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DVDs delight with international hockey history

By Lucas Aykroyd



Relive Wayne Gretzky's 21-point performance in the 1987 Canada Cup on DVD

One of the great things about being a hockey fan in the new millennium is that you don't have to rely on memory and oral recountings nearly as much to revisit the great games of the past. Apart from having a few beers with your grandfather, there aren't too many ways to visualize, say, Howie Morenz's wizardry in Montreal's 1930 sweep of the Stanley Cup finals or Vsevolod Bobrov's first-ever game with the USSR national team in 1954 at the surprisingly advanced age of 31.

But in the Television Age, the emergence of DVD technology has made it possible to enjoy some of our favorite international tilts all over again, in some cases with quality comparable to the original broadcasts.

2006 marks the 30th anniversary of the inaugural Canada Cup, and a new four-DVD set from VSC/Music Video Distributors commemorates that historic tournament. Co-sponsored by Hockey Canada and the Hockey Hall of Fame, this production includes six games involving Canada. Only missing is the opening 11-2 win over Finland, since the archived video footage of that one had deteriorated too much to be restored. And yes, the images here are a little grainy overall: a humorous introductory note advises viewers not to adjust their TV sets,



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since this is "thirty years old for crying out loud!"

Yet the hockey itself exceeds expectations: wide-open, improvisational, and free-flowing. Canadians, of course, will marvel at the talents of their championship-winning squad, which boasted such all-time legends as Phil Esposito, Bobby Hull, and Guy Lafleur up front, with Bobby Orr, Denis Potvin, and Larry Robinson anchoring the defense. But Czech and Slovak fans will also relish the clutch performances by forward Milan Novy and goalie Vladimir Dzurilla in Czechoslovakia's classic 1-0 round-robin win over the host team. And interspersed in between the play-by-play commentary of CTV's Bernie Pascall (father of current Team Canada media relations director Brad Pascall), there are frequent out-of-town highlights such as, say, a spectacular scoring play featuring the USSR's Viktor Zhlukov, Boris Alexandrov, and Vladimir Vikulov versus the USA at the Philadelphia Spectrum.

When you factor in a miniature replica of the original Canada Cup program, two different tournament documentaries in English and French, and a retrospective interview with winning goal-scorer Darryl Sittler, among other bonus features, this package is a must-buy for international hockey completists.

Equally essential is Morningstar Entertainment's *Blade Wars*, which includes all three games from the 1987 Canada Cup finals. Again, this showcases a Canadian victory, but here, it doesn't matter what nation you cheer for. The speed, skill and passion of the hosts and their Soviet rivals still remains a benchmark for what hockey should be. The picture and sound are crystal clear.

You may have seen Mario Lemieux's famous winning goal set up by Wayne Gretzky, but it's worth reacquainting yourself with the warp speed finesse of the USSR's KLM Line. Wingers Sergei Makarov and Vladimir Krutov steal the show numerous times, such as on a shorthanded Makarov breakaway goal in Game One that rivals the best of Pavel Bure and Alexander Ovechkin, or on a Krutov wrister that absolutely freezes Canadian goalie Grant Fuhr in Game Two.

There are no DVD extras with *Blade Wars*, but while having some would be nice, complaining about the lack is like asking for a second dessert after finishing a seven-course gourmet dinner.

For fans of other nations or those who don't have six hours to spare, Morningstar Entertainment also offers an excellent Canada Cup '87 Highlights DVD, covering virtually all the games.

There's one available for 1991 as well, but that tournament was not nearly as classic, and here, the voice-over narration becomes rather overwrought at times, claiming a Canadian victory was needed to lift the nation's spirits after sprinter Ben Johnson's disqualification for steroids from the Seoul Olympics and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's failed attempt at constitutional reform with the 1990 Meech Lake Accord. (Let's just say the malaise wasn't quite as great as in the USA circa 1980.)

You can order the 1976 Canada Cup DVD set through either of the

following links:

<http://www.videoservicecorp.com/>

<http://mvdb2b.com/>

For the 1987 and 1991 titles, search for "Blade Wars" on:

<http://amazon.ca>

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