

# Four greats in Canadian hockey

Star of the 80s



Photo: Denis Brodeur

The most popular spectator sport in Canada is ice hockey. In winter, thousands of people attend games every week, millions regularly watch professionals on television, and at least 500 000 adults and children, some as young as six years old, play the game.

This enthusiasm for hockey continues a well established tradition in Canada. The prized Stanley Cup, the award given to the winner of the National Hockey League (NHL) season each year, is North America's oldest professional championship trophy. Lord Stanley of Preston donated it during his term as

governor general of Canada in 1893. Numerous games and numerous players have broken all sorts of records since that time, but a few names stand out.

One of the most outstanding is Wayne Gretzky, who started skating before he was three years old. Ever since he first signed with the now-defunct World Hockey League at age 17, he has annually won the esteemed Hart Trophy, awarded for being the most valuable player in the the NHL. In addition, this talented young man has always been chosen for the first All-Star team. At age 18 he signed a 21-year contract with the

Edmonton Oilers and began setting new records.

Two previous super stars compiled records of 50 goals in 50 matches but Gretzky's tenacity and skill surpassed their records. He scored 50 goals in only 39 games. By the end of the 1981-82 season he had pulverized the record book: his 92 goals greatly outdistanced the previous record of 76. Even in assists (passing the puck directly to the goal scorer), he had beaten his own record by 1981-82. At age 26, he has set records that will most likely stand for many years.