

DEFENDING THE GOAL

BY DWAYNE BUHLER

Dan Hamhuis' faith in God makes him solid on-and off-the ice.

Last year at this time, Dan Hamhuis was lacing up his skates for Team Canada. Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, Patrick Marleau, Drew Doughty and other NHL all-stars took the ice with him at the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Like many boys and girls in Canada, Dan grew up in a hockey-crazy family. Now he was living out a dream—playing for his country on the world's biggest stage.

"I've had the chance to play for Canada eight times in my career," Dan says. "It never gets old putting on the Canadian jersey."

Dan and his teammates didn't disappoint. Their teamwork and passion helped bring home the gold medal to Canada for a record ninth time.

SETBACK TO PERFECT SETUP

Winning Olympic gold has been a highlight for Dan in a career that didn't always go as he had planned.

The Vancouver Canucks defensemen started playing hockey when he was 4 in Smithers, a small town in northern British Columbia.

"I'd play ball hockey on the road in front of our home or on a frozen rink that my dad made in our backyard," Dan says. "I played at school and on our community league team."

As a teenager Dan had the opportunity to play at the B.C.

Winter Games. Coaches and scouts from around the country attended the tournament, looking for the best up-and-coming talent. But a couple of weeks before the competition, Dan broke his leg in a hockey game.

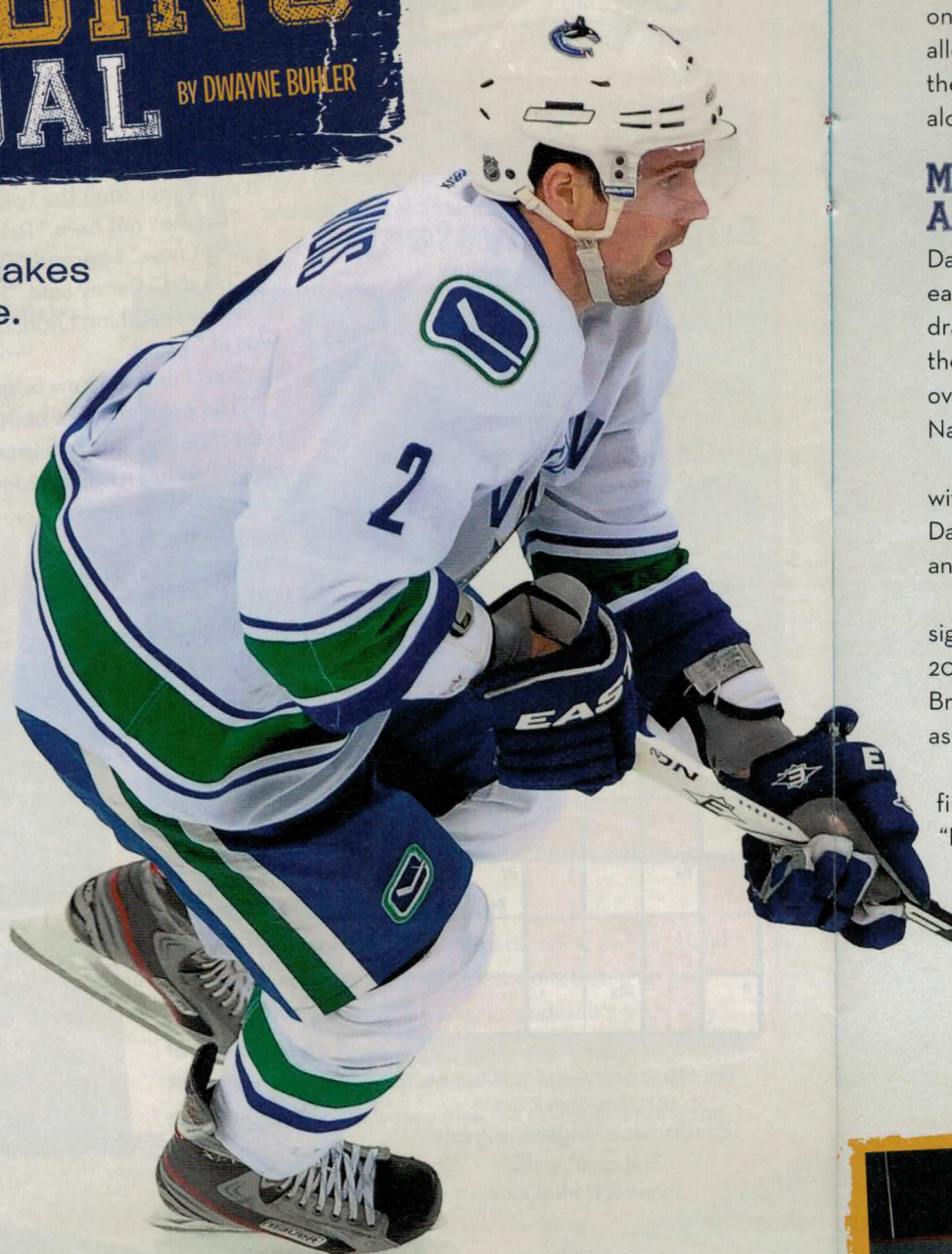
"Looking back, I can see God's hand was in that injury," Dan says. "Because of it I ended up playing my junior hockey in Prince George, where I lived with my uncle and aunt."

Most junior hockey players move

hundreds of miles away from home to improve their skills in this super-competitive league. But at 15, Dan was close enough that his parents could come see him play.

"I had family around me, and that saved me from peer pressure and temptations," Dan says. "I went to a great church and met my wife there."

Dan grew up in a Christian home where God's Word and his faith guided him.



"My faith in Jesus helped me make better decisions," Dan says. "I wouldn't say that I made the right ones all the time. But my upbringing allowed me to make good choices then, and hopefully better ones along the way."

MUSIC CITY AND BEYOND

Dan excelled in juniors, quickly earning all-star status. He was drafted in the first round in 2001 by the Nashville Predators with the 12th overall pick. In 2003, Dan made his National Hockey League debut.

"Nashville was a great city to start, with good friends and teammates," Dan says. "The people are friendly and the team was first class."

After six years in Nashville, he signed with Vancouver before the 2010-11 season. But going back to British Columbia wasn't as smooth as he hoped.

"I got off to a rough start in my first year in Vancouver," Dan says. "I was injured after five games and then again in the middle of the year."

Despite his injuries, the Canucks made it to the

Stanley Cup finals his first season. Dan played an important role in the first 19 games of the playoffs, but watched most of the final series against Boston from the sidelines after he was injured in the first game.

"It was fun to be part of a deep playoff run," Dan says.

The hard-hitting defenseman credits God with helping him through life's hard hits.

"When I look back at my life and think about the different twists and turns, I know that God's hand was in everything," Dan says. "To know that God is in control, even through injuries or setbacks, made me a stronger person."

And a stronger player. Although his main job is to hit (or "check") opposing players and defend the goal, Dan also looks for

opportunities to set up his teammates to score.

Last season, he tallied his

200th assist in the NHL. He's also scored more than 50 goals.

"My faith makes me a better hockey player because I know that what I do on the ice is not what defines me," Dan says. "My faith is what defines me. That way everything doesn't hinge on whether I have a good or a bad game. I don't have to play to impress people. Relying on God and playing for Him makes me push myself and be the best player I can be."

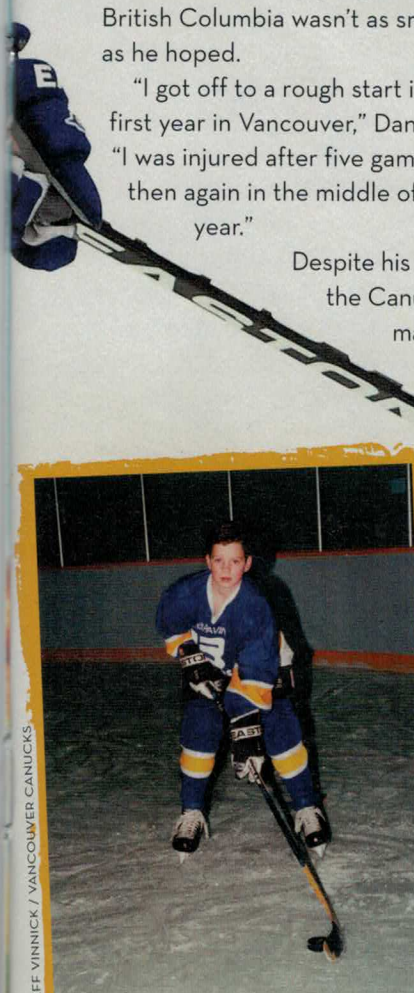
PRACTICE MAKES PROFICIENT

When asked what it takes to become a professional hockey player, Dan said, "You need to practice, practice, practice and then practice some more. But you also need to have fun. You aren't going to be good at anything unless you like it."

"In the summer I played baseball and rode mountain bikes, but every chance I got I would go back to hockey. I've loved the sport my whole life."



Dan enjoys giving back to the Vancouver community by visiting schools.



Dan built his skills through years on the ice.