

Stratford scores Hockey Day in Canada

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Stratford shoots, Stratford scores!

Stratford will host the 2010 Tim Hortons Hockey Day in Canada Jan. 30.

The announcement was made Tuesday night during the first intermission of Game 3 of the Stanley Cup final between the Detroit Red Wings and Pittsburgh Penguins, broadcast on CBC.

"The viewer audience will be outstanding and it will give us an opportunity to showcase our community and to celebrate what makes Stratford a great city not only to live in and come see theatre but also to enjoy quality of life and to invest in," Mayor Dan Mathieson, co-chair of the bid committee, said yesterday.

"From an economic standpoint it will be huge. From an exposure standpoint about our community it is very significant. And from an opportunity to bring the community together and celebrate, it is just incredible," he said in an interview.

Stratford was one of three finalists. The others were Kirkland Lake and Kenora, according to stories in their local newspapers.

Leading up to the day of wall-to-wall hockey there will be a week of festivities planned, including an NHL alumni game.

Mayor Mathieson said both local school boards have been approached about getting Stratford students involved. Clinics for minor hockey players are also being planned for that week.

The idea is to hold as inclusive an event as possible, he said.

Hockey Day in Canada features a triple-header of games between Canada's six NHL teams.

The broadcast will begin at noon with host Ron MacLean at the William Allman Memorial Arena for 13 1/2 hours of air time paying tribute to Canada's game, alongside colourful Don Cherry of Coach's Corner.

Four Stratford hockey organizations will get a chance to be showcased at the Allman arena: Stratford Rotary house league, Stratford Minor Hockey Association, Stratford Girls Hockey and the Stratford Cullitons Junior B team.

"Stratford will provide a beautiful backdrop for our 10th edition of Tim Horton Hockey Day in Canada," said Joel Darling, director of production for CBC Sports. "Stratford's history of hockey and their vibrant community will help celebrate what has become a Canadian tradition over the past decade."

Stratford has a rich hockey history.

The legendary Stratford Streak, Howie Morenz, voted the greatest player of the first half of the 20th century, suited up here before starring for the Montreal Canadiens.

Current NHLers Chris Pronger and Rob Blake got their start playing for the Stratford Cullitons Junior B team. So did Ed Olczyk, Garth Snow, Bryan Smolinski and Tim Taylor.

Mr. Taylor, who won Stanley Cups with the Detroit Red Wings (1997) and Tampa Bay Lightning (2004), was the other co-chair of the bid committee.

"Playing in the NHL you saw every day the impact and influence that small towns like Stratford have on the greatest game in the world," he said. "It's just great that Stratford has been chosen because it is places like this where the game's roots are deepest."

Although the CBC does not reveal the number, approximately 30 communities bid to host Hockey Day in Canada. Mayor Mathieson said that Stratford's bid was successful for a variety of reasons.

"Not only is it a great hockey town with a great history, we've got a great old building, the river drive, the stage of the Festival Theatre and Tom Patterson for ancillary events, the Rotary Complex for the banquet and dance Friday night.

"They (CBC) were impressed we had the space to hold multiple events."

Local hockey groups were asked for a letter supporting the bid but were kept in the dark as to how the bid was proceeding until just before last night's announcement.

Several of them, along with the city committee which has been working on the bid, met at Boston Pizza last night to celebrate the announcement.

Traditionally, a broadcast of the "The National" news with Peter Mansbridge has been part of Hockey Day in Canada. This time, the CBC anchor and Stratford resident could do the news from his living room.

Campbellton, N.B., hosted Hockey Day in Canada last year.