

# The Border Report

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## Globetrotting hockey team headed to Helsinki

By Matthew McCully  
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A group of hockey buddies from the Townships are preparing for their third trip abroad to play in the Hot Shots Helsinki Recreational tournament against a number of other international teams.

"We're ready to go," said team captain Stéphane Laplume.

The team, comprised of players mainly from the Mansonville, Magog and Stanstead area, are registered in the over-30 category. There are ten players (two lines), plus one goalie, with ages ranging from 30 to 49.

At the heart of the team, according to Laplume, is a 'bunch of buddies' that have been playing together for years, some since elementary school. Over the years, the occasional new player has joined in when there was a space to fill, but the core group has stayed together.

"We never have trouble finding guys to join in."

They got involved in international recreational play thanks to goalie J.P. Nittolo. He suggested they participate in a tournament in Las Vegas three years ago through the CANAM organization.



DANIEL GIROUX

Front row: Left to right, Eric Harton, Jeremiah Beaulne, Stéphane Laplume (Captain), Ghyslaine Daigle (assistant), Étienne Rainville, Daniel Giroux (assistant). Back row: Left to right, Jeremy Bedard-Jonathan-Robitaille, Pascal Rainville, Mike Cyr. Missing players that could not be there, Gaetan Rouleau, Luc Demanche and goalie and proud sponsor Jean-Pierre Nittolo that makes this all possible year after year. Nittolo is the owner of Wickham Hardwood Flooring near Drummondville.



"It's pretty much because of him (Nittolo) that we started playing in these tournaments," he said, adding "He's the big heart of the team."

Nittolo's company, Wickham Hardwood Flooring, is the team's sponsor for the trip to Finland, covering the \$2,000 registration fee and new jerseys, bags, jackets, hats and other gear.

"Other teams are impressed with how organized we are,"

Laplume said, when they take the ice to play against local teams.

They made it to the finals in Vegas, and made friends and contacts that led them to another tournament last year in Prague, where they made it to the semi-finals.

Laplume mentioned that most of the guys on the team travel quite a bit on their own for business. A few of the players had not ventured far from home, but after two successful trips, are rearing to go again.

"Where are we going this year?" they now ask.

Team Wickham will leave for Helsinki on March 23. They are guaranteed to play six games over four days, and meals are included during the tournament.

Following the hockey, Laplume said the guys will take advantage of being in Finland to do a bit of traveling, play an exhibition game, and end their trip with two days in Amsterdam before flying home, hopefully with a winning trophy, on April 4.

The team has been preparing all year for the upcoming tournament. The biggest challenge lately, according to Laplume, has been to find good ice time. Out of convenience, they have been practicing in Jay Peak, but have recently booked ice time at the Pat Burns arena, as well as the Olympic sized rink in Chateaugay, to prepare.

Following last year's trip to Prague, Laplume remarked the play is very different in Europe. "They use bigger ice. There is more space, it moves faster," he

said.

Laplume said the team looks forward to the camaraderie and the celebration of the game of hockey just as much as the ice time.

"Whatever we can bring, and whatever we can learn and take home, we love that. We're going to have fun," he said.

Team Wickham is confident about their chances in Helsinki, according to Laplume.

"We probably have our strongest team so far this year," he said.