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## Penguins/NHL

### Lemieux gets his fill of training for World Cup

Saturday, August 14, 2004

By Chuck Finder, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Mario Lemieux owned the Island Sports Center ice yesterday morning, swooping up and down and across, flicking pucks past his regularly frustrated workout goaltender. He moved effortlessly, even though trainer Jay Caufield pushed him throughout the 50-minute workout.



Peter Diana, Post-Gazette  
**Mario Lemieux skates on the Island Sports Center ice on Neville Island for the first time since his hip surgery.**  
Click photo for larger image.

And afterward the Penguins' owner-player pronounced himself fit for the upcoming World Cup of Hockey and whatever there is of an NHL season.

At least, as fit as he can be.

"It's sore," Lemieux said yesterday, the seven-month anniversary of the season-ending arthroscopic surgery on his left hip.

His left hip -- like his surgically repaired right hip and back before this -- will remain sore throughout the rest of his NHL career, if not life. So Lemieux endures.

"I've played with pain for 20 years," he added with a grin and a glance toward Caufield, a former teammate and his on-ice trainer. "I can do it a couple more."

Yesterday's session with Caufield and goalie Greg Szazynski of Shaler was only Lemieux's third skating workout since the surgery. He was on ice twice in Southern California with three partners with whom he toiled a handful of weeks this summer: Detroit defenseman Chris Chelios, unsigned defenseman Mathieu Schneider and 17-year-old wunderkind Sidney Crosby.

Agent and friend Pat Brisson suggested that Lemieux train with those fellows under workout guru T.R. Goodman at a Gold's Gym in Venice, Calif.

So four times this summer Lemieux has spent a week to 10 days with Goodman's group, doing 90-minute, non-stop circuits on weight machines, "mainly getting your legs stronger." He brings back to Pittsburgh a vigorous workout regimen that he maintains, not to mention a new diet.

All that explains why the owner-player proudly reports his weight at 225 pounds -- down from 238 at last season's start.

"No fries," he said.

Lemieux declined to discuss such issues as the Penguins' slots-arena bid or the league's labor negotiations, coming close only when queried about reporting to camp.

"Our camp?" he asked, in jest.

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Rather, the World Cup camp for Team Canada, which starts Thursday in Ottawa. Team executive director Wayne Gretzky is counting on Lemieux to become Canada's captain and leader, a role Lemieux played -- shortly before right-hip surgery -- in steering his countrymen to a 2002 Olympic gold medal. Gretzky earlier this week told an Ottawa reporter that he spent time in Los Angeles with Lemieux, "and I don't think I've ever seen him look better."

Certainly, his workout goaltender can vouch for that.

Szazynski, a former collegian who calls himself "Pittsburgh's best beer-league goalie," has been helping out Caufield and Lemieux since the comeback began four years ago.

"This is the best I've seen him since he's been back," Szazynski said. "Without a doubt."

Caufield put Lemieux through vigorous skating yesterday. Throughout, Lemieux showed zip. Kids and counselors from the Rick Heinz Hockey School, waiting to get on the ice afterward, marveled from behind the glass. Uttered one counselor in disbelief: "Three strides, and he's through the neutral zone."

"There was flow to it," Lemieux said of the workout.

"Good flow," Caufield added.

Reaching this juncture was a slow and arduous process. As much controversy locally as was stirred by Lemieux's season-ending hip surgery after the 2002 Olympics that rehabilitation hardly compared to his past seven months.

"This one was a lot tougher," Lemieux said. "It took a lot longer than I expected. It takes so much time to rebuild the muscles around it. Took forever."

Lemieux figures to hit the ice with Caufield a few more times in the next week. The better to prepare for Team Canada camp and the Aug. 30-Sept. 14 World Cup. And a Penguins season of some sort.

"There's no secret. It's basically hard work," Caufield said. "He's doing it. He goes back and forth to L.A. to do it. When he comes back here, we do the same thing ... hard work on the ice."

Continued Lemieux, "We'll see if it pays off."

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