

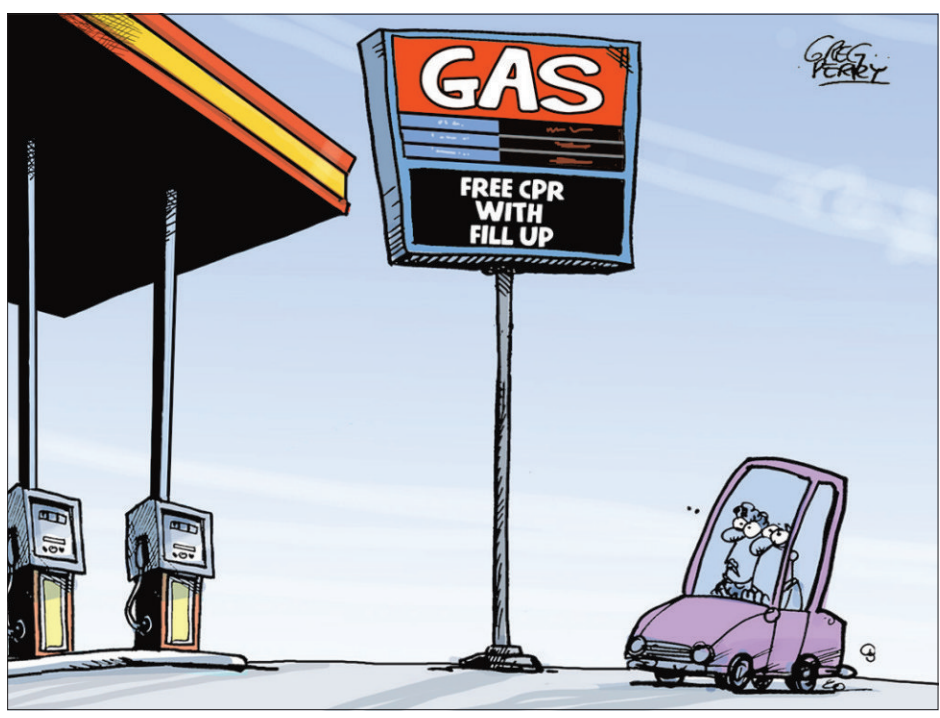
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Face time

Two years to the day the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, B.C. lifted its indoor mask mandate for most settings. Much like the end of testing on demand, it is another tangible sign of our public health leaders moving on to a less restrictive phase in dealing with the virus. Some will welcome the change as a breath of fresh air. For those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, this will feel like an abrogation of responsibility from the provincial health officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry. Wearing a mask is such a small inconvenience when it could be a matter of life and death for someone else. For two years, it was drilled into us to assume we are all just one exhalation away from passing the virus on to someone at

risk of serious illness, and to act accordingly. It could be, with the Omicron variant's shorter incubation period and lower likelihood of hospitalization, that's no longer prudent public health advice. Henry may know that, but it's going to take time for the rest of us to adjust. A stroll around most supermarkets since the mandate was lifted will find the wide majority of people are still masking up, which is good. Businesses are still able to require masks for anyone inside. If that's the case, you should have one in your pocket or purse, ready to don, without complaint. Inevitably, we're all going to find ourselves in close quarters with someone whose position on masks is different from our own. When that happens, default to Henry's best advice of the last two years: Be kind. Be calm. Be safe.



If ever a time to watch Canadian men's soccer, it is now

Does the name Eddy Berdusco mean anything to you?

If it does, then you're probably already fired up for an extremely exciting couple of weeks. If it doesn't, don't worry – you're not alone. Eddy Berdusco, aside from having an A+ sports name, is a former Canadian national men's team soccer player. On June 5, 1994, Berdusco scored the lone goal for Canada in a meaningless exhibition game at Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton. The game ended in a 1-1 tie.

So why are we talking about Eddy Berdusco and a tie in an exhibition game almost 30 years ago? Because that goal came in front of more than 50,000 fans, and it was scored in a tie against the Brazilian national team. About six weeks later, that same Brazilian team was in the Rose Bowl stadium, lifting the World Cup trophy.

For Canadian soccer fans under the age of 45, that may be the greatest thing we've seen the Canadian men's national soccer team do.

Of course, our women's national team has scored some incredible victories, topped off by a gold medal win at the 2020 Olympics (played in 2021) in Tokyo. That inspiring



Laugh All You Want
Andy Prest

group, led by legend Christine Sinclair, has a history of scoring huge victories on the global stage.

But the men? Ehhhhh. ... There was a championship title win at the CONCACAF Gold Cup tournament in 2000. That was cool, but it's not exactly a victory etched into Canadian sporting lore.

And ... that's about it. A Gold Cup, and a tie against Brazil.

You have to go back to 1986 for a bigger men's soccer moment, to Canada's lone appearance at the World Cup. The team's run through qualifying for that 1986 World Cup was certainly stirring, although their actual appearance in the tournament wasn't covered in glory – they didn't score a single goal, and they lost all three of their games.

I don't remember that 1986 World Cup – I was six years old when it happened. But I do remember that Eddy Berdusco goal. In fact, I was there, in the stands, in Edmonton.

That game, in a lot of ways, sums up the

history of Canadian men's soccer. There was some excitement, sure, but nothing of major consequence happened, and most of the fans were cheering for the other team.

On that June day in Edmonton, the stands were packed with Brazilian fans – their drumming was so much fun, and the team was so talented that I think we all were cheering for them at the start of the game. But by the end of the game, the Canadians had won us over with their gutsy draw.

But that's it. That's pretty much all that's happened for the Canadian men. Until now.

If you somehow haven't been watching the national team attempt to qualify for the 2022 World Cup, now is a really great time to get on board. Because the team is, somehow, finally, really good. Like, really really good.

In the final round of World Cup qualifying in the CONCACAF group, they've played 11 games, and they haven't lost one. They've won their last six games, including decisive victories over the United States and Mexico.

They have a super duper star in Alphonso Davies, but they are by no means a one-man team. Davies was out for their last three wins.

Sam Adekunle, Jonathan David, Milan

Borjan, Tajon Buchanan, Cyle Larin, Richie Laryea, Stephen Eustaquio, the immortal Atiba Hutchinson – this is a golden generation, and it's thrilling for fans who have been watching Canadian teams scuff along for decades.

Canada plays its next game March 24 in Costa Rica, and if they win that one, they are in the World Cup. It's as simple as that. Even if they lose that one, they still have two more games after that, and only need one more win. And even if they lose all three, it still would take a miracle to keep them out of the World Cup. But they won't lose them all, because this team is awesome. And yes, it still feels weird to say that with such confidence, but it's true.

It's been a tough couple of months for the Canadian flag – I'm sure many of you still cringe a little when you see a line of vehicles roll by flying flags – but I do predict this team will help bring some glory back to the Maple Leaf. Give this team a look – you'll like what you see. And circle Nov. 21 on your calendar – that's the day of the 2022 World Cup starting, and Canada will be there. That's something I've been waiting my whole life to say.

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