

IN THE CREASE

BY PIERRE MCGUIRE

The rash of face and eye injuries in recent seasons has led a number of young NHL players to experiment with visors at the world championships, which started last week in Cologne, Germany. Among those using the added protection are **Brad Isbister**, **Patrick Marleau**, **Kyle McLaren**, **Derek Morris**, **Ryan Smythe** and **Joe Thornton**, all of whom are under 25 years old. . . . One of the main reasons **Mario Lemieux's** chronic sore back has not bothered him in the last couple of months has been his new exercise regimen. In February, on the recommendation of former Canadiens trainer **Gaetan Lefebvre**, Lemieux visited Biotonix, a Montreal-based company that does computer analyses of a client's posture. The analysis showed that Lemieux has a postural deviation, so Biotonix gave him an exercise program to strengthen and stretch his back muscles. . . . Many scouts think that the Panthers have the top prospect playing outside the NHL: 6' 1", 190-pound **Kristian Huselius**, a scoring winger who was drafted in the second round in 1997 and who played in Sweden this season, producing 32 goals in 49 games. . . . The Thrashers, who have the No. 1 pick in the June draft, are listening to offers for their choice. General manager **Don Waddell** would want a top goaltender as part of any deal. . . . Capitals star center **Adam Oates** had a good excuse for his subpar showing (no points) in Washington's opening-round loss to the Penguins: He was playing with an injury to his knee and ankle. . . . Rookie referee **Kevin Pollock** is getting rave reviews for his work in the postseason. Along with **Paul Devorski**, Pollock worked Game 1 of the Avalanche-Kings series, in which two penalties were called correctly and fearlessly in overtime. (**Jaroslav Modry's** game-winning goal for Los Angeles came on a power play.) Look for Pollock to call games in the next round.