

FUTURE OF SPORTS IS IN GOOD HANDS

As we embark on a new year, sports fans across Canada and the United States will be looking forward to seeing most of the familiar stars — McDavid, Tiger, Brady and LeBron, among others — do what they do in such spectacular fashion. But because it's a 'new' year, it's time to focus our gaze on some of the new stars that are emerging and will keep sports fans entertained long after the current roster of big names has retired.

For instance, pro golf has a guy named Cameron Champ, a 23-year-old Californian who burst on the scene last year and had immediate success. His claim to fame is prodigious length off the tee, but he complements that distance with deft touch around the greens and has 'superstar' written all over him.

He may not be the second coming of LeBron James, or Steph Curry, but Mississauga's R.J. Barrett will be a big name in the NBA probably by this time next year. He's a freshman with the college powerhouse, Duke, and is projected to be the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft this spring. Barrett is next in a long line of Toronto-area stars — Jamal Murray of Denver, Tristan Thompson of Cleveland, Andrew Wiggins of Minnesota — who are putting Canada on the map as far as hoops development is concerned.

Canadian tennis has a new star promising to make a big splash in 2019 and beyond. Bianca Andreescu, 18, of Mississauga has supplanted Eugenie Bouchard as the biggest name in Canadian women's tennis after knocking off former World No. 1s Caroline Wozniacki and Venus Williams in the space of three days en route to a berth in the final at the Auckland Open in early January. She came up short in the final, however, losing to Julia Gorges in three sets.

Haven't heard the name Matthew Savoie? If you follow hockey, you will. Savoie is 14 and his family is trying to convince Western Hockey League officials to give him 'exceptional' status which would allow him to play in the WHL at age 15. He's not even eligible for the WHL's draft of bantam players until this May. In 24 games in the Canadian Sport School Hockey League, the 5-foot-9 165-pound Savoie had 24 goals and 32 assists to hold an 18-point lead in the scoring race. The Crosby comparisons have already begun.

And to wrap up the list of fresh faces sure to make headlines is Christian Pulisic, 20, an American soccer player who is one of the world's best and after two years playing in Germany, was recently transferred to Chelsea of England's Premier League for a whopping \$73 million. Already acclaimed as the greatest American player ever, his skill gives hope to American soccer aficionados that one day, the U.S. may contend for the World Cup.

- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Two nuns have been accused of embezzling about \$500,000 from St. James Catholic School in Torrance, Calif., to support their gambling craze. Apparently they put too much money down on the Cardinals this season and not enough on the Saints."

- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: "Major League Baseball has made a deal with Cuba to scout and sign players without them defecting. In other words, they can now make it to the Bigs by the draft instead of the raft."
- Another one from Perry: "The Boston Red Sox, baseball's highest-spending team, owe \$11,951,091 in luxury tax. That's what they get for having a payroll somewhere between Boardwalk and Park Place."
- **Patti Dawn Swansson** in the River City Renegade, on the slam-dunk choice of **Connor McDavid** as NHL's MVP: "Remove McMagnifique from the Oilers lineup and the Oil would disappear faster than a Big Mac and a bucket of KFC on Air Force One."
- **Rob Tychkowski** of the Edmonton Sun, on Twitter, referring to the trade in which the Oilers acquired the player whose check broke Connor McDavid's collarbone in his rookie season: "It took a while, but in acquiring **Brandon Manning** the Oilers finally got even with **Brandon Manning**."
- **Norman Chad** of the Washington Post, on the makes-no-sense system of tennis scoring: "I might be able to live with 15-30-45, but 15-30-40? You have to be high to come up with that scoring system, and cannabis wasn't widely available in 19th-century England."
- **Brad Rock** of the Deseret News: "**Drew Brees** sent a commemorative football to 174 former teammates he believes helped him become the NFL's all-time passing yardage leader. Said the Tampa Bay Buccaneers secondary: 'What about us?'"
- **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "GM **Brodie Van Wagenen** said he thinks his Mets are the NL East favourites. Don't laugh; someone has to be in the focus group testing Budweiser's new marijuana beer."
- **Currie again**: "Clippers guard **Patrick Beverley** tossed the ball at a courtside heckler in Dallas, earning him a \$25,000 fine from the NBA. Definitely not a free throw."

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