Daniel Spivak’s whirlwind trip to the IIHF World Championships

Daniel Spivak, who recently completed a successful rookie season with the Division I RIT men’s hockey team, was selected to play for the Israeli National Team, as they competed in the Division II International Ice Hockey Federation World Championships from April 7 – April 13 in Novi Sad, Serbia. Although the Israeli National team finished 1-4, it was an excellent 10 days of travel and hockey for Spivak, a native of Thornhill, Ontario. In Israel’s final contest against Iceland on April 13, Spivak was named his team’s most outstanding player. He led all Israeli defensemen and was tied for eighth overall among blue-liners with a goal and two assists for three points during the Championships. Spivak left North America on Saturday, April 4, and arrived back on the campus of RIT on Thursday, April 16.

This is a first person account from Spivak as he made the trek to Serbia and back.

Day 1-2

I am starting this blog from my room at the Park Hotel in Novi Sad, Serbia. The trip here was not as bad as projected. My flight left from Pearson Airport where I met a few of the other guys flying out of Toronto to Frankfurt, Germany and from Frankfurt to Belgrade, Serbia. The flight was probably the best flight ever. We had empty rows in the back of the plane to stretch out and sleep comfortably. After seven hours we landed in Germany’s largest airport in Frankfurt. The lay over was around four hours. Gladly, I found a place to sleep and woke up just in time to board the next flight to Belgrade. To mention also that while in Toronto I met an RIT alum who wished me good luck. Back to Serbia, we had to wait an hour for the arrival of the players and staff from Israel. Eventually, a tournament official and Serbian guide picked us up to go to the hotel. It was also a good time to hug it out with all the guys who we only get to see once a year, and have built a great relationship with over the years. After getting to the very old-school arena of Novi Sad, we were able to hang our gear in the dressing room and took a bus to the hotel.

Now here is where the surprise really caught the entire team off-guard. We first took the bus to the entrance of the hotel, which was blasting Hebrew music towards the 20 people waiting for our arrival. Then, two great looking ladies had the Israeli flag waiting at the top of the stairs of the entrance. After, we entered the hotel to a greeting of the hotel manager and its staff. The walkway to the service table was filled with smoke and fake snow coming down from the ceiling. Did I mention as we walked to the front desk they played “We Will Rock You” by Queen, and six Serbian children from both sides of the hotel came out in rollerblades and full gear skating around. The team was just in shock and we were handed soft drinks. Overall, the entrance was one of a kind, world-class treatment. I felt like I was a king, truly amazing.
After we got our room keys, I picked a new face to room with named Jonathen Rebibo. He is an Israeli who plays hockey in Montreal. He is only 19 and new to this international standard of play. I have the pleasure of teaching him the ropes, to make sure he makes it through the week. As for practicing, we had one at 9 p.m. and the team is just tired from the time change and full day of travelling, but no point in arguing, as we just do as we are told. The practice was probably the best part of the day, even though the ice was absolutely horrendous. The rink was warm and the ice was really soft, like skating in sand, just awful. I can only hope they fix this problem before the tournament starts Tuesday, when we play DPR Korea, which is a must win for our team.

Day 3-5

After our mini training camp, we had our first game against DPR Korea. The game was close due to the fact that the Koreans are very disciplined and in great physical condition. We won the game 2-1, as I scored the first goal of the tournament. I guess it is pretty ironic, since I did not score a goal all season for RIT.

The next day, April 8, we had a morning skate and played the top team in our group, Estonia. The game plan was focus on positional play. The Estonians were much more skilled and in better shape then our team. They had many players from the Russian Super League (which is Russia’s top league, with players such as Jaromir Jagr and Alexander Radulov among them). The game ended in a lopsided victory for Estonia, 16-2. It was sad but not a surprise, since they are a Division I team, that was bumped down to Division II this season. It stinks to lose that badly and I wish I could have played them again with RIT and pumped them just as bad. But, you just have to move on and prepare for the next opponent, which happens to be China. We get a much-needed day off in between.

The day off is basically a sightseeing day, as we only have a one-hour practice early in the afternoon to keep the guys in check.

Days 6-8

As the tournament begins to wind down we have one game left to play against Iceland. This game is more of a 4th or 5th place game, unless Korea beats Serbia, which is super unlikely, but you never know. As for the other games we played, well, lets just say I would like to move forward and not mention them.

The tournament has been fun and always a battle since it is Team Israel. Most of the team plays in Israel, which only plays eight games all year in the season. Being that the rink is located at the top of Israel in Metulla (bordering Lebanon), the trek can be a full day affair, taking a few hours to get there and back. As a team, we do what we can with the limited resources and skill we have. Our team is on the verge of some serious change. The older guys are retiring and the younger guys are now getting the chance to step up to the men’s team.
This change will be a tough one and it up to the older guys still able to play to take charge and become leaders.

On a Side note: the tournament-ending banquet was amazing. Gorgeous models wore team jerseys and carried each countries flag into the hall. The band played excellent Serbian folk songs and pictures were taken. I was very impressed (not by just the women) by the amount of people who were part of this entire stay. From the staff members, to the servers and bus drivers, every part of this tournament was amazing.

I thank Novi Sad, Serbia and the many people who helped make this tournament run smooth and efficiently. But I really feel its time to come home, which will be a long day of travelling, with long lay over times, followed by extreme air conditioning. I look forward to it.... Again.

**Post Tournament**

The last game against Iceland was the closest one we had just because of the talent level of each team and the emotion and intensity to finish the tournament on a winning note. We unfortunately took way to many stupid penalties costing us the game, as we lost to Iceland, 4-3.

Fast forwarding past the packing and cleaning up of the change room. The bus ride was taken at 4 a.m. to the airport to make the flight at 7 a.m. Then we landed in Frankfurt, Germany and waited till 1:45 pm. Not what I had in mind, but I found a nice bench to sleep on for a few hours. Lastly the flight to Toronto was called for boarding and eight hours later at around 5 p.m. with the time change I was at home in Thornhill on Tuesday, March 14.

Then it all hit me. I barely made it into bed. I slept a solid 14 hours into Wednesday. When I awoke, I looked at the school work I had to do, and the stress began to build up. To be fair I was not too focused on school while overseas. I did the homework, but did not do any reading. It is the price I have to pay for doing something I love. Luckily I was able to get extensions from all my teachers to help me with getting all the work handed in with no grade loss.

This only means that when I drive back Thursday morning to RIT, it will be a day filled with homework and studying. Something I am not looking forward to. Then again it was all worth it.

**Israel Results**

April 7 – Israel 2, DPR Korea 1
April 8 – Estonia 16, Israel 2
April 10 – Serbia 12, Israel 1
April 11 – China 5, Israel 1
April 13 - Iceland 4, Israel 3