

Robert's Rant: Canada names final squad, gears up for Belgium next Wednesday]

By Robert Belardi

Opinion

If you're currently over 40 years old, you might have some memory of Canada making the World Cup. If you're over 45 to 50, then surely you might recall the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, when Canada made their first ever World Cup Finals.

It was an incredible time for the men's national team. Canada took on France and lost only 1-0. Don't forget who was on the other side of the pitch at time: probably the best midfielder in the world in Michel Platini.

For many people like us ? and by that, I mean anyone under the age of 35 ? we have no memory of that year.

At the time in 1986, soccer might not have been as popular as it is today. So maybe there are many people who don't remember it because in those times they simply didn't pay attention.

?Super excited to have Canada in the World Cup!! Yes, well over 40 & I totally remember Canada in Mexico '86,? said resident in Caledon Martin Bates, in response to The Citizen's inquiry to the Bolton/Caledon Ontario Community ? Friends and Neighbours Group.

?As for this year's tournament, I'm sure the Toby Jug will have the games on. Fantastic football supporters regularly watch matches there! Let's go Canada!?

Another fan on the Facebook page, Stephanie Bava, wrote, ?It'll be very cool to finally get to watch my country play in the World Cup! Super excited! Go Canada go!?

It's been a long 36-year wait and the time, also may have arrived earlier than expected. With Canada as co-hosts for the 2026 World Cup, there may have been a few of us that said that would be the year we will have finally seen Canada don the red and white in the most illustrious tournament on the planet.

But many of us ? including myself ? were very happily wrong. Because next Wednesday, Canada will take on Belgium to kick things off.

On Monday, Canada officially unveiled their 26-man roster and, of course, the obvious names are on there.

FC Bayern Munich player Alphonso Davies and LOSC Lille forward Jonathan David might be the biggest names this country has on the global stage. But there are other names on the roster to take note of.

Like Atiba Hutchinson for instance. The 39-year-old Brampton native has been with the senior men's national team since 2003, appearing 97 times.

And should his boots touch down on the pitch, he will make World Cup history next Wednesday, to be the oldest player to ever appear in a World Cup Finals match at 39 years, nine months and three days.

The player who previously held that feat was Argentina's Angel Labruna in 1958, having been 39 years, eight months and 18 days old.

That's only one guy. Another player is Leamington, Ont., native Stephen Eustáquio. The Porto FC midfielder has been lights out in

his past five games in all competitions, scoring three times against Boavista F.C., Atlético de Madrid and Club Brugge KV.

There's even Alistair Johnston, who has been exceptional at fullback for Canada. There's Club Brugge midfielder Tajon Buchanan and forward Cyle Larin, who have been having amazing seasons in the Belgium First Division A this year.

There's also 35-year-old Croatian born goaltender Milan Borjan, who has been part of the heart and soul of this roster, even all throughout CONCACAF Qualifying.

Since coming out of World Cup Qualifying on top of the group, with amazing victories against Mexico and even the United States along the way, Canada has a belief under head coach John Herdman and a sense of unity that this country has never seen before in their national soccer team.

And they will need the unity of our great nation beginning next Wednesday. Because with everyone backing Canada, maybe they can take the world by surprise like they just did in qualifying. Maybe they can make noise in a tough group with Belgium, Croatia and Morocco.

Who said it was going to be easy? Nobody did, that's for sure. But mind over matter, right? That's how things get done. It's not all on the skill. It's the will to win and Canada will bring that in every minute of this World Cup. The last time Canada made it, our men's national team didn't score a single goal. This time surely, one player will make Canadian history to be the first man to score in the world cup final.

Their tournament kicks off against Belgium next Wednesday, November 23 at 2:00 p.m. EST. The Canadians will then take on Croatia next Sunday at 11:00 a.m. and then Morocco on December 1 at 10:00 a.m.