

MEDIA RELEASE: New Zealand Ice Blacks take first blood in an Ice Hockey Trans-Tasman battle at the Audi quattro Winter Games NZ

History was made in Queenstown Thursday 7 September) when the first ever international ice hockey test match series between New Zealand and Australia to be played in the resort town resulted in a win for the Ice Blacks, only their second in sixteen match ups.

"The game lived up to the expectations, fast and furious with the Ice Blacks playing out of their skins," said Günther Birgel, President, New Zealand Ice Hockey Federation (NZIHF).

Andy McDowell, Vice President Ice Hockey Australia (IHA) concurred.

"Congratulations to the Ice Blacks. They were hard at the puck for the entire game. The Aussies made a few errors and we paid for them on the scoreboard."

Mr McDowell said that the Mighty Roos were not unhappy with their effort and were looking forward to the next test match.

"There was a really good pace to tonight's game and despite the score, we enjoyed it. We'll tidy up our rough edges and we aim to come back tomorrow night."

The series comes at the end of the Audi quattro Winter Games NZ which hasn't seen ice hockey as part of the elite winter sport gathering since 2011.

"It's something we had in our initial planning, but it has taken until now to make it come to fruition," said a delighted Arthur Klap, Audi quattro Winter Games NZ CEO.

"We all hope this is something we can grow over the years," Klap stated.

For Günther Birgel, the hope that his country's best talent would be available has transpired. A tough fought tournament is expected as it's arguably the best timing for the match up with teams made up of players peaking at the end of their domestic seasons.

New Zealand and Australia last met at the 2016 IIHL World Championships in Mexico with a hard fought 6-2 win to Australia which saw them win gold and promotion to Division 2 Group A. The teams have previously met at the 2009 and 2011 Winter Games, playing at the Dunedin Ice Arena. New Zealand won the Trans-Tasman meet up in 2009 and Australia won in 2011.

The games are sanctioned by the IIHF, however will not be taken count towards world rankings. It is a 'friendly' tournament with plenty of Trans-Tasman rivalry.

New Zealand and Australia have recently returned from their IIHF divisional world championships. The teams are separated by only one division. New Zealand played China, DPR Korea, Turkey,

Israel and Mexico in Division 2 Group B to earn a silver medal, only one win away from promotion to IIHF Division 2 Group A.

Australia has just returned from a successful world championship campaign in Romania also earning a silver medal in Division 2 Group A against Romania, Serbia, Belgium, Iceland and Spain. Australia are currently ranked 33rd in the world. New Zealand are ranked 38th. Until tonight, in Southern Hemisphere ice hockey history, Australia have beaten New Zealand 14 out of 15 times with a 152-goal differential. With this in mind, the Ice Blacks are playing for redemption and to prove their superiority on home ice.

Australia have brought a squad of 17 players with five making their debut while the home team are using the benefit of lower travel costs and home turf to blood six new players with a squad of 31. The size of the Ice Blacks squad could prove crucial if a hard-fought three games in three days takes an injury toll. And then there's the home town support factor.

For the capacity crowd at the Queenstown Ice Arena, it was a night of top level ice hockey. Period one saw action right from puck drop with both teams testing each other out. The first penalty of the game went against the Mighty Roos and the Ice Blacks went in to a power play. Andrew Cox redirected a puck along the ice from Paris Heyd and the Ice Blacks took the lead 1-0.

Play reverted back to a fast pace with the Mighty Roos camped out in the Ice Blacks zone with goaltender Rick Parry forced to make several saves. A quick break out by the Ice Blacks saw Chris Eaden drive the puck into the Mighty Roos zone, followed by a quick drop pass to the high slot for Alexandr Polozov to finish taking the Ice Blacks 2-0 into the break.

Period Two went straight into action with the same velocity and end to end hockey. Early on the Roos were penalised a power play to the Ice Blacks and had only a few chances to score. They come back strong handed creating several chances, however Ice Black Goaltender Rick Parry was more than up to the task. A break away by Ice Black Paris Hyde with only the Goaltender to beat saw another goal to take the Ice Blacks to a 3nil lead.

However, the Roos headed straight into the Ice Blacks end zone with a quick wrist shot taking it to 3-1. Late in the period the Ice Blacks were penalised and played the better part of the last two minutes short-handed and under pressure.

The first five minutes of period three saw interrupted hockey with the Ice Blacks pulled up for checking and it was a hard battle for dominance from one zone to the next. Matt Schneider pressured the puck carrier forcing an error and a goal went to Alexandr Polozov, his second of the game. The score at 4-1 saw chances taken at both ends of the ice. With a little over a minute to go the Ice Blacks were penalised and finished the game short-handed. Once again, they put their bodies on the line to finish in front.

The Audi quattro Winter Games NZ Trans-Tasman Challenge was highly anticipated in Queenstown with games at near sell out as the series began. The three test match series with Trans-Tasman pride on the line continues tomorrow night.

FINAL SCORE: New Zealand 4 – 1 Australia

MVP New Zealand: Alexandr Polozov

MVP Australia: Brendan McDowell



ENDS

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Game Dates & times

Friday September 8, puck drop 7.00pm, doors open 6pm

Saturday September 9, puck drop 7.00pm, doors open 6pm

Images available via the link below.

https://wintergamesnz.bynder.com/web/3710068f167395cb/ice_hockey_test_-1_pr/