

66 Joe Cool

Joe Sakic speaks softly and carries a big stick

Center Joe Sakic of the Colorado Avalanche didn't tell his teammates how to win the Stanley Cup finals last season. He showed them.

Game 1: Joe was rushing down the right wing with the puck. He cut left sharply, faking defenseman Scott Stevens of the New Jersey Devils off his skates. He waited for goalie Martin Brodeur to flop to the ice, then calmly flicked the puck into the net.

Joe's message: *Follow me, we can beat this team.* The Avalanche won the Cup in seven games.

Joe, age 32, is neither the NHL's biggest player nor its fastest skater. But he is slick, and sees plays before they happen. Plus, he owns a wicked wrist shot. "Joe has a quick release," says Martin Brodeur. "He really messes up goalies."

The Av center is the second-leading scorer (916 points, as of October 18) in the NHL since 1991-92. Last season, Joe scored a career-high 54 goals and was named the league's MVP.

Joe began his NHL career with the Quebec Nordiques in 1988-89. In 1995-96, the team moved to Colorado and became the Avalanche. The Avs won their first Stanley Cup that season. Joe was named playoff MVP.

Awards and fame are no big deal to Joe. He is a shy guy who hates attention from the media. After a game, he offers a few words and heads home. "I like keeping a low profile," says Joe.

This season, the quiet captain will again let his game do the talking.

"Joe is a very smart player," says Av center Chris Drury. "He leads by example."

— by Matt Higgins



Mario Lemieux

An NHL legend is shooting for Canada's first gold medal in hockey since 1952

by Matt Higgins, New Day

"The Winter Olympics are something I've been looking forward to for a long time, especially being the captain of Team Canada. [NHL players were not allowed to compete until the 1998 Olympics. Mario had retired by then. He is now recovering from hip surgery.] It's very important that I'm one-hundred percent when I come back — not only physically, but also in my conditioning. I want to make sure that I'm at the top of my game."

What the 1987 Canada Cup Meant to Me

"The way I played in scoring the [winning] goal gave me a lot of confidence. It told me that I could play with the best players. Just being around some of the great players that we had — Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier, Paul Coffey, Ray Bourque — taught me that you have to focus and work hard to achieve your goals. I learned how to win and what it takes to win."

Woe, Canada: 50 Years, No Olympic Gold

"There's tremendous pressure because of what the whole country expects from us. I think the pressure is something that all the players should welcome."

Captain of Captains

"There are so many great players on our team and captains from their respective NHL teams. There will be 22 leaders in our dressing room. There's certainly a lot of talent, a lot of pride."

Livin' Large

"Playing on the bigger Olympic rink gives you more time to make plays and a little bit more room to handle the puck and have more of a wide-open skating game. It's going to be a lot more exciting for all of us."

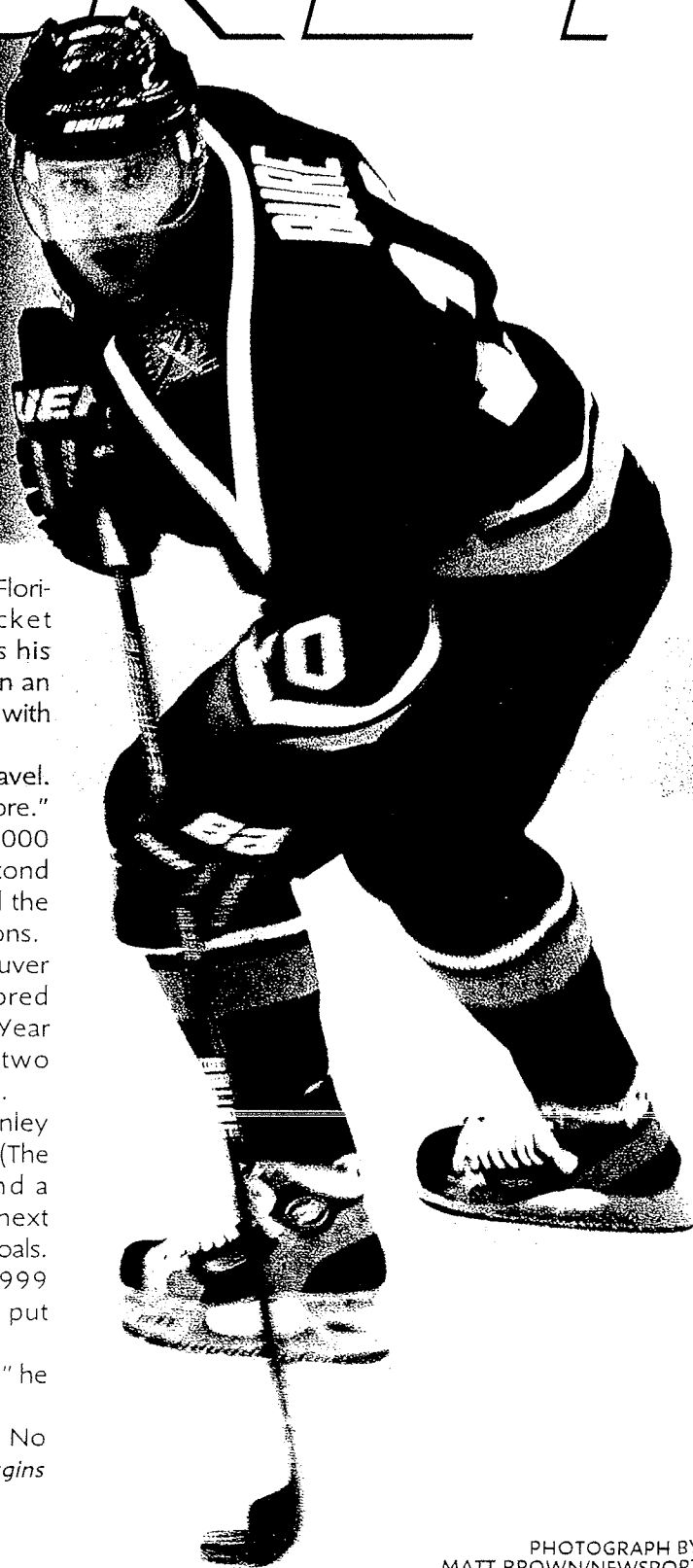
Gold Icing on a Great Career?

"I've won the Stanley Cup and scoring titles, but to have a chance to play in the Olympics, especially at age 36, is something special. I have a chance at a gold medal to complete my career."

— by Matt Higgins

THE RUSSIAN ROCKET

Pavel Bure
burns up the ice
with super speed
and sharp shooting



Right wing Pavel Bure [PAH-vul boo-RAY] of the Florida Panthers is called the Russian Rocket because of his ice-melting speed. He uses his explosive first step to break away from defensemen in an eye-blink. Once he's near the net, he drives goalies mad with his dekes, feints, and puck control.

"I try to change the way I score all the time," says Pavel. "If a goalie expects my shot, it's more difficult for me to score."

Pavel, age 29, kept goalies guessing during the 1999-2000 NHL season. He pumped in 58 goals and won the second goal-scoring title in his nine-season career. He also led the Panthers into the playoffs for the first time in three seasons.

Pavel broke into the NHL in 1991-92 with the Vancouver Canucks. The 21-year-old from Moscow, Russia, scored 34 goals and 60 points, and won the Rookie of the Year award. The Russian Rocket blasted off in the next two seasons, scoring a team-record 60 goals in each season.

In 1993-94, Pavel led the Canucks into the 1994 Stanley Cup championship series against the New York Rangers. (The Rangers won, four games to three.) Injuries and a shortened season limited Pavel's playing time in the next three seasons. He recovered in 1997-98 and scored 51 goals.

The Canucks sent Pavel to the Panthers in January 1999 as part of a seven-player deal. The change of climate put a smile on his face. Pavel digs his new digs.

"Every day, I open up the curtains and there's sunshine," he says. "It gives me energy."

Now the Russian Rocket is running on solar power. No wonder he's so hot on the ice.

— by Matt Higgins

Joe Cool/Mario Lemieux/Russian Rocket

1. What year did Joe enter the NHL ?
2. What is Joe's best type of shot?
3. What year was Joe MVP of playoffs?
4. What was the last year Canada won the Olympic gold medal?
5. How old is Mario?
6. How many scoring titles does Mario own?
7. Who scored the winning goal in the 1987 Canada Cup?
8. How many goal scoring titles has Pavel won?
9. What year did Pavel play in the Stanley cup championship?
10. What was the first NHL team to sign Pavel?