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*'If you would come to Turku, you would not know that a goalie from the Calgary Flames is in the finals. Most of all, the support is for the teams where the Finns play.' — **Markus Dean**, Turku-born Flames fan*



MIKE RIDEWOOD / REUTERS

Miikka Kiprusoff grew up playing shinny with next door neighbour and future Montreal Canadiens captain Saku Koivu. He also fended off shots from his older brother Marko, who spent two seasons in the NHL.

HOMETOWN HOCKEY

Finland's oldest city celebrates Cup final first

Birthplace of Calgary's Kiprusoff

BY ALLAN WOODS AND SHARI KULHA

It is not easy to be a Calgary Flames fan in Turku, Finland.

Supporting Canada's contribution to the Stanley Cup finals means very late nights spent in front of premium European television sports networks (last night's game began at 3 a.m. local time).

It means spending hundreds of Euros for overpriced jerseys and sports memorabilia that have to be special ordered and shipped from North America.

It means being nuts for an Alberta city you likely know nothing about.

"If you would come to Turku, you would not know that a goalie from the Calgary Flames is in the finals," said Markus Dean, a Turku-born Flames fan who now lives 160 kilometres east of the coastal birthplace of Miikka Kiprusoff. There are no Flames jerseys in sight, no red-painted faces.

Support in Turku is for Mr. Kiprusoff, and only secondarily for the Flames, "probably just because Kiprusoff plays there," Mr. Dean said. "Most of all, the support is for the teams where the Finns play."

If that is true, the Flames' stock is likely to rise in Finland with yesterday's announcement that Mr. Kiprusoff, Flames defenceman Toni Lydman, from Lahti, Finland, and Tampere-born forward Ville Nieminen were named yesterday to the country's World Cup team.

Finland, like Canada, is a hockey-mad land. Turku, a city of little more than 170,000, has its own professional team, TPS Turku.

SUPPORT IS FOR KIPRUSOFF, AND ONLY SECONDARILY FOR THE FLAMES

It is the oldest city in the Scandinavian country, but Mr. Kiprusoff, the local newspapers have been excitedly saying, is the first Turku-born NHLer to reach the Stanley Cup finals.

"All the newspapers have had pretty big articles on him," said Mr. Dean, who used to run TPS Turku's Web site.

Henna Hirykoski, who works at Rocco, the upscale Turku restaurant owned by Montreal Canadiens star Saku Koivu, said everyone knows a local boy is in the Stanley Cup finals.

If Mr. Kiprusoff has developed a reputation in Calgary for his calm, even demeanour and coolness under pressure, it may be because, in a sense, he has been playing with NHL-calibre athletes his whole life.

He has spoken of learning the craft from watching his father, Jarmo, also a goalie, stop the puck.

Growing up, he played shinny with his older brother, Marko, who played with the Canadiens and the New York Islanders over two seasons, and future star Koivu.

The boys were next-door neighbours and nurtured their skills on a backyard rink.

Between 1994 and 1999, Mr. Kiprusoff played three seasons with TPS Turku.

He helped the team win the Finnish League championship in 1999.

Then, as a despondent Mr. Dean said is the case with all talented Finnish players, Mr. Kiprusoff was off to the NHL, playing in farm teams and working his way up to his current position.

His father, Jarmo Kiprusoff, a baker, now studies his son's moves in front of the family television in the early-morning hours.

"Jarmo can't sit still at all during the games," Tuula Kiprusoff, the goalie's mother, told the *Calgary Herald* this month.

The proud parents are joined by Marko, who now plays for TPS Turku, and the goalie's fiancée, Seidi, on the living room couch during games.

"The sofa is sold out well in advance," Ms. Kiprusoff said. "We watch all the Flames games that are shown."

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