



Gabriel Bouvier (centre) defends net at B.C.-Canada Place in Turin.

GERRY KAHRMANN — THE PROVINCE

Turin takes to hockey

KIDS LOVE IT: 'Stupendo' reaction to B.C.'s log house

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TURIN — Call it Hockey Day in Turin.

Italians are forging an international love affair with Canada's national sport in an ancient cobbled square in the centre of this Olympic City.

Kids from nearby schools are grabbing sticks to play street hockey just a few blocks from the 2006 Winter Games medals plaza.

"They're having a lot of fun," said Gabriel Bouvier, a 19-year-old from Quebec City organizing the scrimmages in front of a giant Inukshuk, mascot for Vancouver's 2010 Games. "I've had as many as 10 people playing at a time."

Bouvier, who speaks only a smattering of Italian, says that hockey is a universal language, particularly in a city whose Games boast the slogan, "Passion lives here."

Stefano Cravetto and his pal Edoardo Verderone, both 13, headed to the Piazzole Valdo Fusi, home of British Columbia-Canada Place, right after school yesterday.

"It's just a hobby," said Cravetto, skillfully trapping the ball with his foot, more in the manner of hometown soccer heroes, FC Juventus.

Both teens said they'd like to come to Vancouver for the 2010 Olympics.

"A lot of local kids have been

coming by asking, 'Can we play hockey?'" said Carmen Bresanutti, a hostess at British Columbia-Canada Place.

Originally from Trail, Bresanutti now lives in Vancouver and has relatives about 90 minutes from Turin.

She said B.C.'s log house and exhibition centre has been a huge hit.

"People have been coming in and their mouths fall open and they're shaking their heads saying, 'Stupendo, stupendo,'" she said. "We had 3,000 people coming through the house on Saturday. It was just a river of people."

She said that the mainly-Italian crowds don't understand why the house is there, at first.

"Most people seem to know Vancouver is having the Olympics — they just don't know where it is," she said.

Visitors are welcomed by Richard Couture, a nine-year veteran of Surrey RCMP in his dress uniform.

"It's a nice change from my regular job in the economic crime unit," said Couture. "I'm going to be part of the closing ceremonies. It's a great honour."

Couture said he's received a warm welcome from Turin residents.

"I was invited for dinner by a couple from here whose daughter is completing her doctorate at UBC," he added.

The log house has "struck a chord" with people in Turin, says

Paul Welsh, communications boss at B.C.-Canada House.

"The interesting thing is that Italian schoolchildren learn about a little log house in Canada — it's their first introduction to Canada," he said. "We have people coming back with their grandparents and their kids."

With only four days to go before the opening ceremonies, last-minute teething troubles were evident in the city of about one million people.

Workers hurried to put up signs near the figure-skating venue and the media villages were struggling to complete construction and be ready in time.

Mario Pescante, Italian government supervisor for the Games, told a press conference that problems surrounding bus transportation were being ironed out.

He said that with 1,000 bus drivers in the city and another 1,000 in the mountains, it turned out their accommodation was too far from the two main transportation hubs.

"We had an emergency from a organization point of view," he said, adding the system broke down while the drivers were being relocated.

Games CEO Cesare Vacigato, apologized to media when asked about lack of telephones in the media villages.

"This is one of those situations ... and we hope everyone will excuse us," he said.

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