



Gavin McIntosh (right) holds the puck he caught as he poses with fellow Canuck fan Gabriel Becher Friday in Buffalo. DON HEUPEL — AP

Toronto-based Vancouverites invade Buffalo

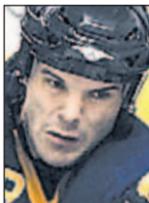
LEAF-FREE ZONE: Road trip a much better way to see the Canucks

BY ADAM ELLIOTT SEGAL
SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE

Trying to get an inexpensive ticket to see your favourite road team play at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto is like getting front row seats to a Madonna concert, and then having drinks, dinner and a nightcap with the chanteuse after the show.

It ain't gonna happen.

"It was a cool atmosphere. [The Canucks fans] got the Buffalo fans into the game."



— Paul Gaustad, Sabres forward

So what's a Canuck fan living in T.O. going to do? Shuffle off to Buffalo, of course.

Take 42 men, four brave girlfriends, book a chartered bus, buy some beer and some face-paint, and you've got yourself a recipe for fun — West Coast style.

It was gaggle of fans — all under

30 — attempting to recapture their youth in one glorious night. Barely out of diapers in 1982, and still pulling up their gym socks in '94, they now seek their fortunes east of the Rockies. One thing, however, still binds them together: the Vancouver Canucks.

These freewheeling fans, organized by Dave Stuart, dedicate one road game a year to seeing the Canucks play. Last year's inaugural trip took the same crew to Long Island, where the Canuck faithful — the East Coast version — witnessed an 8-1 Vancouver drubbing of the Islanders.

Stuart, a financial analyst in Toronto, says, "The new schedule, for a Canucks fan, is not a good one. [So] it was relatively easy to convince people to come" on the road trip this year, though he humbly omits the time and effort it takes him to research bus companies, hotels and group sales.

Stuart laments the 10 p.m. Eastern start times for games in Vancouver, but says with such a great community of supporters that he enjoys being a Canucks fan in Toronto, despite having to listen to Leaf chatter 24/7.

So, after scrutinizing the schedule



Vancouver fans cheer after the Canucks score against the Sabres in Buffalo Friday. A bus load of 46 Toronto-based Canuck fans made the trip across the border to see Vancouver lose 4-3 in a shootout. DON HEUPEL — AP

in the summer, Stuart and Co. decided that Toronto's prices, Montreal's distance, and Ottawa's excessively rowdy fans made Buffalo a no-brainer.

For \$100.50 Cdn each, the Canuck faithful sat in the third row behind the Canucks bench at Friday night's game.

GM Place is the third most expensive rink in the league, according to the Sports Business News FCI rating, which takes into account tickets, drinks, food and parking for an entire family.

For the same price as a hometown ticket, fans can hit the road on a much needed break from the work-a-day grind, drive two hours across the border to Buffalo for dinner (wings, of course), drinks (mmmm, watery U.S. beer), and the game (a thrilling 4-3 shootout loss), and be home the next day, all for the same price as Golds in the ACC or Plaza level at GM Place.

So the question begged: do fans on the road really affect the team?

When asked about the game Friday night, Paul Gaustad, the Sabres

forward who scored Buffalo's second goal said, "It was a cool atmosphere. [The Canucks fans] got the Buffalo fans into the game."

Markus Naslund echoed everyone's thoughts at the end of this four-game eastern expedition. "It ... shows that people want the Western teams to come east and vice versa. It's too bad the schedule is the way it is."

Stuart is already eyeing a trip to Florida next year.

If I was Todd Bertuzzi, I'd call in sick.