

OFFSIDER

The National Hockey League's 44th annual All-Star game was held this past weekend at the Montreal Forum. The game featured the best players from the Campbell Conference against the best from the Prince of Wales Conference. The game itself was the conclusion of a weekend of fun and festivities for the players and fans alike.

The weekend started with the skills competition; every player who has been chosen to represent his team has the chance to compete in the skills competition. Washington Capitals' defenseman Al Iafate had the hardest shot; Iafate's blast was clocked at 170 kilometres per hour. Mike Gartner, who was selected to replace fellow New York Ranger Mark Messier, was the fastest skater.

The game is often criticized for being an offensive battle instead of a hockey game. Because the game alters nothing in the standings and exists only as a weekend break, no player wants to get hurt. All players tend to give up on defense and leave their goalies alone. Critics of the game are attempting to change both the selection format and the nature of the game. The game is usually carried on an American television network, but it does not put forth a good exhibition of hockey.

This year's match was no different than the past blowouts. Although he could not play because of his radiation treatments, Pittsburgh Penguins' superstar Mario Lemieux was in attendance and was the only player to receive a standing ovation during the player introductions. Lemieux received his jersey and watched the game from the press box.

After one period of play, the Wales Conference had taken a 6-0 lead. Wales' starting goaltender Patrick Roy stopped the Campbell Conference's eleven shots for the shut-out period. Mike Gartner led Wales offence with his three goal, one assist contribution. Gartner's second goal of the game was the best--Campbell goaltender Ed Belfour left his net to play the angle on Gartner's chance and lost the puck through his legs. Gartner scored into the empty net.

Wales' second period goaltender Peter Sidorkiewicz played a better game than anyone thought he would. Sidorkiewicz's inclusion to

the Wales Conference roster was contested and argued because he was chosen over his better peers. Sidorkiewicz, of the Ottawa Senators, allowed two goals on sixteen shots. He made some great saves, including one on Los Angeles' Luc Robitaille's breakaway and the subsequent rebounds. Maybe it ought not surprise anyone that Sidorkiewicz was able to hold his own in the defenceless shootout--he does play for Ottawa which means that he usually plays with no defense.

The Wales Conference started the third period with a 12-2 lead. The Campbells scored four times in the third but could not catch up to the power of the Wales. Three of the Campbells' goals came from talented European rookies Teemu Selanne and Pavel Bure; Selanne scored once and Bure, twice. The final score was 16-6 for the Wales Conference. Mike Gartner scored four goals; New York Islander representative Pierre Turgeon had three.

Gartner was named the player of the game and received a new car and a statue. Gartner kissed the car as it was presented to him; he was there to have fun. Each player on the winning Wales Conference received a new set of golf clubs.

St. Louis winger Brett Hull decided to play the game without his helmet. Hull correctly assumed that the game would not be dangerous. Ottawa defenseman Brad Marsh was the veteran selection of the Wales roster; Marsh scored a goal in the third period. He was the happiest goalscorer at the game. The linesman congratulated him and the audience applauded him more loudly than it did any other goal.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman is waiting for the American television ratings before he decides whether or not changes have to be made to the All-Star game. Next year's match will be played at the Madison Square Garden, home of the New York Rangers.

The hockey Panthers played their final two regular-season home games this past weekend against the University of New Brunswick Red Devils. Local media was referring to the two games as a "preview of the playoffs" because the Panthers will be meeting the Red Devils in the first round of the playoffs. It is important to note that a team's hockey changes for post-

season play; most teams play more strategic hockey in the post-season because winning then is a necessity.

Saturday night's game was the Panther lament for Greg Webber; it was their first game since Webber had taken his leave from the team. The Red Devils seemed to control the game right from the opening face-off; their impressive on-ice organization forced the Panthers into paying attention to a facet of their game which had been missing: man-to-man coverage, especially in the defensive zone. The Panthers were unable to catch up to the Red Devils' impressive start; the fast skating Red Devils took advantage of the slower Panthers to win 8-4. Panther forward Jeff Gallant and Red Devil Jamie Colvin were awarded five-minute fighting majors and game misconducts for their altercation near the middle of the third period. UNB defenseman Kelly Reed was the player of the game with four assists and a strong third period.

Sunday afternoon the Panthers corrected some of their mistakes from the night before. Once again, UNB got off to a quick start, but the Panthers were able to work through it and win the game 7-5. The Panthers played a better game in their own zone, but still took stupid penalties during the game. Four players, two from each team, were ejected from the game in the third period for fighting. The Panthers lost John Nelson and Max Mazur for the rest of the game. Nelson will miss the Panthers' next game, and Mazur, the final two of the season. The Red Devils lost Bryan Wilson for one game and Ken Murchison for two. Panther rookie Jason Denomme has regained his scoring touch; he scored the winner, his second of the game, at 16:04 of the third and Cory Power added the short-handed empty-netter at 19:42 to cap the Panther win.

It really is too bad that not very many UPEI students attended the Panther games this season. Lack of fan support is always a factor contributing to a team's success or failure. It is certain that more people will show up for the playoff games, but support is needed well before a team makes the playoffs. Remember this for next year. ●