

## Canada Hosts World Championships for the First Time, See Huge Crowds

Written by Peter Morrison  
Tuesday, 06 May 2008 12:26

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*The following is by the newest member of the Business of Sports Network, Peter Morrison. Peter is a former correspondent for ESPN Soccernet, writing about the Czech National Team and has also written for Eurohockey.net. Please welcome Peter. -- **Maury Brown**, Founder and President, Business of Sports Network*

Despite winning the World Ice Hockey Championships more than any other country in history, Canada had never served as host of the annual event until this year. Of course, one of the major reasons the 24 time champions have never hosted the tournament is the relatively low profile the event carries. Since it clashes with the Stanley Cup playoffs, the majority of star players are still with their NHL clubs and therefore unable to represent their home countries.

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The lack of stars in the World Championships has relegated the tournament to an event largely ignored in North America and has meant that it is largely contested by players from European based clubs, leading some to refer to the tournament as "The European Championships."

Though the Canadians have won the event more than any other nation, the majority of these victories came in the first half of the 20th century, and from 1962 until the turn of the century, [they lifted the trophy only two times, in 1994 and 1997](#).

However, the Canadians have seen better luck in recent times winning the event 3 out of the last five years. But despite this success, the tournament has remained a European based event, rotated between the major powers on that continent. While even minor hockey playing nations such as Latvia, Norway, and Austria have held the World Championships, Canada had never hosted, while the USA has not held the tournament since 1962.

However, with 2008 marking the centennial year of the founding of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), the governing body decided to [award this year's tournament to the founding nation of the game](#), meaning a very different feel to this year's event including the smaller playing surface of North America, but also and more importantly bigger crowds.

If there was any thoughts that the Canadian fans would stay away from this event in favor of the stars in the Stanley Cup playoffs, those fears were quickly put to rest during the tournament's first round. Through the first 12 games, average attendance has been 8,573 at matches held at the Colisee Pepsi in Quebec City and the Metro Centre in Halifax.

The huge crowds have led to talk of breaking the record number of spectators for this event, set in 2004 when the Czech Republic was host. Canada already [holds record attendance marks for the World Junior Championships and the World Women's Championship](#).

Though surpassing the record mark of 552,097 spectators for 56 games would mean the 15,399 capacity Colisee Pepsi and 10,595 seat Metro Centre would need to see a big increase

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in ticket sales, the large crowds are a welcome addition to the relatively small attendances typically seen in European host cities.

To compare, the first round of last year's tournament in Moscow and Mytishchi, Russia saw only two games with an attendance which surpassed the 8,573 average seen in Canada. Both of these games featured the host nation, while the third opening round match for Russia against the Ukraine attracted only 6,620 spectators. Even the lowest attended match in Canada so far; a game between minnows Italy and Denmark was watched by 6,838 fans. Similar games between minor nations saw approximately 2,000- 4,000 spectators attend during the 2007 Russia tournament, with [a low of 1,900 for a match between Austria and the USA](#) .

While the increase in spectators has been a pleasant surprise, it does not appear that this will mean more World Championships for North America in the near future. The 2009 event will be held in Switzerland, with Germany, Slovakia, Finland, and Sweden hosting in the following years.

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**Peter Morrison** is a staff member for the [Business of Sports Network](#) , which includes [The Biz of Baseball](#)

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