Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 38 (2011)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Winter sport : Switzerland - an ice hockey nation
Autor: Wey, Alain
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907328

Nutzungsbedingungen
Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.

Conditions d'utilisation
L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. Voir Informations légales.

Terms of use
The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. See Legal notice.

Download PDF: 28.04.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

Switzerland – an ice hockey nation. After football, ice hockey is Switzerland's second favourite sport. A love story that has stirred Swiss passions for more than a century. We take a look at the legendary virtuoso world of Swiss ice hockey.
By Alain Wey

Emotional scenes at the SC Bern vs. Langnau Tigers match: it's not just in Berne that ice hockey attracts sell-out crowds.

The puck flies into the back of the net triggering a deafening roar from the fans. Ice hockey in Switzerland has a long and glorious history dating way back. To say that Switzerland is an ice hockey nation would be stating the obvious. The headquarters of the International Ice Hockey Federation are in Zurich and its president (since 1994) is René Fasel from Fribourg. The Swiss championship rates as the third-best league in Europe after Russia and Sweden. In 2008, the national league celebrated its centenary. As for the Swiss team, it has enjoyed some historic victories in recent years against the leading nations, in particular against Canada (2–0) and the Czech Republic (3–2) at the Olympic Games in Turin in 2006. It finished in fifth place at the World Championship in Germany in 2010 after a regrettable defeat at the hands of the Germans at the quarter-final stage. Let's delve into the history of Swiss ice hockey.

On the ice in French-speaking Switzerland at the start of the 20th century

Legend has it that, in winter 1887, Tom Griffith, a football player with Grasshoppers of Zurich, told his teammates for the first time about this game from Canada. However, Swiss ice hockey first got off the ground in French-speaking Switzerland where Lake Geneva meets the Vaud Alps. At the end of the 19th century, two forms of the sport were played – bandy, imported from Great Britain (a cross between football and field hockey), and Canadian ice hockey. Educationalist Max Sillig, the "father of Swiss ice hockey", encouraged his pupils in Vevey, canton of Vaud, to play ice hockey. He founded the first identified club in Switzerland in 1904, Bellerive Vevey, and established the Swiss league in 1908. The first Swiss championship took place in the same year with eight teams from French-speaking Switzerland. The first club in German-speaking Switzerland was set up in Zurich in 1910. In 1916, the national team played its first international match, four years prior to the first Olympic tournament in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1920. This combination of two sports had been played well before then by the upper classes during their winter holidays, but this is merely incidental given that ice hockey's popularity with general society soared after that. From 1908 to 1933, a Swiss international championship was held without any limits on foreign players, and the national league was established in 1915.

The supremacy of the mountain regions

With Davos and Arosa, etc., Grisons quickly established its dominance of Swiss ice hockey from the 1920s. This total supremacy lasted until the start of the 1960s. Davos has also hosted the Spengler Cup since 1923. This is the second oldest international club compe-

Photo: Keystone

tition in ice hockey after the Stanley Cup (1894) in North America. The host club has also won the most honours with 14 titles. Other legendary clubs from high-altitude regions include Ambri-Piotta from Ticino, winners of the Swiss Cup in 1962, and La Chaux-de-Fonds (canton of Neuchâtel), Swiss champions six times consecutively between 1968 and 1973.

Legendary derbies

Rivalry between neighbouring clubs brings out the best and worst kind of passion. More than in any other sport, derby games in ice hockey are the highlight of the championship season. The derby between Ambri-Piotta and Lugano, which sets the valley against the town, dominates ice hockey in Ticino today. The Zähringen derby between Fribourg-Gottéron and Berne also has aspects of an anthological battle. You only have to look at the number of police officers in riot gear on duty at every encounter between these two rival towns. In the Zurich region, Zurich and Kloten also contest cantonal supremacy. As for Langnau vs. Berne, the importance of this match is so great that, in 2007, the two teams played their 100th derby in the Swiss national stadium with an ice rink replacing the pitch. Berne eventually won 5–2 in front of over 30,000 fans.

Swiss goaltenders in the NHL

Few Swiss ice hockey players play in the NHL, the highly regarded championship of North America. With the exception of Bernese defender, Mark Streit, who plays for the Islanders in New York, Switzerland mainly exports goaltenders across the Atlantic. Fribourg-born David Aebischer defended the goal of Colorado Avalanche (2000–2005), then Montreal (2006) and the Phoenix Coyotes (2007). Goaltender Tobias Stephan from Zurich played for the Dallas Stars from 2007 to 2009. Thurgau's Jonas Hiller has been with the Anaheim Ducks in California since 2007. Currently, the most high-profile Swiss goaltender is without doubt Martin Gerber from Berne who has played for the Anaheim Ducks (2002-2004), the Carolina Hurricanes (2006), the Ottawa Senators (2007–2008) and the Toronto Maple Leafs (2009) and is now with the Edmonton Oilers (2010).

"Go again" – a sporting and ice hockey philosophy

In the movie "Miracle" (2004), which recounts the story of the US team against the USSR at the Lake Placid Olympic Games in 1980, the coach yells "go again" relentlessly at his players, who sprint from one blue line to the other at the end of a disappointing performance against Norway. This mindset is found in ice hockey in both North America and Switzerland. Over the last 30 years, there has been an incredible leap forward both in the professionalism of the players and staff at the clubs and in the quality of the matches. In spring 2011, the Swiss national team will take part in the World Championship in Slovakia where it will face Canada, Belarus and France in the first round. We anticipate some thrilling performances from the team in red and white in the hope of reaching the holy grail of the semi-finals.

SOME FIGURES ON THE SWISS NATIONAL LEAGUE

The Swiss ice hockey league has 25,000 registered players, around 1,200 teams and 900 referees. The LNA championship involves 50 matches with 12 teams: HC Davos (founded in 1921), the bears of SC Bern, the Zurich Lions, the airmen of HC Kloten (1934), Rapperswil-Jona Lakers (1945), the dragons of HC Fribourg-Gottéron (1938), the eagles of Geneva-Servette (1905), HC Biel (1939), the tigers of SC Langnau (1946), HC Ambri-Piotta (1937), the panthers of HC Lugano (1941) and EV Zug (1967). The eight best teams in the league contest the play-off elimination series. The clubs with the most honours are Davos, Swiss champions 29 times, Bern (12), Arosa (9), Lugano (7), Chaux-de-Fonds and Zurich (6) and Kloten (5).

THE NATIONAL TEAM'S GREATEST MOMENTS

In 2010, the Swiss team ranks seventh in the world hierarchy, which is dominated by Russia, Canada and Sweden. The German-Canadian Ralph Krueger coached the national team from 1998 to 2010 and succeeded in taking his protégés to the quarter-finals of the World Championship several times. His greatest achievement was a fourth-place finish in the 1998 World Championship. Since March 2010, Switzerland has been coached by the Canadian, Sean Simpson, who, as head coach of the Lions of Zurich (2008–2010), won ice hockey's European Champions League against Metallurg Magnitogorsk from Russia and the Victoria Cup against the Chicago Blackhawks in 2009. Zurich's European champions title is one of Swiss ice hockey's greatest achievements alongside bronze medals at the Olympic Games in St Moritz in 1928 and 1948.

The Swiss team and the European Championship. The first European championship was organised in Avants near Montreux (canton of Vaud) in 1910. In 1925: 3rd place in Czechoslovakia. In 1926 and 1935: European champions in Davos. In 1939: European champions in Basel and Zurich. Incidental detail: Switzerland beat Germany 3–1 in Zurich in 1941.

World Championships in Switzerland. Olympic Games and World Championship in St. Moritz in 1928: 3rd place for Switzerland. World Championship in Davos in 1935: 2nd place. World Championship in Basel and Zurich in 1939: 3rd place. Olympic Games and World Championship in St. Moritz in 1948: 3rd place. World Championship in Basel and Zurich in 1953: 3rd place. World Championship and "B" World Championship in Lausanne and Geneva in 1961: 3rd place and promotion. "B" World Championship in Berne, La Chaux-de-Fonds and Lyss in 1971: 1st place (B) and promotion. World Championship in Berne and Geneva in 1971 and "B" World Championship in Biel and Val Gardena, Italy, in 1981: 3rd place (B). "B" World Championship in Fribourg in 1985: 2nd place. World Championship in Berne and Fribourg in 1990 (Switzerland was in the "B" World Championship). World Championship in Zurich and Basel in 1998: 4th place. World Championship in Berne and Zurich in 2009: 9th place.

"100 visages, 100 histoires. 100 ans de hockey sur glace en Suisse" (100 faces, 100 stories and 100 years of ice hockey in Switzerland), book and DVD, published by Orell Füssli, 2008. www.planetehockey.ch, www.swiss-icehockey.ch, www.iihf.com