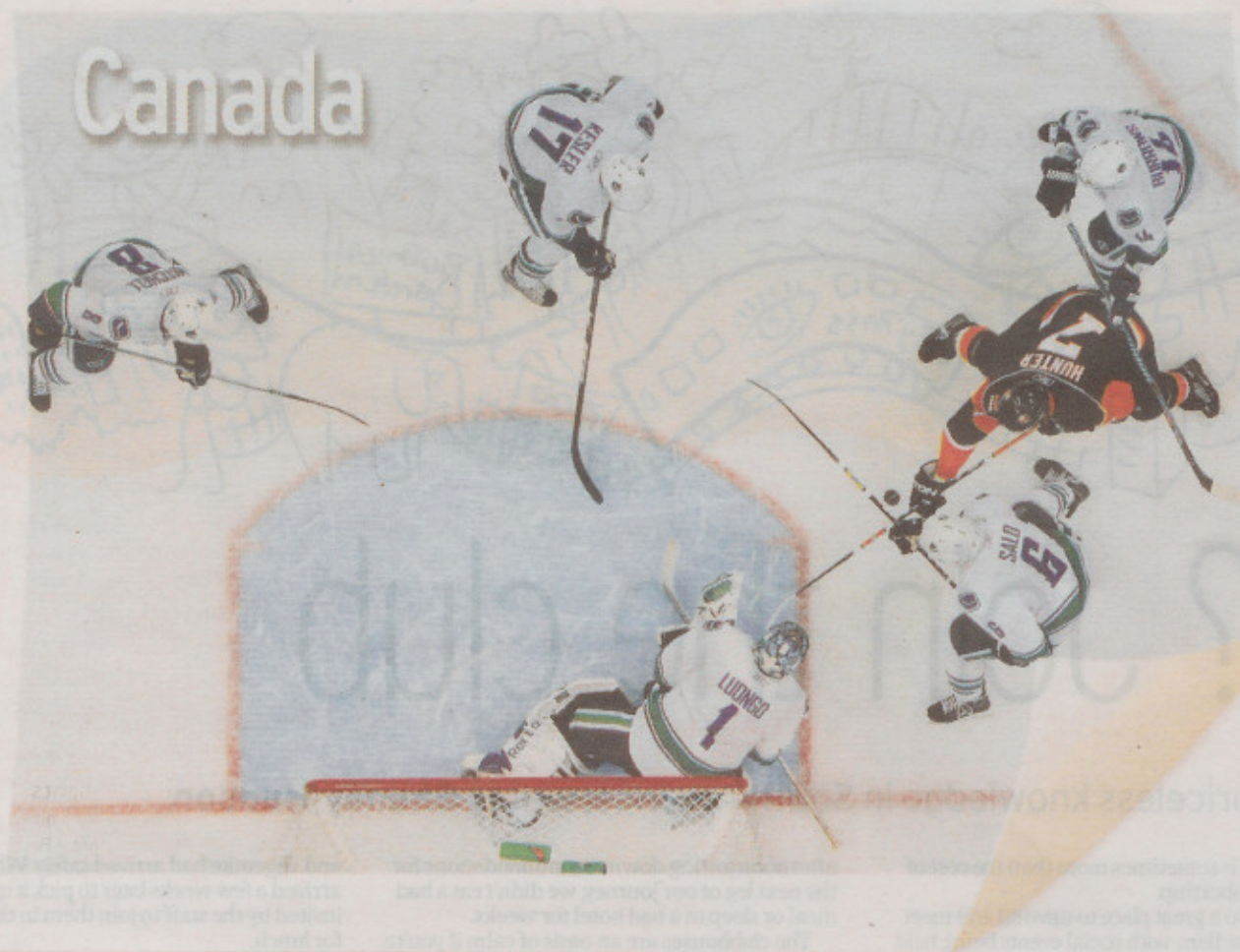


Postcard



Slightly out of whack

Everything seems strangely familiar. A Delta Goodrem track is playing through shopping mall speakers, Bryce Courtenay's latest novel is front and centre in a local book store.

The teens wear hoodies and tats and mooch around with hands in their pockets.

But something is out of kilter. Not way off, just slightly.

Turn on the television on a Saturday morning and there are no fewer than three fishing shows running simultaneously.

Strange. Magazine racks are stocked to the rafters with offerings on ice hockey. Footie mags that don't feature men in helmets are thin on the ground.

Australians feel comfortable in Canada, particularly the British-influenced British Columbia (get it?), which has many parallels with our own country.

The fact the locals are a thirsty

Life in British Columbia is like home with a quirky edge, writes **Winsor Dobbin**.

bunch, with an agreeable sense of humour, adds to the ambience.

The denizens of British Columbia are, however, more than a little bit wacky, which can lead to some eyebrow-raising moments for Australian innocents abroad.

How to explain, for instance, a store called Roots Kids? That's just plain wrong. Or one called the Doggie Style Deli?

We may speak the same language but there are certain subtle differences it pays to be aware of. *Vancouver Magazine*, for instance, in a story on the city's homeless population, revealed they prefer to be referred to as being of NFA (No Fixed Abode). Political correctness is alive and well, even among those who sleep in cardboard boxes.

There are similar differences, not always subtle, when it comes to food.

What to make, for instance, of white chocolate truffles served alongside cider at the Spinnakers Brewpub, or of beautiful pink salmon, perfect for grilling, wrapped up in batter and served as a fish and chip option at Red Fish, Blue Fish, both in the beautiful capital, Victoria?

Or of La Casa Gelato in Vancouver, which serves 218 different flavours including wasabi, cabernet sauvignon, basil and pernod, balsamic vinegar and chanterelle mushroom sorbetto while *That's Amore* blares from the sound system.

Brilliant. Outrageous. Ridiculous. And, I have to admit, the pear and blue cheese gorgonzola ice-cream I had was stunning.

British Columbia – and more particularly Vancouver and the ski resort of Whistler – hosts the Winter Olympic Games in 2010.

Locals are really looking forward to the hockey (known to you and I as hockey, and a national obsession in Canada). Half the workers in Whistler, one of the world's great ski resorts, seem to be from Australia. Budding snowboarders, mountain bikers and skiers thrive on the clear mountain air.

You can tell they've settled well in their new surroundings, because if you ask them how they are enjoying life Whistler-style they say (with an accent already evident) "awesome".

You need to be alert around Whistler, however, as there are bears everywhere. Not cuddly koalas – big black, hungry bears.

But that's British Columbia for you. Something different waits around every corner but it's largely (and strangely) familiar.