



THIS WEEK'S GAMES

WEDNESDAY: All-star game at Dallas, 5 p.m.

On the air: CBC TV, TEAM 1040 AM

The skinny: Roberto Luongo, the starting goalie for the West, is the only Canuck taking part. It's his second all-star game, making him a grizzled veteran. Of the 42 players selected, 20 are making their first appearance, led by top vote-getter Sydney Crosby. Another 11 make just their second appearance, marking a changing of the guard as a new generation moves in. Of the dwindling old guard — only eight have played in three or more previous all-star games — Joe Sakic leads the way, making his 12th appearance.

THURSDAY: vs. LOS ANGELES, 7 p.m., GM Place

On air: Sportsnet, TEAM 1040

The skinny: First Todd Bertuzzi didn't show up with Florida, now Dan Cloutier will be missing (hip surgery) for what would have been his first return to GM Place. Not that Los Angeles will miss him — Cloutier is last (39th) in the NHL in goals against and save percentage. Marc Crawford, unless his hair breaks or something, will be behind the bench as the struggling Kings make their first visit. It's the first of four encounters between the West Coast clubs. Barely missing the playoffs with Vancouver last season must be looking good to Crawford at this point, as L.A. clings to last place in the conference. — *Gordon McIntyre*

Diary of a wild road trip

Nothing like a good old fashioned road trip. Here's what happened when a group of Canuck fans hit Buffalo's HSBC Arena Friday night:

Pregame

3:27 p.m. Downtown Toronto. A swarm of Canuck jerseys slowly gathers on Front Street. The Hockey Hall of Fame looms behind us as we file on to the bus. A promotional rep offers us two cases of Red Bull. As if we need it.

4:00: Our departure hits some snags. One late arrival, one forgotten passport, and one beer pickup. Bemused urbanites shake their heads as four vintage Canuck jerseys go bounding through the streets with flats of Kokanee.

5:00: We finally hit the 401. Traffic is a nightmare.

5:15: Several shirts come off and the music cranks up a notch. The bus is beginning to resemble a nightclub in Ibiza.

5:30: With the revelers desperate for some fresh air, the emergency roof hatch flies open. Several curious Canuckleheads stretch their necks out the hatch. This will prove ominous shortly.

6:45: With the bus going 100 km/h, the hatch slams shut on a fan's head, cutting the back of the skull. The bus pulls over. A doctor, with his shirt off and face painted, is administering first-aid with a Canucks towel. An executive decision is made, and we detour to a hospital in Grimsby, Ont., seven km away.

7:30: The bus hits the road, minus three members, who remain in the emergency room for the evening.

7:45: We will definitely miss the puck-drop. Everyone is disappointed, but confident we made the right decision. It is noted, somewhat ironically, that Kevin Bieksa was born in Grimsby.

8:00: We sing *O Canada* on the bus.

8:15: Crossing the border is like your girlfriend asking you if she looks fat in that dress. There is no right answer. So we hold up our passports like choirboys for the border guard, and cheer her departure like she is the Patron Saint of Good Karma.

8:20: I imagined cruising into Buffalo, sun setting over Niagara Falls. But the city is how it always is in January — cold, dark and windy.

The game

8:30: We enter the arena with only nine minutes gone in the first period, 1-0 Sabres. Several of the strange items we are showcasing: oversized gold sunglasses, a fake beard, and a sign that says "Luongo Can't Go Wrong-O."

8:45: The chanting begins. First, a call and response number. Rober-to! Lu-on-go! Rober-to! Lu-on-go! Next, surprise starter Dany Sabourin. Sa-bou-rin! Sa-bou-rin!

This cheering will continue, without reprieve, for the next two periods. We wave official Canuck towels, courtesy of the team.

9:05: Intermission. HSBC Arena is quite nice. They have a spacious, open concourse. Prices are reasonable. The best thing going for us: We are not Leafs fans.

9:16: Second period underway, and Pyatt scores! 1-1. We erupt. Go Canucks Go! Go Canucks Go!

9:17: Security gives us our first stern talking-to.

9:20: A puck flies in our direction. Bam! One of our guys grabs it. We got a puck! We got a puck!

9:21: Our second security conference.

9:23: Vigneault, in his Vigneaultian way, is laughing at us.

9:40: Bulis shorthanded on a breakaway ... scores! 2-1. Canuck zealots are going ballistic. Bulis! Bulis! As he exits through the tunnel at intermission, I'm sure I notice a Czech-toothed smile aimed in our direction.

10:05: Third period. Cooke is stopped on a breakaway, Buffalo flies down the ice and Gaustad puts in a rebound. 2-2. The Sabres' fans explode. This building is very loud when it wants to be.

10:14: The boys have painted B-I-E-K-S-E-L-E-N-T on their chests.

10:18: Bieksa ... off the end-boards ... Naslund scores! 3-2. It would be an understatement to say Section 106 is a Gong Show.

10:19: Spilled beer tally: four. Man-hug tally: a whopping 17.

10:28: Sabourin makes an amazing glove save. He's having a fantastic game. We have a backup! We have a backup!

10:43: 40 seconds to go, and Buffalo pulls the goalie. Three deflections ... and Drury scores to make it 3-3. Ouch. Overtime.

10:50: Going to a shootout. The energy in the building is at its apex. Sabourin's first save against Briere will later make ESPN SportsCenter. Naslund has a chance to win, but misses. Kotalik seals the deal for the Sabres. 4-3 final.

Postgame

11:00: Luongo is pleasantly surprised to see this many Canuck supporters in Buffalo, appreciating how the fans cheered their way through the lineup. "Every player got a turn. It was fun." Sabourin, the second star, says he has felt "mentally better" lately. It showed. And he did hear his name being chanted in the third.

11:30: We hit the Buffalo nightlife. Champagne sprays in the air. We get another stern warning.

Injury report

The guy who spent the night in Grimsby is out 7-10 days with a concussion. — *Segal*