 3-on-3 "Winter Classic World Cup" with the participating teams from Belgium, South Africa, Lithuania and Bulgaria.



Belarus played to some big home crowds in Minsk at the 2020 U20 Division I Group A.



A Danish player hip checks an Austrian forward at the U20 Division IA championship.

Vitali Harbatsiuk

Vitali Harbatsiuk

## The Golden Years

### Looking back at the Czechs' U20 triumphs

By Andrew Podnieks

**The Czech Republic, as Bohemia, was one of the founding nations of the IIHF in 1908, and the senior men's team has won many medals in international hockey in the ensuing 111 years.**

But, shockingly, the Czechs have won only three medals at the World Junior Championship since claiming independence in 1994—back-to-back gold medals in 2000 and 2001, and a bronze in 2005.

Those two gold medals came during the Czechs' greatest period of domination. They won gold at the senior men's Worlds in 1999, 2000, and 2001, and that after winning Olympic gold in 1998.

In the 43 years of the World Juniors a nation has won senior and junior gold in the same year only 12 times. The Soviets did it five times (1978, 1979, 1983, 1986, 1989), Canada four times (1994, 1997, 2007, 2015), and the Finns just last year.



*The Czech Republic won the gold medal with a 1-0 shootout victory over Russia at the 2000 World Juniors in Sweden.*

Both Czech victories were coached by Jaroslav Holik, but, interestingly, only two players were on both teams—Michal Sivek, and Václav Nedorost (goalie Tomas Duba was technically on both teams but didn't play in 2000).

These wins also came during the “dead-puck era,” when goals were hard to come by. Indeed, the Czechs won gold in 2000 with a

1-0 win over Russia in a shootout (the only 0-0 gold-medal game in U20 history to be decided by shots), and a year later they defeated Finland, 2-1.

The 2000 team started the tournament with a solid 5-2 win over rivals Slovakia but then had to fight back with a third-period goal to tie the United States, 2-2, in their second game.

Against Canada, they rallied for a 1-1 tie, and they closed out the round-robin preliminary round with an impressive 4-2 win over Finland.

Their quarter-finals match against Kazakhstan was interesting, to say the least. The Czechs built an impressive 4-0 lead through 26 minutes and looked to be on their way to an easy win, but the Kazakhs rattled off three goals in three and a half minutes to make it 4-3. The Czechs maintained their composure to win, 6-3, but it was an uncomfortable game.

They had no such lapse in their semi-finals game against the United States, taking a 3-0 lead into the third period and winning, 4-1, to advance to the final game of the tournament against Russia.

In that game both Ilya Bryzgalov and Zdenek Smid were perfect through 60 minutes of regulation and 20 minutes of sudden-death overtime. In the penalty-shot shootout, Evgeni Muratov (RUS) and Libor Pivko (CZE) scored early, and Milan Kraft scored the winning goal in the third round to give the Czechs their first ever gold medal at the U20.

Milan Kraft led the team with 12 points (five goals, seven assists) and was named Best Forward. Some of his better-known teammates to go on to excellent pro careers in-


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cluded Petr Svoboda, Martin Havlat, and Josef Vasicek.

A year later, coach Holik was back with an entirely different roster, but he managed to create the same golden result. In fact, the Czechs started the preliminary round in even more impressive fashion, winning all four games by a cumulative score of 20-4. Along the way they edged Sweden, 2-1, thanks to a Martin Erat goal to break a 1-1 tie with only 3:09 remaining in the third. They crushed Kazakhstan, 9-1, and then skated to an efficient 4-2 win over the U.S. Their final game was an easy 5-0 win over Slovakia, Tomas Duba recording the shutout by stopping just 16 shots.

The playoffs were a different story. The Czechs faced Switzerland in the quarter-finals and were in a much tougher battle than they might reasonably have expected. Although they jumped into an early 1-0 lead, the Swiss tied it before the end of the first period and twice led in the second. They were ahead 3-2 going into the third but the Czechs tied the score early and went ahead for good three minutes later, winning 4-3 and moving on to the semi-finals to face Sweden.

Zdenek Blatny scored on the power play for the Czechs midway through the open-



*The Czech Republic won the gold medal for the second consecutive year with a 2-1 victory over Finland in Moscow.*

ing period of that penultimate game, but the team ran into penalty trouble for much of the contest. Blatny's goal held up thanks to the goaltending of Duba, who stopped all 29 shots for the winning shutout.

Duba was again sharp in the gold-medal game against Finland, and this time his team scored twice in the first 23 minutes and killed off all five Finnish power plays, winning 2-1 and claiming a second straight gold. Pavel Brendl led the tournament in as-

sists (6) and points (10) and was named IIHF Directorate Best Forward.

And then, just like that, the mini-dynasty was over. Holik led his team to 7th place and 6th place finishes the next two years and was then replaced, and the team hasn't come particularly close to gold since. But they are hosting the world's best juniors for the first time in 12 years, and perhaps hometown fan support will give them the inspiration they need to reach the podium again.



# Coming up

**2019 IIHF WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP**  
CZECH REPUBLIC, Ostrava & Trinec  
26.12.2019 - 05.01.2020

**2019 IIHF U20 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP Division III**  
BULGARIA, Sofia 13.01.2020 - 19.01.2020

**2019 IIHF U18 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP**  
SLOVAKIA, Bratislava 26.12.2019 - 02.01.2020

**2019 IIHF U18 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP Division I Group A**  
GERMANY, Fussen 03.01.2020 - 09.01.2020

**2019 IIHF U18 WOMEN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP Division I Group B**  
POLAND, Katowice 02.01.2020 - 08.01.2020

**2020 YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES**  
SWITZERLAND, Lausanne 09.01. - 22.01.2020

[Click here for 2019/20 IIHF tournament list](#)

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