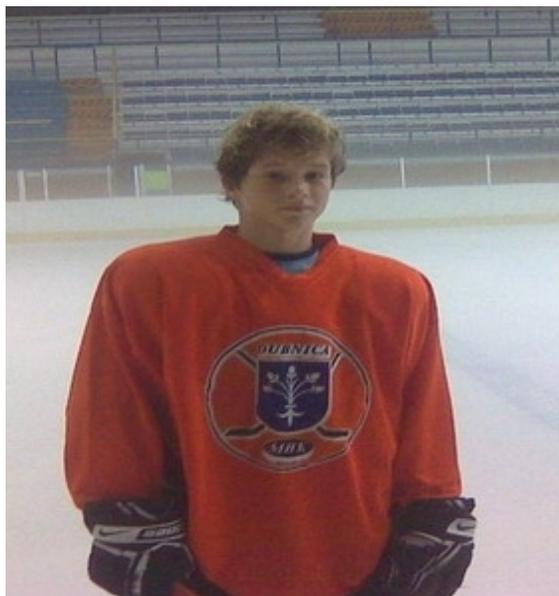


Hockey Night in Slovakia

Written by Matt Bugg

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From the country that brought that us Marian Gaborik, Marian Hossa, Ziggy Palffy and of course Peter Stastny, a young- YOUNG- player is poised to do something not even Sidney Crosby could at the same age.

Slovakia is abuzz about a new phenom. It's been a dry run for the country over the last decade; Tomas Tatar was the (non-Canadian) darling at the last World Juniors and the top Slovak in the 2009 Draft Class, but nevertheless ended up being selected 60th overall.

So the country could use some good news, and some even better luck. That's where Patrik Koyš comes in. Playing for MHK Dubnica in the U18 Extraliga, Koyš is tied for 12th in league scoring with 12-13-25 in 19 games. What's so special about that, you might ask?

Well, born on October 25th 1995, Koyš was just 13 when the European hockey season began. That's right- a 13 year-old playing with kids four and five years older. It's an incredible accomplishment, and one that hasn't gone unnoticed in his home country. A major multicultural hockey forum has already dedicated a thread to him and the press in his homeland is tracking his accomplishments, much like TSN did with their oft-updated 'The Crosby Show' webpage.

Koyš is no stranger to playing this far above his age group. At age 12 he was already playing U16, what we would call Bantam here in North America. He didn't do a bad job there, either,

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leading not only his team but the league in scoring with a staggering 122 points in 39 games. It was that feat that convinced the Slovak hockey establishment to allow him to join U18.

Koyš is somewhat lucky to be playing in a country starving for stars. A then 12 year-old Sidney Crosby was turned down by the Cole Harbour Hockey Association when his parents asked for permission to bump him from Peewee to Bantam. As such, while Crosby was a double-underager wherever he played, Koyš will forever play three years above his birth year.

That is, until about, oh, 15. That's when the young phenom may very well have be ready to do something the North American hockey system will never let a player do: enter the pro game. Dominik Hasek currently holds the record as the youngest to do so, a 15 year-old when he debuted in the Czechoslovak Extraliga.

Slovakia will likely ask Koyš to play at least one year in U20- not only for his development but so that as many people can see him in a prominent role as possible. But if he can score at a PPG pace there, it's conceivable he debuts in the 02 Extraliga as a 15 year-old in the fall of 2011.

There's a lot of time before then, a lot of time for things to go wrong. But like Sidney Crosby, there's this sense that it won't, that Koyš is too smart, too quick, too skilled. All that's left is for him to work his way up the ladder a season at a time. The good news is that he's neither too tall or too small- at 5'9, 154 lbs he's right on target. A 16 year-old Crosby was 5'10 175 when selected first in the QMJHL Draft.

Koyš is just what Slovak hockey needs to get back on track. Even if he never reaches the staggering potential he possesses, as one poster on a messageboard put it, 'We finally have someone to track from a young age like Canadians and Sidney Crosby'.

Statistical Comparisons

Sidney Crosby, age 12- 70 GP, 200 points (Peewee AAA)

Patrik Koyš, age 12- 39 GP, 122 points (U16)

Sidney Crosby, age 13- 63 GP, 86-96-182 points (Bantam AAA)

Patrik Koyš, age 13- 19 GP, 12-13-25 (U18)