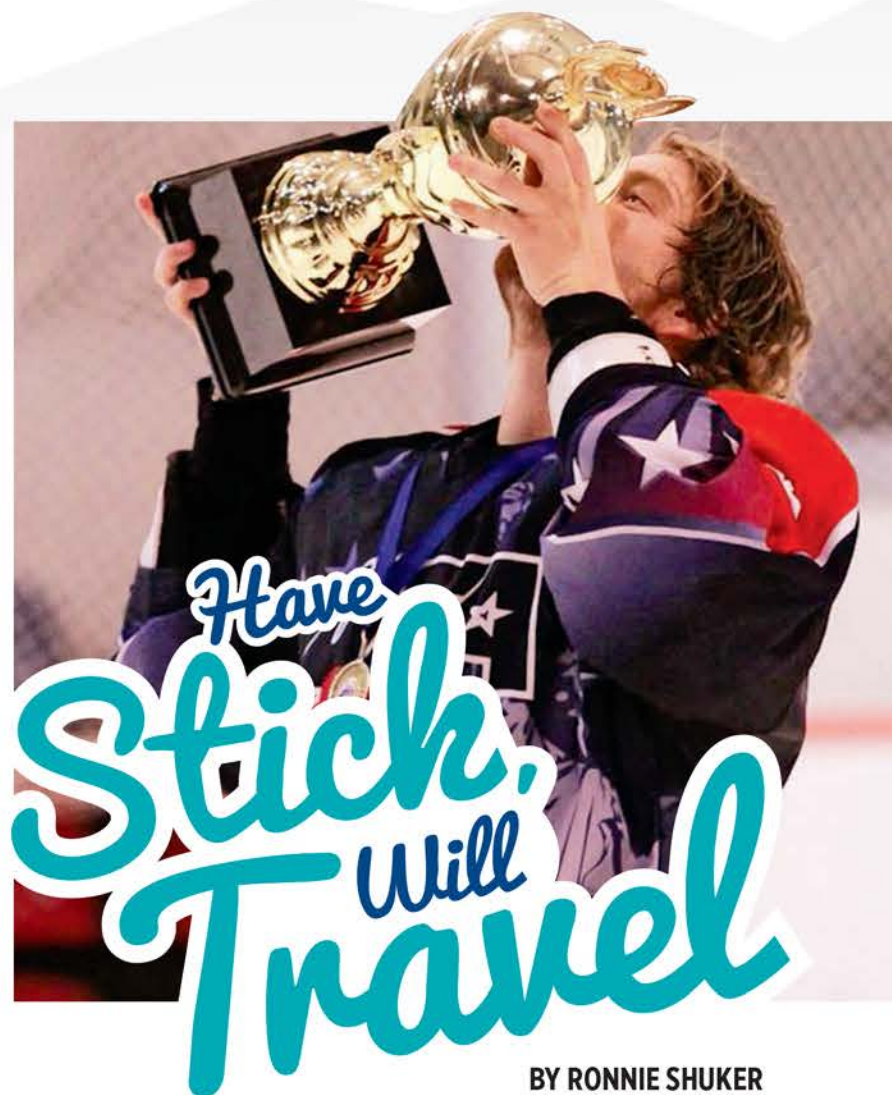




BY RONNIE SHUKER

Hockey's travellin' man is one continent short of a Guinness World Record. The final stop on his epic adventure is the granddaddy of ice sheets: Antarctica

Ryan Bahl can swear in Cantonese, Czech, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and, of course, English, including a potpourri of American, South African, New Zealand and Australian slang. They're the first words he learns when landing in a new country, sticks in hand, hockey bag in tow. No matter where Bahl has travelled to play the game – Asia, Australia, Europe, North and South America, and even Africa

– profanity has proven to be the universal mode of communication. "If you get into it on the ice, you can just use curse words," Bahl said. "I try to learn the worst words possible and use them if it gets too heated."

That voluminous vocabulary of colorful metaphors has served him well over the past seven years bouncing around the globe.

Bahl is hockey's 'travellin' man. He has played pickup or semi-pro hockey on every continent except Antarctica, and he's hard at



SOUTH AFRICA

work on a plan to complete the septet next year. His goal? To be recognized by Guinness World Records as the youngest person to play hockey on all seven continents.

His hockey nomadism began in 2009, when, at 20, Bahl had a decision to make. He had played youth hockey in his hometown, San Diego, where he faced off against the likes of Chad Ruhwedel, Alec Martinez and Jonathon Blum. But he knew the NHL wasn't in his future. He'd had a tryout in the ECHL, but nothing came of it. Then came his aha moment. "I was in no man's land," Bahl said. "I would've had to try really hard to make it into one of the lower-level pro leagues. But then I thought of this other alternative route of just playing overseas. It started with wanting to play in some of the European pro leagues, and it has transformed over the years into more travelling, doing it for fun, meeting new people and expanding my knowledge of the world and cultures."

If Bahl had bought a round-the-world ticket, his itinerary would have looked something like this: San Diego – Hong Kong – Canterbury – Zdar nad Sazavou – Sydney – Las Vegas – Stromstad – Cape Town – Madrid – San Diego – Punta Arenas – Istanbul – San Diego – Sydney – Antarctica – San Diego.

After playing in 10 countries on six continents, Bahl has just about seen it all and dealt with his share of occupational hazards. In South Africa, during an All-Star Game, he helped push a Zamboni off the ice when it broke down during an ice cleaning. In Chile, he played on a rink that had two corners missing, so whenever the puck was wrapped around the boards it would disappear and halt play. But the worst breakdown came while Bahl was playing in Spain. During a game in Barcelona, an opponent



SAN DIEGO

flipped the puck and hit the roof and about a dozen pieces came crashing down. Luckily, no one was hurt. The debris was cleaned up and the game went on.

Bahl has experienced his share of oddities, too – some straight out of *Slap Shot*. He's seen photographers dressed up like Stormtroopers for team photos. He's seen coaches throw Gatorade bottles at teammates and fans dunk nachos all over visiting players. The goofiest came during a game in the Czech Republic after the referee had made what the hometown fans considered a bad call. Bahl looked up to see an entire section of the crowd, uh, showing its displeasure with the penalty. "The whole section was mooning him," he said. "They're definitely crazy over there."

Now 26, Bahl has never received a salary for playing hockey, but his contracts have covered his accommodations, hockey-related expenses and sometimes even food and transportation. He finances his travel through his online gig as a creative director for a business marketing software company, which gives him the freedom to work, travel and play hockey wherever his wanderlust takes him in the world. Bahl has even combined his marketing savvy with his passion for the game in developing hockeyconnection.net, a website that helps players, from beer leaguers to professionals, do what he does by finding places for them to play overseas.

Japan, Greece and back to Australia are places Bahl and his wife, Michaela, would still like to go to, but for now he is tapping into his connections in Chile to find a way to play on Antarctica. He admits it's a logistical nightmare, which includes shipping material down to set up a makeshift rink



AUSTRALIA

and getting enough participants to play 3-on-3 or 4-on-4, but Bahl is dead-set on completing his continental tour. After that, the couple will likely settle down in San Diego as soon as they've had enough of their nomadic lifestyle. "We'll always be traveling at some point, but it'll slowly migrate into more shorter-term trips, maybe a few weeks or a month at most," Bahl said. "It'll turn into playing in tournaments and local scrimmages or just going to visit friends. But I don't think I'll be doing full-season leagues for too much longer. It's hard to say. We're always so year-to-year, so you never know."



SWEDEN



CHILE



TURKEY

What happens when you mix a serious dose of wanderlust with an incurable case of puck fever? Ryan Bahl can tell you. He has been bouncing around the globe with his wife, Michaela, playing semi-pro or its nearest equivalent everywhere they go. The hockey-mad couple, who met on the ice, got engaged on the ice and even had a puck-themed wedding, plan to wrap up their world tour in the White Desert.

