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<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/hellebuyck-us-win-gold-in-milan>

***Hellebuyck, US win gold in Milan
Jets goaltender makes 41 saves to give the United States their first gold in 46 years***

The United States gold medal drought ended today after 46 years.

The primary reason.

Connor Hellebuyck.

The Jets goaltender made 41 saves and Jack Hughes scored at 1:41 of overtime as the Americans beat Canada 2-1 to win the gold medal game in the final event of the 25th Winter Olympic Games.

Jets head coach Scott Arniel was asked on Saturday about what winning a game of this magnitude would mean for the Hart and Vezina winner.

“The more you go through these experiences, when you face them again, (you feel like) ‘I’ve been there and done that.’,” said Arniel.

“For Helle to go through it last year (at the 4 Nations Face-Off) and to go through our seven-game series against St. Louis, with all of the highs and lows of that one, those are all experiences – not just for him but all of his teammates here as well. Hopefully, he rises to the occasion, and he has a great game.”

Hellebuyck was outstanding at 4 Nations but was beaten by Connor McDavid in overtime as Canada won the first best-on-best tournament in 10 years (2016 World Cup). Afterwards this quote from Zach Werenski stood out as to how his American teammates felt about their goaltender.

Hellebuyck answered multiple questions about being able to win a big game and then some. He stopped Connor McDavid on a breakaway in the first period. He made 18 saves in the second period when Canada made their push and started to take over the game.

In the third, he denied Macklin Celebrini on a breakaway. The save of the day and the tournament came off of Devon Toews, as the Avalanche defenceman looked to have Hellebuyck beat but the 32-year-old reached back with his stick and kept the game tied at one.

Hellebuyck was named the best goaltender of the tournament and also to the Olympic All- Star team.

Kyle Connor also gets a gold medal; Josh Morrissey will take home a silver medal.

What a tournament.

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/like-rest-of-canada-toews-ready-for-gold-medal-clash>

***Like rest of Canada, Toews ready for gold medal clash
After winning gold in Vancouver and Sochi, Toews is ready to watch Canada on Sunday morning***

By Jamie Thomas

WINNIPEG – Jonathan Toews resume is loaded with big game experience at many levels. He's played in two Olympic gold medal games, scoring the first goal in 2010 in Vancouver and again in 2014 at Sochi.

He's also faced the Americans in important games, in 2007 at the World Junior Hockey Championship in the semifinals and of course, in 2010 at the Olympics with gold on the line.

Sunday morning though, he will be like you and I watching as a fan when Canada and the United States go head-to-head in Milan. There is a strong chance that the gold medal game will set records for viewing audiences in North America, the final from the 4 Nations Face-Off was watched by 16.1 million people.

"It's the final that, at least, that I wanted, and people in North America wanted. I think it's great for our game, especially in the US. I think it's the game of hockey has grown so much. And I know the final in 2010 Vancouver was great for the game as well," said Toews after the Jets practice on Saturday morning.

"And it's funny to be on the other side of it now, and just see how, everyone's holding their breath, and we're down two nothing against the Finns. And you feel how important is to everyone across Canada in games like that. So obviously, this is the big one. There's some great teams in the tournament, so it hasn't been an easy road for Canada. So definitely be cheering for them tomorrow."

Toews was only 21 when Canada met the U.S. for the gold medal on home soil. Clearly, he had never experienced that type of pressure before. So how does one prepare for the game of a lifetime?

"I can think back to the game in Vancouver, especially where I don't remember getting much sleep that night and basically laying wide awake, and all of a sudden, it's time to go to a game at like 9:30 in the morning. And then, I don't know, you just got to find a way to get to that place where you can just go play, because you have to play the game, you have to execute, and you have to find ways to make plays and kind of just let go of the nerves and the pressure, because, you know the other teams feeling it too," said Toews.

"So, all in all, you know, I get to look back, and it's a pretty special moment, one way or another, to be part of a game like that, and obviously, you want to see Canada get the gold."

Canada jumped out to a 2-0 lead only to watch the Americans fight back to tie it, Zach Parise made it 2-2 with 25 seconds left on the clock. That set the stage for one of the biggest goals in Canadian hockey history with Sidney Crosby giving Canada gold in overtime.

"In the moment when the US tied the game late, I'm not gonna lie. I know a lot of guys said that the feeling was calm in the locker room. And I don't know if I was feeling that a whole lot. I feel like if we're being honest, obviously there were nerves," said Toews.

"And we're just hoping that one guy gets a break and finds where he scores the goal, because obviously can go either way. So, like I said, it was pretty fitting that Sid got it and a pretty huge moment in his career too."

Not everyone is hoping for a third consecutive gold for Canada with NHLer's playing at the Olympics. But Toews says the banter has been pretty friendly for the most part in the Jets dressing room.

"I think with Sally (Salomonsson) and Ville (Heinola) a little trash talking a few days ago. They were pretty confident early on, but I think we knew there was a lot of hockey left to play," said Toews.

"So, I think a couple of guys were asking if I played against anyone in the final. I think playing against Kaner in 2010 obviously got pretty big bragging rights now, but I wasn't too quick to bring it up after the fact, but it's pretty special to be at that level and have some teammates there and watching them do so well."

ICE CHIPS

Neal Pionk was back in a white jersey at practice this morning so that is a good sign for his availability when the Jets get back to action next Wednesday in Vancouver.

"He's ready to go there for Vancouver, which is great news. Having him and (Samberg) back together is a big piece for us," said Scott Arniel.

"Not having him for the last couple of weeks there before the break, when you lose those top four guys, that has a big impact. Him being back and up to speed is a really good sign."

Speaking of top four defencemen, Josh Morrissey won't play in the gold medal game. Obviously, this is devastating news for Morrissey who missed the championship game at 4 Nations Face-Off with an illness.

"It's been the whole tournament, obviously. He was given the chance to play in the first game and then getting hurt, he's pretty frustrated," said Arniel.

"But at the end of the day, you don't want him playing in a game of that magnitude if he's not able to do what he needs to do."

Arniel added that he's not sure about Morrissey's availability for the Jets, but they will have a better idea when Morrissey returns home from Milan.

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/olympics/mike-richter-raves-about-hellebuycks-gold-medal-game-performance>

***Hellebuyck was ‘beyond belief’ for Team USA in gold medal game, Richter says
Former U.S. goalie raves about current starter following 41-save performance against
Canada***

By Shawn P. Roarke

MILAN -- Mike Richter, like everyone else, was flabbergasted when Connor Hellebuyck made the save heard around the hockey world, one of 41 by the latter in Team USA's 2-1 overtime victory against Team Canada in the gold medal game of the men's hockey tournament at the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 at Santaguita Arena on Sunday.

In the opening minutes of the second period, Canada defenseman Devon Toews crept down into the slot, a few feet from Hellebuyck. He had the puck on his stick and an open net in front of him. His quick shot should have resulted in a goal, but it didn't.

Hellebuyck, facing toward the corner, where the puck had come from, reached behind himself and somehow hit the puck with the blade of his stick, leaving the Canadians still in search of a goal.

Richter, the goalie who backstopped the U.S. to a best-on-best win against Canada in the 1996 World Cup of Hockey, saw the save live, watching this generation of Americans try to win Olympic gold for the first time since 1980.

Asked for his thoughts on Hellebuyck's sorcery, Richter shook his head and smiled. Then he invoked the names of some of the greatest goalies to ever play in the Olympics.

He mentioned Patrick Roy, a gold medal winner with Canada. He mentioned Dominik Hasek, whose acrobatics led the Czech Republic to an upset against Canada in the 1998 Olympics. He even mentioned Jim Craig, the iconic U.S. goalie for the "Miracle on Ice" team in 1980.

"I watched it like 10 times on replay, and the key is he doesn't give up on the puck," said Richter, who won consecutive 5-2 games against Canada in 1996. "You look at any great goalie, the Patrick Roys, the Dominik Haseks ... Hasek was amazing and people would say he got lucky; he wasn't. He wouldn't give up."

Hellebuyck didn't give up, even though the odds were stacked against him on the play. Richter knows the desperation of that moment, the split-second decisions, the trust in reflexes.

"It came to Toews pretty quick, and he did a good job of getting that shot off," Richter said. "I don't think he could have done much better at getting the shot off. It seemed like he had an open net, but not when you have a stick there so quickly."

"[Hellebuyck] did exactly what he had to do — he was in perfect position all night long. He wasn't in great position for that, but then it is how much do you want it, and he wanted it."

The U.S. fed off that save and Hellebuyck's confidence throughout the game.

When it was over, defenseman Charlie McAvoy said he pegged the save on Toews as the turning point — not in hindsight, but in the moment.

“I was yelling down the bench, ‘That’s the one,’” McAvoy said. “I was joking it’s the ‘TSN Turning Point.’ That was the one I said, ‘Remember that!’ Then he made a couple of others.”

At times, Hellebuyck’s brilliance seemed to demoralize Canada’s players. They missed multiple opportunities, trying to be too fine around the net.

“You have to tip your hat to their goalie — he played great,” Canada forward Sam Bennett said. “We had a lot of looks. We generated what we wanted, but sometimes the goalie steals it, and he did a great job.”

When the Americans previously won Olympic gold, in 1980, Craig was the hero. In the iconic upset of the Soviet Union, on this very day 46 years ago, he made 36 saves in an improbable 4-3 victory against the best team in hockey.

“He channeled his Jimmy Craig tonight,” McAvoy said of Hellebuyck. “He was unbelievable. He had so many saves, time and time again.”

Richter watched that game as a 9-year-old. It shaped his love of hockey.

He says he thought about Craig in the second period of this game when the ice was tilted heavily in Canada’s favor.

Hellebuyck couldn’t save a rifled shot by Cale Makar that tied the game 1-1, but he stopped each of the 18 other shots he faced in the second. Richter says it was reminiscent of Craig, who held the fort while the Russians came at the Americans in waves.

“In that 1980 game, I think it was [ABC commentator] Ken Dryden said they are really relying on Jim Craig too much; he’s holding them in it,” Richter said. “But there are punches and counter punches in these games with two heavyweight teams like this.

“There’s going to be momentum. You are going to have goal posts and both teams did, missed opportunities. But your goalie better keep you in there until you get your legs, and he did that. The last half of the game, he was beyond belief.”

That brilliance paved the way for the U.S. to win Olympic gold for the first time in 46 years, and third overall.

“This gold is the nation’s goal — not just a Team USA goal, but the whole nation’s goal,” Hellebuyck said.

<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/olympics/martin-brodeur-on-connor-hellebuycks-golden-legacy>

***Hellebuyck builds golden legacy in Team USA win, Brodeur says
2-time Olympic champion believes Jets goalie put stamp on already successful career***

By Martin Brodeur / Special to NHL.com

NHL players are competing at the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026, the first time they've been on this global stage for a best-on-best competition in 12 years. In order to provide an inside look at the Games experience, NHL.com has enlisted former Olympic players, coaches and those around the game to provide insight. Today: two-time Canadian gold medal-winning goalie Martin Brodeur, the NHL's all-time leader in wins and shutouts, and now an executive with the New Jersey Devils.

In one game, as dramatic a one as you'll find, Connor Hellebuyck changed his legacy.

Forever.

No matter what happens in his career from here on in, the Winnipeg Jets goalie finally won something from a team standpoint, that being the gold medal with Team USA at the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

On this Sunday afternoon in Milan, on the grandest of stages, what a time to turn in the performance of a lifetime.

It was Jack Hughes who scored the overtime winner that gave Team USA the 2-1 victory against Team Canada and its first gold medal since the 1980 Miracle On Ice team.

It was Hellebuyck who played a huge role in getting them there, making 41 saves including breakaway stops on Connor McDavid and Macklin Celebrini.

And, thanks to that performance, when you look at the gold medalist goalies for Team USA in history, there's three.

Jack McCartan, 1960.

Jim Craig, 1980.

Connor Hellebuyck, 2026.

Impressive.

Hellebuyck has won three Vezina Trophies, which go to the goalie voted as the best in the NHL, including each of the past two seasons. But there's always been a narrative, rightly or wrongly, about his lack of team titles, including criticism that he has been far too inconsistent in moments that matter including the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

A year ago he played well enough to win in the title game at the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament, helping Team USA force Team Canada to overtime in a 2-2 game. After watching Team Canada's Jordan Binnington make a handful of game-saving stops, Hellebuyck had no chance on McDavid's winner that handed Team USA a gutting 3-2 loss.

Sunday, the roles were switched. This time it was Hellebuyck who triumphed over Binnington, although the Team Canada goalie was very good in defeat.

I'm probably the best example of how Olympic gold can change the way you are perceived.

I'd never won the Vezina until I won my first gold medal with Team Canada. I won four of them after that.

I think people see you a different way when you're on a big stage like that and you perform. And so there's no difference for Connor. I know he's had some success before winning this, but he'd never really won, like, a major tournament or Stanley Cup or whatever.

Look, I know for a fact that it changes the way people see you. Not that they weren't seeing him as one of the best goalies in hockey anyway.

But this puts a stamp on it.

I do think Canada was the better team all day. Hellebuyck was the difference.

Another example of how we goalies can be difference-makers when one is in "the zone."

What is it like when you're in "the zone" like Hellebuyck was?

When you're feeling it like that, that puck seems so big to you. You're able to pick it up out of nowhere. You're able to get in the way of it.

And the opposite is, there are times you can't get in front of it, no matter how hard you try to.

I think when you're in the zone, you just have that feeling that they won't beat you tonight. You rely on your technical skills, how good of an athlete you are, and your reads. You see the puck big. You move across when that puck's coming in, and everybody thinks it's in, but you feel just comfortable enough to get a piece of it.

It's a fun feeling when you feel like that.

But again, the other feeling is pretty bad, too.

You could see it right away he was on his game early. Credit the Americans: They kind of blocked the middle of the ice. They didn't get many chances from the slot early on in the game. And he's so big, they're trying to get one-timers from outside the dots. And he just made it look easy. And next thing you know, he just started feeling good about himself.

Obviously later on in the game I think we had better opportunities, but I think they let him gain that confidence early. And he's good. He's a big goalie that doesn't really move much. He stays pretty in control in his paint. He's allowed to do that because he's so big and technically sound. But you could tell right from the get-go he felt the part.

As for the two breakaways, I think his depth was really good on both. He didn't have to catch up to Connor or Celebrini. He was ahead of Connor, and Connor decided to try to open him up,

getting close to him. As for Celebrini, he kind of missed the shot a little bit. I think he wanted to go a high blocker, but you look at Hellebuyck's positioning, he was right there too.

There were two key plays in the third period with the game tied 1-1.

The first came when Nathan MacKinnon hit the outside of the post when he had an open net. That's hockey. I'm sure no one feels worse than he does. He regularly finishes those off. It happens. He gave the entire tournament everything he had.

Then there's the save on Devon Toews where Hellebuyck was out of position only to reach out and make a stick save with the Team Canada defenseman staring at an open net.

Nine times out of 10, that puck goes in. So give Hellebuyck credit for coming out of his structure and doing what he had to do to make the save.

It's an example of why a goalie should never give up on a play. I tell my son that all the time. It shows you what a competitor Hellebuyck is.

Overall, it was an amazing game, an amazing tournament.

I think the quality of play from both teams, especially Canada, was outstanding. Again, I thought they outplayed the U.S. but they faced a goalie that wouldn't be denied and made some spectacular saves. We had enough opportunities to win this hockey game, but that's what hockey is all about.

Sometimes you get goalied. I know that firsthand.

Either way, when all is said and done, it was great theater.

And in the end, I think the NHL hit a home run on Sunday.

Right now, I'm sure Hellebuyck and Team USA certainly think so.

<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/olympics/olympic-winter-games-milano-cortina-2026-all-star-team>

McDavid, Hellebuyck, Quinn Hughes lead Olympic all-star team

By Jon Lane

Connor McDavid, Connor Hellebuyck and Quinn Hughes will take home medals and individual awards from the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

McDavid was voted most valuable player and best forward of the tournament by attending media. The Edmonton Oilers captain, who for the final two games was Team Canada captain in place of an injured Sidney Crosby, had 13 points (two goals, 11 assists) in six games to break a record shared by Teemu Selanne and Saku Koivu (11 each) at the 2006 Torino Games for most at an Olympics with NHL participation.

The Oilers return from the Olympic break when they visit the Anaheim Ducks on Wednesday. McDavid's 96 points (34 goals, 62 assists) in 58 games lead the NHL, and have him contending for his sixth Art Ross Trophy and fourth Hart Trophy given to the League MVP.

Hellebuyck's 41 saves capped a performance that earned him best goaltender to give Team USA its first Olympic gold medal since the 1980 Lake Placid Games with a 2-1 overtime win against Canada. The Winnipeg Jets goalie broke Ryan Miller's record for saves (36 at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics) in a gold medal game with NHL players. He stopped McDavid on a breakaway in the second period, made a desperation stick save against Devon Toews in the opening minutes of the third and finished 5-0-0-0 with a 1.18 goals-against average and .956 save percentage.

"Hellebuyck was insane," Quinn Hughes, voted best defenseman, said in remarks published by the IIHF website. "You saw the looks they had. Canada's an insane team out there. The game's never been faster. It's never been more skilled. And they've got some special players, Hall of Famers, all over their team."

The Jets visit the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday trailing the Ducks by 11 points for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Western Conference, one season after winning the Presidents' Trophy with an NHL-high 116 points. Hellebuyck, the reigning Hart and Vezina Trophy winner (top goalie), is 13-16-7 with a 2.79 GAA and .900 save percentage.

"It's a dream come true," Hellebuyck told NBC Sports. "I love this group. We had so much fun over here, we grinded, we battled. This is some of the best and most fun hockey ever played. It still hasn't truthfully sunk in. Who knows how long it's going to last? It's surreal."

Hughes of the Minnesota Wild scored in overtime to give the U.S. a 2-1 win against Team Sweden in the quarterfinals. His eight points (one goal, seven assists) tied Sweden's Erik Karlsson (2014 Sochi Olympics) and Brian Rafalski of the U.S. (2010) for the most by a defenseman in a single tournament. Hughes and the Wild return to the NHL with a visit to the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday holding the first wild card in the West.

Quinn's brother, New Jersey Devils forward Jack Hughes, scored the golden goal 1:41 into overtime, giving the U.S. redemption for a 3-2 OT loss to Canada in the championship game of the 4 Nations Face-Off at TD Garden in Boston on Feb. 20, 2025. He and Crosby (2010) are the two players to score in OT of an Olympic goal-medal game with NHL players.

"The USA Hockey brotherhood is so strong," Jack Hughes said. "We have so much support from our players. I'm so proud of the Americans today. USA Hockey, brotherhood, means so much."

The U.S. won Olympic gold for the third time, including the 1960 Squaw Valley Games, and defeated Canada in Milan on the 46th anniversary of when the "Miracle on Ice" team won 4-3 against the Soviet Union, two days before defeating Finland 4-2 for gold.

"This just means so much to all of us and USA Hockey," forward Jack Eichel said, per the IIHF. "There's just so much pride in wearing this jersey and being able to do something special and create our own story here. It's been a long time since USA Hockey was on top of the hockey world, so we're really proud of this moment, and I just can't say enough about the group."

The Olympic All-Star team was rounded out by Canada defenseman Cale Makar, Canada forward Macklin Celebrini and Team Slovakia forward Juraj Slafkovsky.

Makar's six points (two goals, four assists) tied 2026 teammate Drew Doughty (2014), Shea Weber (2010 and 2014), Dan Boyle (2010) and Duncan Keith (2010) for most by a Canada defenseman during a single tournament with NHL players. His goal that tied it 1-1 on Sunday made him the sixth at his position to score in a gold medal game with NHL participation (Kimmo Timonen, Nicklas Lidstrom, Niklas Kronwall, Rafalski and Petr Svoboda). His 15 goals are tied for fifth in the NHL among defensemen with the Avalanche, who resume their schedule at the Utah Mammoth on Wednesday.

WATCH: Men's Hockey Highlights from the Olympic Winter Games

Celebrini, a 19-year-old forward with the San Jose Sharks, had 10 points (five goals, five assists), second in the Olympics behind McDavid. His 81 points (28 goals, 53 assists) are fourth in the League and have the Sharks contending for their first playoff berth since 2019. San Jose continues its regular season at home against the Calgary Flames on Thursday.

Slafkovsky's eight points (four goals, four assists) for fourth-place Team Slovakia were the third most by a Montreal Canadiens skater in an Olympic tournament with NHL players behind Saku Koivu (11 in 2006 and 10 at Nagano in 1998). He has 45 points (21 goals, 24 assists) in 57 games with the Canadiens second in the Atlantic Division ahead of their home game against the New York Islanders on Thursday.

The Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 All-Star Team

Most Valuable Player

Connor McDavid, Team Canada

Tournament Directorate Three Best Players

Best Goalie: Connor Hellebuyck, Team USA

Best Defenseman: Quinn Hughes, Team USA

Best Forward: Connor McDavid, Team Canada

Media All-Star Team

Goalie: Connor Hellebuyck, Team USA

Defenseman: Quinn Hughes, Team USA

Defenseman: Cale Makar, Team Canada

Forward: Connor McDavid, Team Canada

Forward: Macklin Celebrini, Team Canada

Forward: Juraj Slafkovsky, Team Slovakia

<https://www.nhl.com/news/topic/olympics/united-states-canada-2026-olympics-gold-medal-game-recap-february-22-2026>

Jack Hughes scores in OT, Team USA wins Olympic gold medal game against Canada Devils forward wins it at 1:41, Hellebuyck makes 41 saves; Crosby misses game with injury

By Shawn P. Roarke

MILAN -- The United States has a new Golden Generation.

Jack Hughes is the poster boy after he scored one of the most dramatic goals in Olympic hockey history, 1:41 into overtime to give Team USA a 2-1 win against Team Canada in the gold medal game of the men's hockey tournament at the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 at Santagiulia Arena on Sunday.

The goal, off a pass from Zach Werenski during 3-on-3 play, slid through the five-hole of Canada goalie Jordan Binnington and delivered the much-awaited gold medal for this American squad, placing it on the same pedestal as the 1980 "Miracle on Ice" team. The win came on the 46th anniversary of the improbable 4-3 victory against the Soviet Union during the medal round in Lake Placid, New York.

"I can't even believe this," said Hughes, smiling despite losing a few teeth when he was high-sticked earlier in the game. "I mean, it's such an unbelievable game, USA-Canada. That's such a good game. They have so many great players. We're a great team.

"That's exactly how we wanted it to go. We wanted to go through Canada and beat them. It's an unbelievable win for the Americans."

Canada had not lost an Olympic game involving NHL players since the 2010 Vancouver Games, when the Americans defeated the Canadians in round-robin play. Canada got revenge in overtime of that tournament, winning on a Golden Goal by Sidney Crosby. Four years later, it defeated Sweden for gold.

Pandemonium broke out after the Hughes' goal; the players leaping onto the ice in waves, tossing equipment into the sky, bearhugging the New Jersey Devils forward along the wall in front of the penalty box.

The Team USA goal song, "Free Bird," played in the background, fighting with the "USA, USA," chants from the crowd.

"There is no better feeling in the world," said U.S. defenseman Charlie McAvoy, wrapped in an American flag. "This is that. I can't wait to see the footage of what happened after we scored because it was a complete blackout, who I was hugging, where I was going.

"It was just euphoria, man. I can't even explain what I was feeling. Just pure joy."

Jack Hughes #86 of Team United States celebrates after their gold-medal win during the Men's Gold Medal match between Canada and the United States on day 16 of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic games at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena on February 22, 2026 in Milan, Italy.

Hughes was in the spotlight afterwards, but the victory was built on the back of goalie Connor Hellebuyck, who made 41 saves, many of the highlight-reel variety, especially during a 19-8 advantage by Canada in the second period.

"Oh my gosh, they will be talking about this performance for generations," U.S. forward Matthew Tkachuk said of Hellebuyck. "It was an all-time performance from a superstar at his position. It'll go down as one of the best performances of all-time, right up there with Jimmy Craig (Team USA goalie in 1980). If we don't have him, we don't win."

The biggest save of the game came in the opening minutes of the third period. Defenseman Devon Toews was in the slot, the puck on his stick, looking at an empty net. As he shot, Hellebuyck stretched his stick behind him in a final act of desperation and the puck struck it, skittering away from the net.

"I haven't even seen it, but if he saved it, it's a great save" Toews said after the game. "Honestly, I don't know how Mitch [Marnier] put it on my tape. I just felt it there and tried to shovel it in and it didn't go in. We had five or six of those kind of looks tonight, and we just couldn't put it in."

Hellebuyck said, "It's not the first stick save of my career, but it is the biggest stick save of my career. "When I'm rolling back and the puck is not in the net, it is just an overwhelming feeling of, 'I got this.'"

Cale Makar scored, and Binnington made 26 saves for Canada, which played without Crosby, its captain, for a second straight game because of a lower-body injury he sustained in the quarterfinals against Team Czechia.

"It was pretty close," Crosby said. "Ultimately, I wasn't able to go out there and do what I needed to do in order to help the team. At that point you have to make a decision that's best for the group. It's not an easy one, but that's hockey."

Makar tied at 1-1 at 18:16 of the second period with a snap shot that picked the far corner.

Connor McDavid, the leading scorer in the tournament, had a breakaway in the first period but was denied by Hellebuyck. Nathan MacKinnon had a Grade-A chance at an open net in the third but missed.

Canada had defeated the USA each time they met in a tournament-deciding game since the 1996 World Cup Final, including an overtime victory in the 4 Nations Face-Off championship last season.

"I look at this game, and I am so proud of what went on," Canada coach Jon Cooper said. "I'm proud of our country, proud of our players, proud of our team. In the end, you are going to read the book that USA won the gold in Olympic hockey and Canada won the silver, but in the grand scheme of things, the big winner was ice hockey. I think that is what we should all take out of this."

Matt Boldy gave the U.S. a 1-0 lead at 6:00 of the first, flipping the puck between Makar and Toews before gaining position on the latter and deked to his backhand before pushing the puck past Binnington.

Hellebuyck helped force overtime by stopping all 14 shots he faced in the third.

"I'm just so lucky to be a part of this generation right now of USA Hockey," McAvoy said. So many generations before us, unbelievable players, the guys we looked up to, they didn't get it done. They paved the way for us, but they weren't able to get it done.

"We've been thinking about those guys. They've been in the locker room telling us, 'It's your guys' turn, get it done.' And we got it done, man. It just feels so surreal right now."

NOTES: Hughes joined Crosby (2010) as the only players to score in overtime of an Olympic gold medal game with NHL participation. ... Boldy's goal was the fastest to start a gold medal game in an Olympics with NHL players; Tony Amonte (U.S.) scored at 8:49 against Canada in 2002. ... Ryan Miller stopped 42 shots in a round-robin game against Canada in 2010, the only American goalie with more saves than Hellebuyck in an Olympics with NHL players. ... Canada's 19 shots in the second were the most by one team in a period during a gold medal game; it had 17 in the second against the U.S. in 2002.

Winnipeg Free Press

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/23/he-can-show-up-in-big-games>

'He can show up in big games' Jets hope netminder Hellebuyck's gold medal win quells critics

By: Ken Wiebe

Adam Lowry has seen this film before — or a real-time version of it — on numerous occasions.

So, as goalie Connor Hellebuyck was being celebrated globally after his exceptional showing in the Olympic gold medal game, the captain of the Winnipeg Jets wasn't the least bit surprised to see his longtime teammate shine in the biggest moment of his hockey career.

"We've been saying this for a few years now: we think he's the best goalie in the world," said Lowry. "Sometimes, he gets unfairly criticized for our team's performance in the playoffs and I think he went out and showed that he can show up in big games and he can win you big games and that's what we've grown accustomed to.

"We've been so fortunate to see his entire career here; sometimes I think we take it for granted how great he is, how easy he makes the game look.

"The biggest thing with him is he's so calm, he's so poised, he's so big in the net," Lowry continued. "But he reads the play so well that he needs to make these cross-ice saves on seam passes — he's already read it, he's there on his feet, he's square. Then when he needs to make an otherworldly save, he seems to be able to reach back in his back pocket and scoop it off the line."

The paddle save off Canadian defenceman Devon Toews was the latest highlight-reel special Hellebuyck provided early in the third period, but the bulk of the 41 stops he made were of the vintage variety.

"I mean, he stood on his head," said Jets forward Nino Niederreiter, who suited up in the Olympics for Switzerland. "He was the Hellebuyck everybody knew, and it was good for him to be as great as he was in a big moment like that."

Jets head coach Scott Arniel was cheering for his home country, but had a rooting interest in how Hellebuyck played as well.

"The biggest thing I was hoping for was that he was going to be at his best, then sort of let the chips fall where they may," said Arniel. "We've seen it. Everyone in Winnipeg and Manitoba has

seen this. When he gets on (a roll) like that, he almost gains more confidence as the game goes.

“He was a wall. He was outstanding and well deserving of that gold medal.”

Arniel was blown away by the talent that was on display as NHLers were involved in the Olympics for the first time since 2014.

“In my lifetime, I’ve gotten to see some great hockey games. All of the way back, I remember my school gymnasium, everybody watching that ’72 (Summit) Series. I know I’m aging myself but I remember watching those games,” said Arniel.

“That game (Sunday), that was right up there with one of the best again. When you’ve got best on best around the world playing, the whole tournament I thought was so exciting. The games were fast, highly skilled, and that one (on Sunday) hits a lot of people hard emotionally on both sides. But yeah. Special. That was a special game.”

As for the narrative that Hellebuyck hasn’t been able to deliver in the big moment, Sunday’s showing should help quiet the critics.

“Anytime the stats fall off just a little bit, people start asking, ‘What’s going on with Connor?’” said Lowry. “But I think it’s more a team thing, where it becomes what’s going on in front of him.

“His level of play very rarely drops off, even if a little. He showed up. Talking to buddies before the game, they were asking me who I thought was going to win and I just said, ‘It’s tough to bet against Helly. It’s tough to bet against the best goalie in the world.’”

Having someone like Hellebuyck on the roster as dialled in as he was during the Olympics is one of the reasons the Jets remain encouraged about the prospect of taking a shot at a playoff spot during the stretch drive.

“The confidence that he has in himself doesn’t waver,” said Lowry. “To know his game’s at an elite level at the world stage, I’d expect he can carry that over coming back to us.”

That sprint includes 26 games in 51 days, beginning on Wednesday against the Vancouver Canucks as the Jets open a three-game road trip that also includes tilts against the Anaheim Ducks and San Jose Sharks.

The Jets are currently 11 points behind the Ducks (who hold the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference) and they won’t have the benefit of easing into things coming out of the break.

“We all know what’s at stake,” said Niederreiter. “So, it’s game by game, as cliché as it sounds. But that’s all the mentality we’ve got to have. It’s playoff hockey from here on out, and we know the record we’ve got to be at to give ourselves a chance to get in.”

Arniel has referenced several recent examples of teams that rallied from a seemingly insurmountable deficit to make the playoffs, including the St. Louis Blues of last season.

That Blues team pushed the Jets to the limit before they were eliminated from the opening round matchup in double overtime on a goal from Lowry that was only possible because

Winnipeg scored twice with the net empty in favour of an extra attacker in the waning moments of the seventh and deciding game.

“We’ve got to make a run here,” said Arniel. “Our schedule kind of lines up where we’re playing a lot of these teams that are just above us and in and around that area. It’s every other day. So, it’s going to be a grind.

“But it’s also something that if we can get on a roll like we saw some teams last year, we saw St. Louis do it, a team we played in the playoffs, the year before we saw Nashville do it. Some real great examples in our division. Just try to stay in the moment. Not worry about how big the hill is, we’ve got to just take our steps as we start to climb it.”

To that end, the Jets have spent much of the past week involved in a mini training camp, making a few tweaks to the system that they plan to break out later this week.

“You feel like you’re able to get back up to speed,” said Lowry. “It allows you to come back feeling your best going into that first game out of the (Olympic) break.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/23/jets-wednesday-night-roster-up-in-the-air>

Jets’ Wednesday night roster up in the air Niederreiter in, Morrissey out as club set for season homestretch

By: Ken Wiebe

Not only did an injury knock Josh Morrissey out of the majority of the Olympics, it’s unclear when the star defenceman might be able to return to the Winnipeg Jets lineup.

Morrissey, who is fourth in team scoring with 10 goals and 42 points in 56 games while averaging nearly 25 minutes of ice time per game, is dealing with an upper-body injury that limited him to just one period and change of action in Italy with Team Canada.

The full severity of his ailment won’t be determined until after he is examined by team doctors.

What we do know is that Morrissey won’t be suiting up as the Jets open a three-game road trip on Wednesday against the Vancouver Canucks.

“For sure he won’t be in Vancouver and we’ll see where we’re going from there,” Jets head coach Scott Arniel said on Monday afternoon.

Should Morrissey be sidelined for an extended period of time, it would be a significant blow to the Jets slim playoff chances.

Arniel confirmed that Eric Comrie would be between the pipes against the Canucks and that the plan, at least for the time being, was for Connor Hellebuyck to start against the Anaheim Ducks on Friday.

However, that plan could be in flux depending on how everything shakes down with the proposed visit to the White House for the U.S. men’s hockey team that won the gold medal on Sunday in Milan.

The Jets are expecting to get Neal Pionk back from a lower-body injury on Wednesday, but fellow blue-liner Haydn Fleury won't likely be an option until later in the road trip, at the earliest.

Goalie Dom DiVincentiis is expected to dress as Comrie's backup on Wednesday, though it's too early to tell if defenceman Ville Heinola or Walker Duehr will remain on the roster.

The status of Kyle Connor for Wednesday's game is also up in the air, since Team USA is scheduled to visit the White House on Tuesday.

Although Connor was vehement about returning to the Jets lineup immediately after the 4 Nations Face-Off, that tournament was held in North America.

Things could be a bit more complicated this time around as it pertains to the logistics.

"Everybody's in a holding pattern," said Arniel. "We have to see. We'll see where we're at on the (defensive) side. I'm not pushing this off, I've got to see exactly where everybody's travelling to, who's going to be available."

Fellow Olympian Nino Niederreiter is going to play after he returned to skate with his teammates on Monday for the first time since Switzerland was eliminated after a 3-2 overtime loss to Finland.

Niederreiter, who had one goal in four games in Milan, was encouraged by what he saw from his home country as NHLers returned to the Olympics for the first time since 2014.

"In prior Olympics, I feel like Switzerland always got taken very lightly, and I feel like this year, we gave a good push, and I feel like everybody respected us and the way we play," said Niederreiter. "I think that's something which we accomplished and we were very proud of."

"Last game against the Finns, (that) was one we should have taken home, which was kind of frustrating. But at the same time, I felt pretty good about Swiss hockey."

Niederreiter confirmed the pace was as frenetic as it looked on television.

"It was extremely fun," said Niederreiter, who has eight goals and 19 points in 55 games with the Jets this season. "Obviously, you could tell that the ice surface was a little bit smaller. There's a little bit less room than you're kind of used to, but at the same time it was extremely fast. Everybody was going I feel like 100 miles an hour. And it was a great competition."

The inspiration that comes from competing in an event like the Olympics has Niederreiter feeling rejuvenated as he returns for a stretch run that will feature 26 games over the span of 51 days.

"Absolutely," he said. "For me personally, I wasn't extremely happy with how things are going so far with my own performance. So, it's definitely something (where) it was kind of good to regroup as well and hopefully we put a couple of great games together here."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/22/i-felt-i-was-doing-everything-right-hellebuyck-leads-usa-to-gold>

'I felt I was doing everything right': Hellebuyck leads USA to gold

By: Mike McIntyre

MILAN — On the biggest stage, under the brightest lights, with the weight of an entire nation on his back, Connor Hellebuyck proved he can elevate his game to the highest level — and deliver when it matters most.

The Winnipeg Jets netminder backstopped the United States to Olympic gold Sunday afternoon, stopping 41 of 42 shots in an instant classic that ended with a 2-1 overtime victory to close out the Milano Cortina Games.

“Oh my gosh, they’re going to be talking about this performance for generations,” said U.S. forward Matthew Tkachuk.

“It was an all-time performance from a superstar at his position. It’s gonna go down as one of the best performances of all time — it has to.”

While Jack Hughes will forever be etched in history for scoring the golden goal during a brief three-on-three session for all the marbles, make no mistake: Hellebuyck is the only reason the Americans even got this beyond regulation.

His personal highlight reel included stoning Connor McDavid on a breakaway, robbing Macklin Celebrini on another solo dash, and then committing grand theft larceny against Devon Toews with a diving paddle save.

Just another day at the office? Hardly — though Hellebuyck admitted he sensed something special early.

“It’s crazy, I came into this game, probably one of the biggest of my career, and the second I woke up (Sunday) morning I felt I was doing everything right,” he said.

“I was stepping in the right spot, every step I took I felt right. It kinda translated.”

From walking the walk — quite literally — to talking the talk, Hellebuyck also explained the save that will live on forever.

“You know, it’s not my first stick save in my career. But it’s probably the biggest moment to make a stick save,” he said.

“But, you know, when I’m rolling back and puck’s not in the net, it’s just an overwhelming feel of ‘I got this.’”

There was a sweetness to the moment for Hellebuyck, who has long heard whispers in hockey circles questioning whether he’s a “big-game goalie.” Despite a résumé that includes a Hart Trophy, two Jennings and three Vezina Trophies, he has yet to lead the Jets to the Stanley Cup and has struggled at times in the playoffs.

“Those critics, they can keep writing,” Hellebuyck said when asked about his reputation.

“But they don’t understand goaltending. They definitely don’t understand my game. I know what I’m putting forward. I know what I’m building. These are the moments that prove it — not that I need to, but these are the moments I enjoy and this is why I play the game.”

U.S. defenceman Zach Werenski, who trains with Hellebuyck in Michigan during the off-season, said several narratives should finally be put to rest.

“He showed the world why he’s the best goalie in the world,” he said. “I honestly don’t know if I have ever seen a goalie performance like that. Whatever people say about him, I think he put it to rest and I’m happy about that.”

Hellebuyck was his big-and-boring best against Canada, unflappable amid the chaos around his crease. The only puck that beat him was a wicked wrister from Cale Makar late in the second period.

“He’s a stud, and I was telling him in between each TV timeout that he’s the best in the world,” said American forward Brock Faber.

“We all know it. And I just kept telling him, you’re the best in the world. He would just smile and nod and say, ‘I know.’”

How relaxed was he? Defenceman Quinn Hughes laughed while recalling Hellebuyck falling asleep on the team bus earlier in the tournament as they headed from the athlete’s village to the rink ahead of a must-win quarterfinal game against Sweden.

“I was like, ‘We’re good with this guy.’ He’s very relaxed. Kind of since that moment I was like, ‘This guy, he’s going to be good,’” said Hughes, who described Hellebuyck “an absolute maniac” with his play.

Indeed, Hellebuyck was sensational throughout the tournament, playing five of six games, facing 137 shots and stopping 131 of them for a staggering .956 save percentage.

“He channeled his Jimmy Craig,” said U.S. defenceman Charlie McAvoy — a nod to the famous American puck-stopper from that incredible 1980 men’s team that was the last to claim Olympic gold.

“He was unbelievable. He had so many saves. Like the one in the third on Toews, we’re going down the bench saying ‘That’s the one.’ And then he made a couple more. There were times in this game for sure when we were on our heels. It’s hockey. You need good goaltending and we got it. He’s the best player in the league, and we have him on our side.”

How’s this for some serendipity: Sunday marked the 46th anniversary of the epic “Miracle On Ice” game at Lake Placid. One of the members of that team — Jets 1.0 forward Dave Christian — was at the rink in Italy to watch his nephew, Brock Nelson, make some more hockey history.

Nelson was fighting back tears as he spoke about the family connection — while also giving Hellebuyck a shout-out for making it all possible.

"I think everyone saw the stick save. He's an unbelievable goalie," said Nelson, who came close to becoming a teammate of Hellebuyck's at the trade deadline last March, only to be shipped from the New York Islanders to the Colorado Avalanche instead.

"We had all the confidence in him every game here. He gave us a chance to win, and (Sunday) was a prime example of that."

Hellebuyck's road to gold wasn't seamless. He began the NHL season with lingering knee pain, eventually undergoing arthroscopic surgery in November and briefly wondering whether his Olympic hopes were in jeopardy.

"You know, at the time, there were scary moments, never having a big injury," Hellebuyck said.

"There was some doubt whether it was going to affect my game. But that process played its way out. It was just water on a duck's back."

Hellebuyck will share this gold medal with Jets teammate and fellow Michigan product Kyle Connor, who didn't play nearly the same role: He was a healthy scratch on Sunday for a fourth straight game, appearing in just the first two outings, with no points and no shots.

This triumph also carried a dose of ice-cold revenge for Hellebuyck and his teammates.

One year earlier, he was beaten in overtime at the 4 Nations Face-Off Final by McDavid, with Jordan Binnington in the opposite crease. The same matchup resurfaced Sunday, adding another chapter to a growing duel that already includes last spring's Jets–St. Louis Blues "Manitoba Miracle" playoff epic.

"It's cool to have a rivalry like that and battle. We've had some special moments competing," said Binnington.

Hellebuyck arrived in Italy amid questions about whether he'd even be the starter. The Jets' struggles and a dip in his numbers added fuel to the doubt. Instead, U.S. coach Mike Sullivan looked prescient for riding Hellebuyck over Jeremy Swayman and Jake Oettinger.

"I think Connor was part of the foundation of this group from the get-go," said Sullivan.

"Dating back to the 4 Nations and throughout the course of this tournament. Just a high stakes player in a high stakes environment. I think that's when players build their legacy. Connor certainly did that (Sunday)."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/22/canada-finds-no-solace-in-second-place-after-2-1-olympic-hockey-loss-to-usa>

Canada finds no solace in second place after 2-1 Olympic hockey loss to USA

By: Mike McIntyre

MILAN — There were no silver linings for Canada. No solace in second place. No comfort or salvation in what coulda, shoulda been.

Sure, you could argue they deserved a better fate, given how much they controlled play for large stretches of Sunday's gold-medal clash against the United States. But hockey can be cruel that way.

The final scoreboard — United States 2, Canada 1 — is ultimately all that mattered.

As players quietly shuffled through the mixed zone Sunday evening, solemn and stunned, heads down, barely noticing the silver medals hanging around their necks or the small plush Olympic souvenir mascots they'd been handed moments earlier, the sense of heartbreak was palpable.

You could hear it in the few who stopped to speak, struggling to find the words. None more so than Nathan MacKinnon, haunted by a missed opportunity midway through the third period.

"Sad. Disappointed. Just couldn't finish, didn't have that touch. I missed a wide-open net," he said.

"I thought we generated so many looks. It felt like it really wasn't meant to be. It felt like a really good opportunity slipped away. It's going to be a long time before we can try to get this one back, and obviously with a much different team, I'm sure. So it's just sad, for sure."

Winnipegger Mark Stone was practically talking in a whisper, the disappointment written all over his face.

"It sucks. It really sucks," he said.

"I thought it was one of our best games of the tournament. Thought we really controlled the majority of the game. We just couldn't get that extra goal."

Canada sure had its chances, including a 5-on-3 for 93 seconds that shockingly came up empty in the second period. Then, another chance on the man advantage in the dying minutes of the third period, with the likes of MacKinnon, Connor McDavid, Macklin Celebrini, Cale Makar and Sam Reinhart unable to click.

"At the end of the day, we didn't capitalize. We didn't bury our looks," said Celebrini, the 19-year-old phenom who had a tournament to remember despite the unfortunate way it ended.

"I didn't bury the looks I had. Had a lot of good guys set me up and I couldn't finish."

Devon Toews had the best chance of all, only to be robbed by American goaltender Connor Hellebuyck.

"We had a great game, had a great tournament. We were trying to get this one for our country and for this group here," said Toews.

"Hockey's such a cruel game, it's hard to win at every level. You can control play all you want, but you have to score goals, and (Sunday) we just weren't able to."

Adding to the sense of “what if” was the fact Canada — which had to replace the injured Brayden Point and Anthony Cirelli before the Olympics began — was without two more key players who went down during the Games.

Captain Sidney Crosby was unable to recover enough from a lower-body injury he suffered in Wednesday’s quarterfinal against Czechia, despite Herculean efforts on behalf of himself and team doctors and trainers.

“He didn’t think he could battle properly and do the little things he felt like he needed to do,” said MacKinnon.

“So it was tough for him to not play, because he could have just said he wanted to play just for himself, but he put the team and country first, like he always does. But it definitely sucks not having our leader in there.”

Crosby, who scored the golden goal the last time these two countries met for Olympic gold in Vancouver 2010, said he wrestled with the decision, especially knowing this could be his last Olympics.

“Obviously in your head you always want to be out there and find every way possible. But not at the expense of what needs to be done,” said Crosby.

“(Final Olympics) might’ve crossed my mind a little bit. But ultimately I think it was about what’s best for our group and what gives us the best chance to win. If I’m not able to go, I’m not gonna compromise our team, put myself ahead of that. Might’ve crossed my mind but ultimately that’s not how you make your decision.”

His good friend and Canadian teammate, Brad Marchand, said the group tried to rally around Crosby.

“You feel bad letting a guy like that down,” he said. “Just one of the best ever to play, one of the best leaders to ever play the game. Wish we could have got it done for him.”

Then there’s the case of Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey, whose Olympics ended before they really got going. Morrissey suffered an upper-body injury in Canada’s first game against Czechia and never fully recovered. He looked close to a return last week, only to suffer a setback.

“In the end if you’re not physically able to do it — and the one selfless thing about this team and the way I’ve watched these players...when it comes to the flag, nobody’s getting in the way,” said Canadian coach Jon Cooper.

“If they’re not capable of giving what they think is optimal effort, they don’t want to put the country at harm. They understand what we have here. Josh, in the end, he just wouldn’t be able to perform at what he could. We made the decision.”

Making this even more difficult is the fact Morrissey missed last year’s 4 Nations Face-Off Final with illness.

“Oh my gosh. That’s a tough one,” said Cooper. “This is (the second time) in a year now we’ve had the same conversation and I feel for him. He’s just an all-world kid and hell of a hockey player.”

Morrissey will bring one of four silver medals back to Manitoba, along with Stone, Winnipegger Seth Jarvis and Elkhorn's Travis Sanheim.

The Games are over but debate will no doubt continue about the roster Canada took to Italy, especially when they ultimately came up a goal short.

Might a Mark Scheifele or a Connor Bedard up front or a Matthew Schaefer or Evan Bouchard on the back end have made a difference? We'll never know.

"It's extremely disappointing. You dream about these moments, and it didn't go our way," said forward Sam Bennett, who took a four-minute high-sticking penalty in the third period which Canada ultimately killed off. "The team pushed. We gave everything we had, and unfortunately, it wasn't enough."

Added veteran defenceman Drew Doughty, who most certainly just played in his final Olympics: "Shocking. I really thought we played a hell of a game. I thought it was going to turn out different."

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/21/morrissey-ruled-out-for-gold-medal-game>

Morrissey ruled out for gold medal game

'In the end, he just wouldn't be able to perform at what he could': coach Jon Cooper

By: Mike McIntyre

MILAN — Josh Morrissey's Winter Olympics are over.

The Winnipeg Jets defenceman has been ruled out for Sunday's gold medal clash between Canada and the United States due to a mysterious upper-body injury he suffered early in his team's first game.

"Listen, we want Josh in this game and helps us. Puck mover, everything he does," coach Jon Cooper said following Saturday's practice in Milan, which was closed to the media ahead of the pivotal showdown.

"In the end if you're not physically able to do it — and the one selfless thing about this team and the way I've watched these players ... when it comes to the flag, nobody's getting in the way. If they're not capable of giving what they think is optimal effort, they don't want to put the country at harm. They understand what we have here.

"Josh, in the end, he just wouldn't be able to perform at what he could. We made the decision."

It would be a difficult enough pill to swallow for Morrissey in a vacuum. But considering he also missed last February's 4 Nations Face-Off Final with illness — also against the United States — the timing feels downright cruel.

"Oh my gosh. That's a tough one," said Cooper.

“This is (the second time) in a year now we’ve had the same conversation and I feel for him. He’s just an all-world kid and hell of a hockey player.”

Earlier this week, Morrissey appeared to be nearing a return — particularly after Tuesday’s practice, where he was flying around the rink and skating in his usual second-pairing spot alongside Colton Parayko. Morrissey spoke with reporters afterward, saying he felt great and hoped to play in Wednesday’s quarterfinal.

“Just taking it day-by-day. A good practice here. Just trying to get ready for the rest of the tournament the best I can,” he said.

Cooper, who had told reporters after the first game “by no means are his Olympics over” clearly liked what he saw as well.

“That was a big thing for him to get out here today. In my opinion he looked great. But (no decision) until after I talk to him,” said Cooper.

Yet when the puck dropped Wednesday against Czechia, Morrissey was not in the lineup.

He skated with the team again Thursday, but left the ice as soon as the formal session ended, not staying out for extra work with most of his teammates. Curiously, team PR officials initially planned to make him available to the media, only to reverse course.

Morrissey was again sidelined for Friday’s semifinal against Finland, with Cooper still classifying him as day-to-day.

Clearly, there was some kind of setback. Asked Saturday to clarify the nature of the injury, Cooper declined.

“No. With all due respect to Winnipeg,” he replied.

During that opening game against Czechia, Morrissey’s left leg clipped the right leg of forward Martin Necas on his final shift of the first period, causing him to labour on the way back to the bench. Morrissey returned to start the second, took one more shift, then grimaced as he left the ice — this time for good.

However, with the injury classified as upper-body, it’s unclear whether either play factored into his current status.

Morrissey likely won’t be the only member of the Jets to miss the gold medal game. U.S. forward Kyle Connor is expected to be a healthy scratch for a fourth straight game, barring a late-breaking injury or illness to one of his teammates.

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck will get the start in goal for the Americans.

In other Canadian injury news, captain Sidney Crosby has not been ruled out for Sunday’s final. Crosby was injured in Wednesday’s quarterfinal and was unable to play in Friday’s semifinal.

“We’ll see. I watched him skate today. I haven’t spoken to him yet. We’re gonna meet tonight and leave a determination of what’s gonna happen tomorrow,” Cooper said Saturday.

“Again, he won’t put himself in harm’s way and he’s not gonna put the team in harm’s way. Obviously we’d love to have him. That determination will be made tonight.”

Asked whether Crosby could dress even if he’s well below 100 per cent and severely limited, Cooper was emphatic.

“No. No. It’s too important. We don’t want to have somebody in there as an inspiration when we could have a player that could be capable of helping,” he said.

“You never know if guys are gonna get hurt in the game. He wouldn’t want to do that either.”

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/02/21/this-is-the-big-one-says-toews>

‘This is the big one,’ says Toews

By: Ken Wiebe

Jonathan Toews said what most hockey observers – at least those in North America – have both been thinking and saying out loud at various points during the past several weeks.

“It’s the final that I wanted, and people in North America wanted,” said Toews, the Winnipeg Jets centre who has some first-hand knowledge of what is on the horizon on Sunday morning when Canada takes on the United States in the gold medal game of the Olympic men’s hockey tournament. “It’s great for our game. The game of hockey has grown so much. And I know the final in 2010 Vancouver was great for the game as well.”

After the Jets completed their on-ice session on Saturday, Toews fielded questions about the high-profile Olympic tournament that has lived up to the hype so far and also shared some insight on what it’s like to appear in a game of this magnitude, given his international experiences.

“It’s funny to be on the other side of it now, and just see how everyone’s holding their breath (when) we were down 2-0 against the Finns. And you feel how important this is to everyone across Canada in games like that,” said Toews. “So obviously, this is the big one. There’s some great teams in the tournament, so it hasn’t been an easy road for Canada. So I’ll definitely be cheering for them.”

So, what’s it like to prepare for a game like this, with so much at stake?

“I mean, I don’t know there’s not really any moment in your life that’s going to prepare you for that, really,” said Toews. “I’m sure some of those guys probably felt a lot of nerves, even just showing up to the Olympics and being in that locker room, and you play your first game, and you slowly kind of just get comfortable.”

“Playing in the gold medal game is a whole different thing. I can think back to the game in Vancouver, especially where I don’t remember getting much sleep that night and basically laying wide awake, and all of a sudden it’s time to go to the game at like 9:30 in the morning. And then, I don’t know, you’ve just got to find a way to get to that place where you can just go and play, because you have to play the game.”

“You have to execute, and you have to find ways to make plays and kind of just let go of the nerves and the pressure, because the other team is feeling it too. It’s a pretty special moment, one way or another, to be part of a game like that, and obviously, you want to see Canada get the gold.”

There’s been plenty of discussion the past several days about Canada’s ability to rally from deficits in each of the past two games just to reach the gold medal game.

Toews faced similar adversity in 2010, when the U.S. got a goal in the third period from Zach Parise to send the game to overtime, setting the stage for a seminal moment that followed – the golden goal from Sidney Crosby.

“You feel how important this is to everyone across Canada in games like that”

“After the fact, and when you have time to reflect on it, felt so fitting that he was the guy to score the goal. And winning on home soil in Canada at the Olympics was such a huge incredible cap off to Canada’s performance at the Olympics,” said Toews. “So, it was pretty special to contribute to that. But in the moment when the U.S. tied the game late, I’m not going to lie. I know a lot of guys said that the feeling was calm in the locker room. And I don’t know if I was feeling that a whole lot. I feel like if we’re being honest, obviously there were nerves.”

The ability to handle those nerves in tense moments could be the deciding factor in a game between two closely matched teams.

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck has been excellent for the United States and he’s ready for the 4 Nations Face-Off matchup with Jordan Binnington.

“It is the one game everyone is excited about,” said Jets defenceman Dylan Samberg, who has represented the U.S. at the world junior hockey championship and the men’s world championship. “It is good to see (Hellebuyck) playing well and the team in front of him is playing well. The (U.S.) went up against a (couple of tough) opponents. The Sweden game, it was pretty tight checking. It was a scary one, but it was good to see them get through that one.

“(Canada) is a heavy team with some bigger guys who like to throw their weight around. I think it will be a good battle.”

Jets head coach Scott Arniel has been watching the games intently, both from the perspective of a hockey fan and as a coach with players involved in the competition.

“There’s not really any moment in your life that’s going to prepare you for that”

“It’s pretty tough to predict how this is going to go,” said Arniel. “It will have a lot of that 4 Nations (Face-Off) look to it. It’s going to be tight, it’s going to be fast. It will be really interesting to see the match-ups. Canada has the last change. The U.S. has their heavy line, with the Tkachuk’s and now it looks like (Canada) has got (its) new heavy line, with Tom Wilson, Marchand and Bennett. We’ll see how they match up.

“I don’t imagine there’s going to be a lot of free ice out there.”

How about a prediction, coach?

“These games so far have been so much fun to watch, watching best on best with all the games, not just Canada and the U.S. and when you get to see that, it’s pretty exciting for the fans,” said Arniel. “You’re just hoping for a great game. I just hope it lives up to what everyone is expecting. We’ll just leave it at that.”

Jets injury update

Team Canada head coach Jon Cooper announced on Saturday that defenceman Josh Morrissey won’t be suiting up in the gold medal game because of an upper-body injury that has limited him to just over one period of action in these Olympics.

“He’s pretty frustrated,” said Arniel. “But at the end of the day, you don’t want him playing in a game of that magnitude if he’s not able to do what he needs to do.”

Arniel said he won’t know Morrissey’s status for Wednesday’s game against the Vancouver Canucks for a few more days.

“In the moment when the U.S. tied the game late, I’m not going to lie... a lot of guys said that the feeling was calm in the locker room. I feel like if we’re being honest, obviously there were nerves.”

There was some promising news on the injury front as Neal Pionk shed the non-contact jersey on Saturday and was working with his regular defence partner, Samberg.

“He’s ready to go there for Vancouver, which is great news,” said Arniel. “Having him and (Samberg) back together is a big piece for us. When you lose those top-4 guys, that has a big impact. Him being back and up to speed is a really good sign.”

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7066611/2026/02/24/jets-jonathan-toews-nhl-trade-deadline-locker-room/>

Jonathan Toews weighs in on NHL trade deadline: ‘I wouldn’t consider going anywhere’

By Murat Ates

Jonathan Toews is exactly the kind of player contending teams ask about at the trade deadline. He’s a three-time Stanley Cup champion renowned for his leadership and has been named the most valuable player on Cup champions and Olympic gold-medal-winning hockey teams.

The 37-year-old centre is also a pending UFA for just the second time in his career, while the Winnipeg Jets sit 11 points outside the Western Conference playoffs.

It makes sense that there are questions about Toews’ future. When he signed his one-year, bonus-laden contract with the Jets, it seemed to combine a heartwarming homecoming with the chance to play for a legitimate Cup contender. The Jets are so far outside of a playoff spot that Toews, who possesses a full no-movement clause, could soon be asked to pick between dreams. Was his decision to sign with Winnipeg more about a homecoming or a shot at a fourth Stanley Cup?

"I wouldn't consider going anywhere," Toews told The Athletic during a wide-ranging, one-on-one interview Monday. "I want to keep playing for this team."

Toews declined to indulge in discussion about his value to a Cup contender, redirecting the conversation to his belief in this season's Jets. He also rejected the premise that Winnipeg is out of the playoff race.

"I don't even know that we're not a playoff team," Toews said. "Even throughout our 11-game winless streak, there were so many nights where we were inches away from scoring a tying goal or a winning goal or we give one up late, losing in overtime. There were so many situations where all of the little things that could go wrong did ... We're going to find a way to make them go right."

So Toews is not a mercenary. He's a Winnipeg Jet and could theoretically remain with the club next season, too. He's proven he's capable of contributing to an NHL team — ideally in a depth role — and has been eligible to sign a contract extension since Jan. 1.

"I'm not thinking about that at all," Toews said. "I'm obviously thankful for the opportunity that the Jets organization and coaching staff have given me to be able to play in the NHL again. It was an adjustment period this year, but I want to keep playing for this team."

Toews remains close with fellow University of North Dakota alumnus Mark Chipman and former Chicago Blackhawks assistant general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. When it comes time to discuss his NHL future in earnest, the conversation will be full of mutual respect. Those relationships are a big part of what brought Toews to Winnipeg in the first place; they will remain strong whether or not there's an extension in his future.

But what does Toews mean when he says this season was an adjustment? How has he balanced having an outsized presence in any locker room with respect for existing Jets leadership — particularly given how slowly Toews started the season?

Toews was an open book about all of those topics on Monday afternoon, starting with what it's like to be new in Winnipeg after 15 years as a fixture in Chicago. It's one thing to be a new kid on a team early in an NHL player's career. As a veteran whose name will forever be synonymous with 2007-23 Blackhawks history, being a fresh face in the room hits a little bit differently.

"Everyone's so used to being around each other," he said. "They've got their own little stories and history and inside jokes. You feel like a bit of an outsider and slowly get more and more comfortable to just be yourself. Then these guys get to know you. It takes time to build trust on and off the ice."

Some of the challenges are just learning everybody's name, from the coaches and players to the athletic therapists, equipment staff and media. Sometimes it's knowing which door to knock on or learning the best route through the tunnels at Canada Life Centre. After more than 15 years of muscle memory at the United Center in Chicago, Toews has needed to be patient as he builds new habits in Winnipeg.

It was never his intention, but he looks back at his status in Chicago and sees how so many coaches and staff worked around his preferences. He says he's been conscientious in his

efforts to fit into the group instead of expecting to be accommodated by others all of the time: “You slowly earn your place with the group and in the room.”

There is one other way in which Toews’ efforts to integrate into the team are different now than they were when he was a teenager in Chicago. It’s easier for a player to be confident in their voice — and for people to receive their insights — when they’re a driving force behind team success. The Blackhawks made Toews their captain when he was 20 and then watched his presence in their room grow in accordance with his on-ice accomplishments.

Toews isn’t a point-per-game player anymore or even close to it. He doesn’t single-handedly dominate the flow of play like he did during his prime. How does he build respect in a dressing room that hasn’t been at his playoff-winning side?

“It’s a subtle thing,” Toews said. “You’ve got to find the middle way. I come in here with a ton of respect for (Adam Lowry) and the captains and the leaders in here ... I’m not here to disrupt the flow. If you don’t have too big of an ego, you come to a locker room and you want to add to the energy. You don’t want to make it about yourself. If you have the right intentions, you take your time and you’re patient.”

The other side of picking his spots is that Toews started the season slotted in as the Jets’ second-line centre but did not produce like one. He had scored just nine points in 35 games before the NHL’s holiday break. He’s scored 10 points in 21 games since that time, building confidence in his game and his voice — and earning legitimate interest from those Cup contenders.

If he were willing to go to the trade market, Toews would likely be Winnipeg’s most valuable asset heading into the deadline. His games-played bonuses don’t apply to a team’s playoff cap hit, making Toews a \$2 million player for playoff cap purposes. His Conn Smythe Trophy, three Stanley Cups and 119 career playoff points in 137 games, not to mention his 61 percent faceoff winning record, would make Toews an appealing third- or fourth-line centre on a lot of contending teams.

Winnipeg will have to recoup assets by a different means, likely by moving other pending free agents like Luke Schenn, Colin Miller or Gustav Nyquist. Logan Stanley indicated to Ken Wiebe of the Winnipeg Free Press that he hopes to re-sign with Winnipeg, but he could also be an asset of interest.

None of that concerns Toews. He signed the contract he did, no-movement clause included, because he wanted to play for the Jets. Winnipeg may have forgone the opportunity to acquire assets for Toews by offering that clause, but management is not likely to pitch him on changing his mind.

Toews’ focus will remain on finding a way to help Winnipeg — somehow — make the playoffs.

“I had enough of not playing the way I know I can,” Toews said. “I really wanted to come back with a new mindset. I can take the puck and go with it and make plays and be a guy who can make the difference in the game, shift in and shift out ... Regardless of where I am in the lineup, I’m going to be ready every time my name’s called on the ice.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7067157/2026/02/24/connor-hellebuyck-us-goalie-gold-medal-backstory-olympics/>

Connor Hellebuyck goaltended the U.S. to gold. His journey started in Odessa, Texas

By Ian O'Connor

Not many hockey dreams are cultivated in Odessa, Texas, the home of “Friday Night Lights”, but this is where United States Olympic hero Connor Hellebuyck was first told he was good enough to make it in the big time.

Joe Clark, his general manager and position coach with the Odessa Jackalopes, had told some of Hellebuyck’s teammates that they needed to get his autograph while they still had a chance. During one video session, the GM turned to the teenage goaltender and said, “You’re going to play in the NHL.”

“Really?” Hellebuyck replied.

Really.

The Jackalopes play their games in the Ector County Coliseum, site of a couple of Elvis Presley concerts in 1976 and some rodeo and oil shows in the years since. While the high school football rivalry that inspired a book and later a TV series — Odessa vs. Permian — could bring in 20,000 fans at Ratliff Stadium, the Jackalopes would draw 4,000 to the Coliseum on good nights. The paying customers did appreciate how the physicality on the ice mirrored what they saw on the gridiron.

In 2011, financial losses compelled team ownership to transition from the professional ranks of the Central Hockey League to the second-tier junior ranks of the North American Hockey League. That year, Odessa scout Craig Sarnier, the leading scorer on the silver medal-winning 1972 U.S. Olympic hockey team, was watching high-powered AAA prospects in a Michigan tournament when he wandered over to an adjacent rink and spotted a tall, lanky goalie playing for a struggling high school team from suburban Detroit. Hellebuyck was better than the AAA kids.

“I’m not going to draft you,” Sarnier later told him, “because I don’t think anybody knows about you. It’s my job to put as many good people in front of you as possible, and I’m taking the chance that you’re not going to be drafted.”

Though Hellebuyck was heartbroken when he wasn’t picked by any team in the NAHL or the upper-tier United States Hockey League, Sarnier’s gamble paid off. Clark said Odessa invited Hellebuyck and seven other goalies to a Minnesota camp. “He was a nobody then,” the GM said, “but I saw him make things look easy. He looked like he was in control and knew what he was doing.

“I later told Sarnier, ‘If you knew Helly was this good, you wouldn’t have gambled by not drafting him. Don’t BS me on that one.’”

Lee Scheide, sports editor of the Odessa American, remembered Hellebuyck as a quiet workhorse who carried the 2011-12 Jackalopes to the postseason. Though it was hard to fathom a future gold medal-winning goalie and NHL MVP emerging from the West Texas hockey scene,

Scheide, who regularly covered the team, said there were obvious hints back then of Hellebuyck's greatness.

"At 6-4, his size was dominating, and it was hard to even find any space around him," Scheide said. "The more he played, the better and more confident he became. He was always going to make the routine saves, and he also made the spectacular saves to keep them in games. It was a lot of fun to watch."

Hellebuyck wasn't ranked among the top 36 North American goalies by NHL Central Scouting entering the 2012 draft, but the Winnipeg Jets did take him in the fifth round with the 130th pick. Hellebuyck first played two major college seasons at UMass-Lowell.

Clark warned him that the school had a talented veteran goalie in place and that he would need to be patient.

"Connor looked me square in the eye and said, 'I'll have his job by Christmas,'" Clark recalled. "And he did."

Hellebuyck led UMass-Lowell to the Frozen Four seven years before he won his first of three Vezina Trophies with Winnipeg, and a dozen years before becoming the first American-born goalie to win the Hart Trophy.

At 32, Hellebuyck was already a Hall of Famer before he left for Italy and these Winter Olympics.

"And then," Clark said, "he became a national treasure overnight."

As a coach, scout and executive in the U.S. and abroad for the better part of four decades, Clark, 65, has remained a mentor of Hellebuyck. He visited the goalie's Winnipeg home last month and sat in the stands for a practice, watching him hoot, holler and chirp at teammates — having a blast in the middle of an extended Jets winless streak.

"I don't think the coaching staff really liked that; they didn't say that, but that's the vibe I got," Clark said. "But (Hellebuyck) isn't going to do it any other way. I was sitting around his kitchen table one night talking about it. ... I don't mean to sound brutal toward the organization, but this year they're circling the drain, and he wasn't going to allow himself to circle the drain."

"Connor said, 'The day I can't have fun, I'll quit. I won't play. I have to have fun.'"

Clark told his former goalie that he needed to pack that attitude with his bags on the flight to the Winter Games in Italy.

"That's exactly what I plan to do," Hellebuyck replied.

Goalie and coach have had these conversations for years. On the website for Clark's company, InsideEdge Goaltending, Hellebuyck says in a video testimonial that Clark is his go-to person when his physical or mental game is off.

"I would call him up, and he would fix me up, and I swear to you in one phone call," Hellebuyck says. "I'd feel great the next day, and I'd feel like the whole world came off my shoulders."

Connor Hellebuyck maintains a close relationship with Joe Clark, right. Courtesy of Joe Clark
Sunday morning, Clark woke up too late to watch the first two periods of the U.S.-Canada Olympic final. He had a good reason: He was dealing with the after-effects of his first chemotherapy treatment for Non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

A former editor in the Omaha World-Herald sports department, Clark wasn't about to miss one of the most compelling sports stories of his time. He joined his wife at a neighbor's house in McCool Junction, Neb., to watch the rest of the game. He saw Hellebuyck make that astounding save against Devon Toews early in the third period. He saw a goalie known for his big-game setbacks in Winnipeg, in Clark's words, "conquer the skill of having fun. The key is dealing with stress and the big moment, and now Connor has mastered the big moment."

The Americans' overtime victory moved Sarnier to tears as he watched with a friend outside of Minneapolis. "Did I see this coming in Odessa? Hell no," he said through a laugh.

Clark sent Hellebuyck a text with heart and muscle emojis and the simple message, "Congrats, Connor. But I'm not surprised."

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7066010/2026/02/23/olympics-mens-hockey-nhl-legacies-red-light/>

NHL players whose legacies changed most at the Olympic men's hockey tournament

By Sean McIndoe

Red Light newsletter 📧 | This is The Athletic's hockey newsletter. Sign up here to receive Red Light directly in your inbox.

Good morning to everyone except whoever decided to hand out stuffed animals to hockey players who've just lost the biggest game of their lives. Read the rink, guys.

Before we get going, a sincere thank you for following along with our coverage throughout the Olympics. The men's tournament was the first time NHL players participated since 2014, and it lived up to the hype — as did the women's tournament. You can read our Olympic hockey coverage here and the rest of our Olympic coverage here.

New Golden Goal 🏆 USA slays the dragon

They finally did it. Almost 30 years after their only other best-on-best win, the Americans have finally climbed back to the top of the mountain. And while that 1996 World Cup win was a nice building block, this feels more like the finished product. Olympic gold, at the expense of their greatest rival, with the whole world watching. Just what they'd been building toward for decades.

Time will tell just how much Jack Hughes' OT winner seeps into the American sports consciousness, and whether it sticks to the same degree the "Miracle on Ice" has. That's a tall task, but it will hold some space, with the goal providing a simple and emphatic exclamation point on a team win. At the very least, it gives every American kid in a driveway or on a shinny rink a moment to emulate. And having it come from a guy who'd just had his teeth knocked out? Nice touch, hockey gods.

Hughes will get the highlights, but the real hero was Connor Hellebuyck. He finished the tournament with a tidy .956 save percentage and 1.18 goals-against average and saved his best for last, making 41 saves in the gold medal game. He even got an assist on the winning goal, which actually feels like showing off if you ask me.

Did Team Canada get goalied? Sure it did, but that was always a big part of the plan for any Team USA win. Goalies are part of the team, and one nation has most of the best ones these days. When that country wins thanks to its goalie, it's not a fluke, it's destiny. And this time, destiny said it was finally time for the Americans to have their moment.

Who stood out?

One of the best parts of international best-on-best hockey is watching guys you know from the NHL redefine the way fans see them. The Olympics may be the only time in a player's career that he can rewrite his story so emphatically in just a few short weeks.

So, who pulled that off at this year's event? Glad you asked. Here are eight names who've done the most to change how they're viewed.

Connor Hellebuyck

He was: A great regular-season goalie with a reputation for fading when the lights shine brightest. Just can't win the big one.

But now he's: Won that big one and won it emphatically. Hellebuyck was the undisputed hero of yesterday's win, playing the game of his life to turn aside a relentless Canadian attack long enough for Jack Hughes to find the winner.

Macklin Celebrini

He was: The emerging superstar-in-waiting who didn't look out of place as the third wheel on Canada's mega-line with Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon.

But now he's: Forget about emerging or waiting, Celebrini used the tournament to declare that his superstar era is already here. He led the star-studded Canadian team in goals and looked like its most dangerous player for long stretches. Not bad for a teenager we weren't even sure would make the team.

Juraj Slafkovský

He was: The No. 1 draft pick who was shaking off any lingering bust talk while establishing himself as a solid top-six contributor.

But now he's: A young power forward who's looked dominant at two Olympics, including one that was played best-on-best. And after a strong first half in Montreal, maybe now he comes back with a well-earned chip on his shoulder.

Bill Guerin

He was: Just the latest Team USA GM to galaxy-brain his way into taking too many penalty-killers and faceoff specialists at the expense of skill and offense. Good luck outscoring Canada when you leave your scorers at home.

But now he's: The guy who got the mix just right. Credit where it's due, Guerin built a team that was designed to beat Canada 2-1, and that's exactly what it did. With perfect penalty-killing, including yesterday's long five-on-three, to go with domination in the faceoff circle, the formula worked just the way it was meant to.

Juuse Saros

He was: That goalie who used to be good, and has a contract that mistakenly still thinks he is.

But now he's: Coming off of a tournament where he was arguably the best human goaltender, trailing only Hellebuyck. He was the only goalie to play six games and went .940 through the tournament to lead Finland to bronze (while nearly upsetting Canada for the right to play for even more).

The Hughes brothers

They were: Those other brothers from Team USA. You know, the ones who don't have a podcast and an instinct to know where the cameras are at all times.

But now they're: The brothers who actually did something on the ice in this tournament. And did they ever, with Quinn scoring the OT winner against Sweden and Jack etching his name into history with yesterday's snipe.

Auston Matthews

He was: Any debate about Matthews these days feels a lot like talking politics, in that everyone starts at the endpoint they've already decided on and then works their way back through whatever facts seem to help. But you know the drill: He's yet another guy who you just can't win with, certainly not when he's your so-called leader.

But now he's: A winner, at least on the international stage. And he was no passenger in this tournament, tying for the Team USA lead in scoring among forwards while making several standout defensive plays in the final.

Jordan Binnington

He was: The guy who was going to definitely take the blame if Canada didn't win.

But now he's: The guy the Edmonton Oilers should be trading for before the playoffs start. No? Too dramatic? Maybe. So, let's just say he's the owner of back-to-back strong performances in best-on-best tournaments and a guy who's earned his big-game label, and leave it at that. (But seriously, get on the phone, Stan Bowman.)

We'll leave the list there and won't worry too much about any of the players who may have gone the other way. Sam Bennett, Clayton Keller, Tomáš Hertl and Jesper Bratt, among others, can thank me later.

Trivia Time

Yesterday's OT goal was the second game-winning goal of the tournament for Hughes; he also got credit for the GWG against Slovakia in the semifinal. Can you name the only other American NHLers to score multiple Olympic winners?

Hints: Both players are now retired but were teammates on Team USA in 2010 and 2014. They were good, though neither is in the Hall of Fame. One of them had a dad who played for Team Canada at a reasonably well-known international event. And the other one might best be known for fighting Canadians.

Answer below.

Meanwhile, Up North 🍁 Canada in crisis?

For the first time since 1998, Canada is coming home from an NHL-attended Olympics without a gold medal from either the men or women.

Both national teams won silver, which is to say they failed. That's just the way it goes up here, where any major best-on-best tournament is gold or bust.

The last time this happened, back in 1998, the country went into crisis mode, convening a national summit on the state of the game in August 1999. Wayne Gretzky had just retired, joining Mario Lemieux on the sidelines. There was a very real feeling that the sport was slipping away.

Now, over a quarter-century later, it's happened again, only worse because it's Team USA winning twice. So, should Canadians be strapping in for another round of crisis? Is it time to start booking space for another summit? Do we need to take a long hard look in the national mirror and have a brutally honest discussion about how it's not our game anymore?

Arpon Basu took a look at this question in a column yesterday, and reached basically the same answer I do: No. Don't be silly.

First, let's have a little context here. The 1999 freakout came on the heels of not just the Nagano flameout, but also a loss in the 1996 World Cup. Canada hadn't won a best-on-best since 1991, which felt like forever.

Today, even through the sting of two gold medal losses, the situation isn't the same. Canada's men are one year removed from a best-on-best win at the 4 Nations and had won three of the last four Olympic tournaments with NHL players. The women had won gold in five of the last six.

That makes 2026 feel more like a blip than a catastrophe. Maybe it doesn't stay that way, and we end up looking back on the last two weeks as a true passing of the torch, the event where Team USA pulled out in front to stay. It could happen.

But if you were looking to overreact, you probably would have liked to have seen some more emphatic results. Both gold medal losses came via three-on-three overtime, with the men dominating most of their game and the women leading late into theirs. Losses are losses, and there are no style points at this level, so close shouldn't cut it. The Americans won both games, and they don't count any less for being close. They could have gone either way? Sure, but they didn't.

All of that makes for good reason to be disappointed. It's not a reason to overreact, or to get all performative. High expectations can be a curse, but they have to be earned. Canada has earned the pressure through years of success.

Now, the Canadians have to start down the difficult path of earning it all back. They'll need some big wins to do it. And sure, maybe some time spent looking in the mirror. But a summit? A national conversation? A country in crisis? Settle down, eh.

Hoo boy, is it ever going to be tough to go back to the NHL regular season, which resumes on (checks schedule) Wednesday, I guess. Do you remember what was happening with all that? Be honest, we're all in the same boat.

The good news is that you've still got a few days to get yourself back into regular-season shape. So, here's my incredibly condensed list of what you need to know:

Teams have between 23 and 27 games left to play. The season ends April 16.

The hottest team in the league going into the break was the Columbus Blue Jackets, who've won seven straight to move within four points of a wild-card spot.

Also red-hot: the two Eastern Division leaders, with the Tampa Bay Lightning at 8-1-1 in their last 10 and the Carolina Hurricanes at 8-0-2. In the West, the Minnesota Wild are 8-1-1 and have won five straight to move ahead of the Dallas Stars for second in the Central, while the Anaheim Ducks are back in a wild-card spot thanks to an 8-2-0 run.

A few of the contenders have gone cold, most notably the Colorado Avalanche, who've looked mortal after seeming unbeatable in the first half. The Vegas Golden Knights are just 3-5-2 in their last 10 but still lead the Pacific as the Oilers spin their wheels.

Anyone thinking about tanking had better move quickly, because the Vancouver Canucks have opened up a seven-point "lead" for last place, while also shutting down their starting goalie for the season. The New York Rangers are sure trying, though.

And finally, we're less than two weeks from the trade deadline, which is March 6 this year. That's next week! And speaking of trades, the Olympic freeze is over as of last night.

Trivia Answer

The two other Team USA players to have multiple game-winning goals at the Olympics are Zach Parise and David Backes.

Parise, whose father J.P. represented Canada at the legendary 1972 Summit Series, had two winners in 2010: against Switzerland in the quarterfinal and Finland in the semifinal (pictured above). He also scored the dramatic last-minute goal that sent that year's gold medal game into overtime.

Backes, whose memorable pre-Olympic fight tour in 2010 saw him take on Canadians' Jonathan Toews, Corey Perry and Rick Nash over the course of two weeks, had winners against Switzerland in the 2010 prelim and against the Czechs in the quarterfinal.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7066455/2026/02/24/what-we-learned-olympics-hockey-hellebuyck-hughes-crosby/>

What we learned from Olympics hockey: Hellebuyck shines, passing the torch and more

By Shayna Goldman

Twelve years and three cycles later, NHL players returned to the Olympics, and the tournament delivered.

There was an appetite for best-on-best international hockey in the men's game — 4 Nations proved that last February, as the first tournament with NHL talent since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. But that was just a sampler of what was to come. The Olympics were the main course.

The bar was set high, and while the tournament wasn't without its kinks — the rink-size drama, gimmicky rules like three-on-three overtime, extremely stringent rules around highlight distribution — it started with a bang with Slovakia upsetting Finland in the prelims, and ended with a classic.

And in between, international star power was on display. Juraj Slafkovský and Dalibor Dvorský showed what difference-makers they can be, without much NHL support. Zach Werenski

showcased his elite game to the rest of the world that doesn't tune into Columbus Blue Jackets hockey on a nightly basis. Prospect Alberts Šmits showed how he can compete against the game's biggest stars, while non-NHLers like Leonardo Genoni, Martin Gernat and Frederik Tiffels all had standout performances.

From the 4 Nations to the "Heated Rivalry" effect, and now the Olympic stage, it's been a big year for hockey. Now, as the season resumes, the NHL has to build on that momentum.

Hellebuyck's MVP-caliber play

Narratives around Connor Hellebuyck's play in high-pressure situations have swirled over the last few years. While his defense left him exposed in the 2024 playoffs against the Avalanche, he didn't handle his workload well, either. When it seemed like he was in for a redemption arc last spring, with more defensive support and arguably his best regular season yet, Hellebuyck wilted against the Blues in Round 1.

So one of the big questions for Team USA was who would earn the starter's net, considering 1) the depth at the position and 2) Hellebuyck's more pedestrian numbers (relative to his usual heights) since returning from injury.

Hellebuyck answered those questions with sparkling play. And in the highest-pressure situation, he was absolutely phenomenal.

Hellebuyck was the driving force behind Team USA's gold medal. He only gave up one goal against Canada, despite facing 42 shots from some of the best offensive threats in the world, including 23 slot shots and 12 chances off the rush, all of which added up to an xG of 5.8 per Sportlogiq's model. He came up with the stop of the tournament, with a paddle save against Canada's Devon Toews to keep the game tied 1-1 early in the third.

Hellebuyck didn't just have the hot hand for one game. He was the best goaltender of the Games, and a key reason why the penalty kill went 18-for-18. Through five starts, he allowed six goals on 137 shots for a .956 save percentage and earned a tournament-high 5.92 goals saved above average.

Between a solid showing at the 4 Nations and a game-breaking performance for the USA, Hellebuyck has changed his reputation. It's just unfortunate he likely won't get to ride this clutch gear into the playoffs; that could have been a real test between pressure and fatigue, considering how much he generally plays by April.

Big Game Matthews

Auston Matthews hasn't earned a reputation as The Guy in big moments, either. Instead, the fact that his regular-season goal-scoring rate (0.62 goals per game) hasn't translated to the playoffs (0.38 per game), with only two playoff series wins under his belt, tends to be the focal point.

While Matthews wasn't the hero for Team USA, he wasn't just along for the ride. His two-way game was a pivotal part of the USA's success throughout the tournament. Offensively, he stepped up with three goals and six points heading into the gold medal game. Matthews added to that total with a primary assist on Matt Boldy's opening goal against Canada. That assist brought him up to a team-high 31 scoring chance contributions (tracked by the amazing Dimitri Filipovic of the PDOCast).

Defense is tricky to measure because it's hard to quantify a player essentially stopping something from happening. But against Canada, his backchecks — first on Brad Marchand, then to break up a rush chance from Macklin Celebrini — set the tone. Every detail matters in tight games, and Matthews' all-around game was clutch.

The Hughes brothers' next level

The word 'gamer' gets thrown around in hockey — it's usually thought of as a clutch player, who embraces a playoff style and thrives in the big moments. So players like Matthew and Brady Tkachuk generally get branded as gamers, not Quinn or Jack Hughes.

Some of it is due to opportunity — Quinn and Jack aren't super brash and don't have much playoff experience. Quinn wasn't healthy enough to play at the 4 Nations, while Jack had some ups and downs. His injury woes this year added another question mark to his role for Team USA.

This time, the Hughes brothers rose to the occasion.

Despite limited usage (73:40 through six games), Jack Hughes was one of the best American offensive generators. And he did all of that damage on the wing, on Brock Nelson's right on the fourth line, then Dylan Larkin's left on the third. Heading into the gold medal game, his shooting and playmaking combined for 27 scoring chance contributions, which ranked third on the team and in the top 15 of the tournament. In the final, he added another two chances and two chance assists, including the golden goal. When accounting for minutes played, Hughes' scoring chance contributions shook out to 26.9 per 60, which ranked second in the tournament to Connor McDavid. It was a reminder of what a game-changer he can be when healthy (and outside of the Devils' system, considering how many of his teammates excelled away from New Jersey at the Games).

Quinn Hughes, on the other hand, logged heavy minutes for Team USA — a team-high 141, to be exact, which ranked third behind only Miro Heiskanen and Esa Lindell of Finland. Hughes was a one-man breakout machine whose decision-making and pace sparked the team from the back end. He gave the USA a jolt off the rush and bought his teammates time and space in the offensive zone with his possession-heavy game and evasiveness. It's all an extension of what the Wild have been getting out of their new No. 1 defenseman; if he can keep up his post-trade levels down the stretch, Hughes could jump into consideration for both the Norris and Hart.

Despite missing a few Olympic cycles, due to the NHL's absence and a snub back when he was 18, Sidney Crosby is one of the faces of Canadian hockey. At 38 years old, he is still performing at an elite level. While he probably has the chops to be a difference-maker in the next four years, it's way too early to predict his status for 2030.

But if this is it for Crosby, it does feel like the Team Canada torch has officially been passed to Connor McDavid and Macklin Celebrini.

Even with some lapsed coverage on the golden goal, McDavid still had a dominant tournament. He led the entire field in points (13) and scoring chance contributions. But that was, honestly, all to be expected at this point. McDavid is a force whenever he is on the ice, and his game always rises to match the moment.

The more surprising element for Canada was what a difference-maker Celebrini was on this stage at 19 years old.

In just his second NHL season, Celebrini is establishing himself as one of the best players in the world. He can be dynamic off the rush or slow the game down with his patience and puck-handling. That, paired with the massive gap in value between him and the next best player in San Jose, has fueled his place in the Hart Trophy conversation as a sophomore.

All of that earned him a place on Team Canada, but the question was how much he would actually play. Head coach Jon Cooper answered that early, with a top-line placement that he maintained throughout the tournament. Celebrini was one of the most noticeable players for Canada throughout the games; his speed and ability to drive right to the slot were on display every game. He generated a tournament-high 35 scoring chances, according to Filipovic's tracking, and contributed to another 14 chances. And that offense led to his second-best 10 points in six games.

Canada's future blue line

After Josh Morrissey was sidelined, a potential flaw for Canada became glaring: the lack of puck-moving defensemen behind Cale Makar and Thomas Harley. As much as Shea Theodore stepped up to add a spark at the bottom of the lineup, he just wasn't deployed enough. He contributed to three scoring chances in less than nine minutes of play in the gold medal game, in favor of players like Travis Sanheim and Colton Parayko, who each played upwards of 15 minutes.

There was always a risk of some redundancy, with Sanheim, Parayko and Drew Doughty all on the roster, leaving out more offensive options like Matthew Schaefer and Evan Bouchard. So with this tournament in the books, it's something Canada's management has to learn from ahead of the World Cup of Hockey in 2028 and the next Olympics in 2030. Changes on defense may not have stopped Canada from getting goalied in the gold medal game. But having more skill on the back end could have better activated the bottom-nine forwards and given the team a deeper approach.

Stone and Marnier's chemistry

International rosters are a blend of the best talents from around the professional world. Without much time to practice as a group, it helps to find some common links to build off, whether it's past combinations in these settings or regular-season chemistry. On the women's side, for example, Team USA rolled out an all-Seattle Torrent line of Hannah Bilka, Alex Carpenter and Hilary Knight to kick off the tournament. Team Canada rolled out Mitch Marnier and Mark Stone together on the third line.

Marnier only shared the ice with Stone in 27 percent of his five-on-five minutes this season with the Vegas Golden Knights. But the two showed a lot of promise on both ends of the ice for Canada, while playing as Crosby's wings (and then Nick Suzuki's). And that may be something for the Golden Knights to try and tap into as play resumes, especially with Marnier playing center. While it obviously stacks two of Vegas' best two-way threats together, Stone's defensive game could help ease Marnier's transition back to playing the middle.

Necas' power play impact

Colorado's power play is far too talented to sit dead last in the league in scoring rate, with just 5.08 goals per 60. Makar, Nathan MacKinnon and Martin Necas are all staples of that top unit, with players like Brock Nelson, Gabriel Landeskog, Artturi Lehkonen and Victor Olofsson all rotating through that top unit to find the right balance. But what if a tweak in strategy, with some Olympic insight, could help unlock what should be a dangerous unit?

All three of Necas' goals for Team Czechia were one-timers from the left circle on some sort of man-advantage. Against France, David Pastrnak teed him up on the power play from the point. Two days later, against Switzerland, Filip Hronek's lateral pass set up Necas scoring a six-on-five goal to tie the game with two minutes left in regulation. Then against Denmark, Hronek assisted on another Necas one-timer, this time on the power play.

Two of Necas' four power-play goals this season were scored similarly in Colorado, but it's not his primary position. MacKinnon is generally stationed on the left, while Necas (before getting bumped off PP1 for the last few games heading into the break) was the bumper. But maybe it's worth leaning on Necas' hot right-handed shot from the left circle, and either shifting MacKinnon to the slot or letting him rove around the formation to make the power play an actual advantage again for the Avs.

Hlavaj's rising stock

Genoni of Switzerland, Samuel Hlavaj of Slovakia and Damien Clara of Italy all earned praise for their Olympic efforts. Genoni has been a staple for Switzerland for some time, and at 38 doesn't exactly have an NHL future. But Clara (who was drafted by the Ducks) and Hlavaj (of the Iowa Wild) may.

Hlavaj is such an interesting one, because his 3.33 goals-against average and .884 save percentage are among the worst numbers in the AHL — a league that isn't exactly filled with elite goal scorers. But before Slovakia's Cinderella run came to a crashing halt in the semifinal round, Hlavaj's 0.932 save percentage was top-five in the tournament.

What makes his story even more intriguing is the fact that his 2024-25 regular-season numbers were actually better than his goalie partner in Iowa: Jesper Wallstedt.

As much as stellar goalie performances against some of the superteams of the world can generate attention, realistically there is only so much to learn about a player in a tournament setting. It's only one small chapter of a player's career, and in Hlavaj's case, it was only a five-game sample. But stack this experience with his 2024-25 season, and his 2023 World Championship play that put him on the Wild's radar in the first place, and it gives the situation a little more substance. His status as an RFA this summer, the fact that teams around the league could use inexpensive goalie depth, and the possibility Wallstedt could become expendable in a true needle-moving trade are something to keep an eye on in the future.

The PWHL draft is loaded with star power

No one got a bigger boost at these Olympics than some of the up-and-comers in the women's game. Caroline Harvey has developed into an MVP-caliber defender in Wisconsin and is likely to be the first pick in the PWHL draft this year. Laila Edwards, who set up Hilary Knight's tying goal in the gold medal game, and Abbey Murphy, whose combination of elite skill and pesky play was a standout for the USA, are likely top-five as well.

After backstopping Switzerland to the bronze medal, Andrea Brändli could become a starter in the PWHL very soon. Between Nelli Laitinen, Petra Nieminen, and Tessa Janecke, teams are going to infuse even more skill this summer. Any of these players could become a future cornerstone for a PWHL franchise, just like Taylor Heise, who assisted on the golden goal, is for the Frost, or Alina Müller of the Fleet, who scored her second bronze-medal-clinching goal for Switzerland.

The PWHL's impact was strong across the tournament, and there is even more talent incoming.

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7062028/2026/02/21/olympics-gold-medal-game-canada-injuries-crosby-morrissey/>

Josh Morrissey to miss Canada's gold medal game, Sidney Crosby not ruled out

By Pierre LeBrun

MILAN — Sidney Crosby hasn't been ruled out of the gold medal game, but for the second year in a row, Josh Morrissey will miss the big Canada-USA matchup with an upper-body injury.

Team Canada head coach Jon Cooper said after practice Saturday that Morrissey was out — a big loss, as Morrissey is the No. 2 defenseman on the team. Morrissey was injured in the Olympic opener and tried to ramp it up in practice over the past week to come back but he couldn't get there.

"We want Josh in this game, he helps us with puck moving and everything he does, but in the end if you're not physically able to do it ..." Cooper said. "The one selfless thing about this team, and the way I've watched these players — and it goes back to Brayden Point and Anthony Cirelli (injured players replaced before the Olympics) — when it comes to the flag, no one is getting in the way of it. If they're incapable of giving what they think is optimal effort, they don't want to put the country in harm, they understand what we have here.

"But Josh, in the end, he just wouldn't be able to perform. ... So we had to make a decision," added Cooper.

Which was crushing news for the Winnipeg Jets defenseman, especially after also missing the 4 Nations Face-Off championship game in Boston last year with an illness.

"Yeah, that's a tough one. This is twice in a year now that we've had the same conversation, and I feel for him because he's just an all-world kid and a hell of a hockey player," Cooper said.

As for Crosby, who missed Friday's semifinal win over Finland, Cooper said he would meet with Canada's superstar leader Saturday night and see where things were. Crosby did skate with his teammates Saturday in what was a closed practice to media.

"We'll see. I watched him skate today," Cooper said. "I haven't spoken to him yet. We're going to meet tonight and have a determination of what's going to happen tomorrow. He won't put himself in harm's way. He's not going to put the team in harm's way.

"Obviously we'd love to have him, but that determination will be made tonight."

Cooper ruled out dressing Crosby as the 13th forward just to have him on the bench to cheer on his teammates.

"No, it's too important. We don't want to have someone in there as an inspiration when we could have a player in there capable of helping," Cooper said. "You never know if guys are going to get hurt in a game. And he wouldn't want to do that either."

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/7052839/2026/02/18/connor-hellebuyck-olympics-mens-hockey-usa/>

Can an Olympic gold medal change Connor Hellebuyck's big-game reputation?

By Mark Lazerus

MILAN — Connor Hellebuyck looks angry. Like, all the time. There's just something about that steely glare, the way his eyebrows dip in the middle, the way the tiny muscles at the corners of his mouth don't seem capable of going up. This is a very serious man.

So it's almost jarring to hear Hellebuyck use a word like "fun." It's akin to someone rapidly speaking in an unfamiliar language dropping in a name you recognize. Wait, did I just hear that right?

But believe it or not, Connor Hellebuyck is having fun in Milan.

"This is exciting," he said, with absolutely zero excitement in his voice. "This is why I play the game. I don't chase the money, I don't chase the fame. I play for fun. And these are those moments that I really enjoy."

Strange cat, this Hellebuyck. His Zen-like calmness in net is part of what makes him arguably the best goaltender on the planet. He never flails, never panics, never seems to scramble. He's always in the right place, always making the difficult look routine through savvy anticipation and flawless mechanics.

"I just love his confidence, I love his calmness," said United States teammate Matthew Tkachuk. "It's exactly what you want in a No. 1 goalie."

But the stillness masks a competitive ferocity that drives him to almost fanatical levels. He doesn't smolder, he burns. Hellebuyck elicited chuckles last spring when he said, without a trace of irony in his voice, that he has probably studied the art and science of goaltending more than any person "in this world." But he wasn't kidding. He really does take his job that seriously. What he defines as "fun" is that pursuit of perfection.

And he's come pretty darn close to finding it.

At 32 years old, Hellebuyck has already cemented his place as one of the most talented goalies the league has ever seen. He's one of just 13 goalies in NHL history with three Vezina trophies, tied with the likes of Patrick Roy, Glenn Hall and Tony Esposito. He's one of just eight who have won the Hart Trophy as the league's most valuable player, and one of just three this century. He has saved 122 more goals than expected over the last three full seasons — 41 more than second-place Ilya Sorokin of the New York Islanders, per Evolving Hockey.

Hellebuyck's resume and reputation from October through early April is unimpeachable. It's those pesky spring months that have been the issue. His playoff performance over those same three seasons is rather ghastly. In 23 playoff games, he's given up 13 more goals than expected, 47th out of 47 goalies who appeared in the 2023, 2024 and 2025 postseasons. His .922 save percentage from 2022-2025 is tied for best in the league, but in the playoffs, it dropped to .872, bad enough for 39th place. The Winnipeg Jets won just one series over those

three postseasons, and Hellebuyck understandably drew the most scrutiny as the team's best player.

Hellebuyck's inability (so far) to win the big one has been as much a part of his story as his regular-season dominance. An injury this season cost him a month, and the Jets look like they're going to miss the playoffs, meaning he'll have to wait another year to shed that label as a big-game failure.

Unless he can do it in Milan.

Would the image of Hellebuyck with an Olympic gold medal slung around his neck — having conquered Sweden, having conquered Canada — be enough to change the narrative, to rewrite his legacy, to prove him a winner?

As the Olympic tournament enters the quarterfinal round on Wednesday, that's the kind of rarefied air the eight teams left have reached. This is legacy stuff, the kind of thing they put in the first line of your obituary — or the first line of your Hockey Hall of Fame plaque. It's a lot to wrap your brain around, and some players choose not to try. That mental burden can motivate you or crush you, and all athletes — from figure skater Ilia Malinin to snowboarder Eileen Gu to every NHL player on the United States, Canada and Sweden rosters — feel it.

How they handle it varies. Germany's Nico Sturm tries to ignore it.

"We all deal with the pressure a little different," Sturm said. "I always like to not let the moment get too big. You're at the Olympics and you're one win away from having a chance to play for a medal. But there's no point in (spending) the next 20 hours telling yourself that, because you're going to go crazy."

Sweden coach Sam Hallam tries to use it.

"It's important that you remind yourself at times where you are," he said. "This isn't Game 63 in the regular season. This is once every four years. Just embrace that as motivation."

American Vincent Trocheck tries to focus it.

"The next game is part of that," he said. "We have to worry about that one. You can't get to the semifinal game without winning the quarterfinal game."

Hellebuyck? He's, well, calm about it. If the burden of history — and of his reputation — weighs on him at all, he certainly isn't showing it. When discussing Wednesday's quarterfinal against Sweden, he very much sounds like he's discussing Game 63 of the regular season.

"No, it's one day at a time," he said when asked about it. "I'm enjoying myself and trying to get better. All I can do is put my best foot forward every day."

That chill confidence is why his teammates, both in Winnipeg and in Milan, like playing in front of him so much. Asked what he learned about Hellebuyck at the 4 Nations Face-Off last February, Dylan Larkin said that he's "a gamer," adding there's no one else he'd rather have in net. And Hellebuyck was excellent at the 4 Nations, posting a tournament-best .932 save percentage and allowing just five goals in three starts.

But he didn't win. Jordan Binnington and Canada did. And while that blame hardly lies at Hellebuyck's feet, the fact is Binnington made one more big save than he did. Binnington stopped Auston Matthews in overtime, Hellebuyck didn't stop Connor McDavid. Three months later, he gave up five or more goals in four of his 13 playoff starts, losing to the Dallas Stars in Round 2 after barely escaping the St. Louis Blues in Round 1. The talk of Hellebuyck's big-game struggles was never louder.

And it's all fair. Hellebuyck's trophy room is as impressive as any player's in the NHL. But they're all individual, all for the regular season. There's no Stanley Cup. And there's no gold medal. Not yet, at least.

No label is more offensive to a professional athlete than that of "choker." It's a term that's probably too harsh for Hellebuyck, who is not solely to blame for the Jets' inability to get past the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. But it's not far off, either. Sports fans traffic in hyperbole the way Hellebuyck traffics in monotone clichés. So the label will follow him until he rips it off in triumph.

Would a gold medal be enough, or would the skepticism follow him into Winnipeg's next playoff series, whenever that may be? Probably the latter, if we're being honest. In the hockey world, the silver of Lord Stanley still trumps the gold of the Olympic Games. But it certainly wouldn't hurt the public perception. It could, at the very least, nudge the narrative.

Internally? Hellebuyck doesn't seem to feel any of it — the weight, the pressure, the stress. This is not a man who needs more confidence. To steal a phrase from him, perhaps no one in this world has as much confidence as Hellebuyck does. But a coronation in Milan might give the rest of the hockey world some confidence in him the next time the stakes are raised.

And who knows? It might even make him smile.

Winnipeg Sun

https://www.winnipegsun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/trump-invite-throws-wrench-into-arniel-s-plans-for-jets/article_473798fd-0194-4a24-ba05-e2c5abef00ee.html

Trump invite throws wrench into Arniel's plans for Jets

By Paul Friesen

One thing Scott Arniel likely didn't have on his bingo card when taking the job as Winnipeg Jets head coach: having U.S. President Donald Trump interfere with his lineup.

Arniel is facing that bizarre scenario for Jets games Wednesday in Vancouver and Friday in Anaheim, after Trump invited Team USA to his Tuesday State-of-the-Union address.

The issue was further complicated when the Monday charter flights that carried the players back to North America were diverted from New York to Miami.

Never one to miss a chance at self-promotion, Trump told the team they could also come to the White House on Wednesday.

That leaves the status of Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck and winger Kyle Connor up in the air.

“The White House thing kind of threw a bit of a wrinkle,” Arniel said on Monday. “But the plan (to play Hellebuyck) is for Anaheim. The hard part is the coast-to-coast travel here. It’s going from Miami to Washington and back out to Anaheim.”

NHL players are supposed to be available to their teams two days after they're eliminated from the Olympics. A good chunk of the Team USA roster is scheduled to play on Wednesday.

While Hellebuyck was not pencilled into Arniel's lineup before Friday, Connor will be itching to play after being a healthy scratch for all but the first two games of the Olympic tournament.

The Jets, facing immense pressure to get on a roll if they want any hope of making the playoffs, need him ASAP.

“They all have family with them, too,” Arniel said. “So we've got to see how that's going to play itself out. Maybe (they) come home, change their underwear or do whatever they have to do and get themselves back out to the west coast. This all has to do with travel.”

The pair's potential replacements on the 23-man roster are affected, too. Players like defenceman Ville Heinola and goalie Domenic DiVincentiis remain on recall from the AHL farm team, the Manitoba Moose.

“Everybody's in a holding pattern,” is how Arniel put it. “So we have to see. We need a backup goaltender... so Dom's going to be coming with us. We can only go to Vancouver with 23 guys.”

Arniel knows he won't have Josh Morrissey for Wednesday's game. The Team Canada defenceman, injured in the first game of the Olympics, needs to see team doctors before he's cleared.

A deserving gold?

Some of the Canadian narrative coming out of the gold-medal final was that Team Canada was the better team and deserved to win, that only the play of Hellebuyck allowed the Americans to win.

Of course, goalies are part of the team. The most important part, especially in winner-take-all games.

“Two things can be true: you can out-play a team and get goalied,” Jets defenceman Dylan DeMelo said. “It is such a unique position. It's like if a pitcher throws a complete game. What did the other guys really do? And it's no disrespect. But obviously Helle played an insane game for them to win.

“You look at the chances and the shots and the pressure Canada put on them, the USA was on their heels and they dug in and they got it done.”

“That's why you play the games,” forward Morgan Barron added. “If you just base the winner off who created the better scoring chances, it's removing that element. Do I think Canada carried the play for more of the game? Yeah, but that's the beauty of our game. There's a lot of puck luck, there's individual efforts that can carry a team a long way.

“It made it really entertaining to watch.”

Best of seven, anyone?

So which team would win a best-of-seven, this version of Team Canada or the USA?

Barron: "I'd like to think Canada. But there's also part of me that thinks Helle can do that four out of seven times. It'd be interesting."

Arniel: "Canada plays like that, I think they do."

DeMelo: "I don't know. It would be must-watch TV, as (Sunday) was."

Swiss reset

Jets winger Nino Niederreiter got back from Italy in time for Monday's practice, rejuvenated by Team Switzerland's performance along with his own: he scored a goal in their overtime loss to Finland in a quarter-final.

"Switzerland always got taken very lightly," Niederreiter said. "I feel like everybody respected us the way we play and that's something which we accomplished, and we were very proud of."

"It was extremely fun."

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/winnipeg_jets/inside-an-ice-fishing-hut-with-winnipeg-jets-players/article_0a0aca74-0e46-4fa4-8539-7db7de8024ff.html

Ice-fishing hut housed patriotic Olympic moment for four Winnipeg Jets

By Paul Friesen

Question: What do you get when you put four Winnipeg Jets, two Canadians and two Americans, in an ice-fishing hut with a small TV to watch the gold-medal game at the Olympics?

Answer: A spicy side-dish to some fresh-caught Manitoba pickerel.

"Bittersweet," is how Jets forward Morgan Barron described his Sunday morning on the Red River at Selkirk. "It was fun. The fishing was busy early, and then it slowed down."

The game never did.

"It was entertaining," Barron continued. "You want to see all your teammates do well. Deep down, as Canadians, we're pulling for them. But to see Helle do what he did, I'm really happy for him. Pretty incredible."

Barron, from Halifax, and Cole Perfetti of Whitby, Ont., were the two who had mixed feelings about goalie Connor Hellebuyck's thievery against Team Canada.

Minnesota product Neal Pionk and Alex Iafallo, who's from upstate New York, were the ones whose celebrations weren't at all muted.

Iafallo was the host, bringing the generator he uses for camping to power a TV connected to a phone.

The hut is a regular hangout for Lafallo, but it was Barron's first time, both at that fishing hole and as an NHL player with more than just a rooting interest in an Olympic gold-medal hockey game.

This marked the first Winter Games with NHL players in a dozen years, and the 27-year-old is all for it happening again.

As for the outcome, he was already over it by Monday.

"Canada's not going to win every single year," Barron said. "It was a great event, and really good for our game, too."

In Winnipeg, defenceman Dylan DeMelo spent early Sunday morning making pancakes instead of frying fish, watching from the comfort of home instead of from the frozen surface of the Red.

Yes, the 32-year-old from London, Ont., was dismayed by his country's defeat.

But he was also buoyed by the play of his teammate between the pipes.

"I'm bummed for those guys in the sense that you give everything you have, you play a fantastic game, and we've been on the other end of that with Helle," DeMelo said. "I saw it as a win-win. Cheering for Canada..... but to see Helle and KC (Kyle Connor) win the gold, and obviously the game that Helle had was extraordinary. Was super happy for those guys. It's pretty cool having teammates and friends that have won the gold medal."

Jets players have seen a lower-profile version of this movie before: Hellebuyck stealing a game their team had no other business winning.

In fact, halfway through Sunday's tilt DeMelo texted some buddies with a warning of sorts.

"Boys, he's dialled in right now. I've seen this act before," is how the defenceman put it.

Adam Lowry was still in bed at that point, finally dragging himself out for the third period and overtime.

While a Canadian fan at heart, he was glad to see Hellebuyck drag his reputation in big games out of the muck it's been in, based on the ghosts of playoff seasons past.

"Sometimes he gets unfairly criticized for our team's performance in the playoffs," the Jets captain said. "He went out and showed that he can show up in big games and he can win you big games, and that's what we've grown accustomed to. Anytime the stats fall off just a little bit, people start asking, 'What's going on with Connor?' But I think it's more a team thing, where it becomes, 'What's going on in front of him?'"

"His level of play very rarely drops off, even a little."

Going into the game, Lowry told friends he wouldn't bet against "the best goalie in the world." Born in the States but raised in Canada, he was hoping for a 1-0 Canadian win, with Hellebuyck playing great but injured teammate Josh Morrissey coming home with the gold.

Put Scott Arniel in that camp, too.

“The biggest thing I was hoping for was that he was going to be at his best, then let the chips fall where they may,” the Jets head coach said. “Everyone in Winnipeg and Manitoba has seen this. When he gets on like that, he almost gains more confidence as the game goes. He was a wall.”

Arniel has worn the Maple Leaf a few times and was coming out of his chair for some chances at both ends on Sunday.

What everybody agreed on: the out-of-this-world level of play in the Olympic tournament was well worth the disruption to the NHL schedule.

“In my lifetime, I’ve got to see some great hockey games,” Arniel said. “All the way back, I remember in my school gymnasium, everybody watching that ‘72 series. That game (Sunday) was right up there with one of the best again. The whole tournament was so exciting. The games were fast, highly skilled. And that (final) hits a lot of people hard emotionally, both sides.

“That was a special game.”

Whether watching it from a king-sized bed or in a humble shack on the ice, it managed to live up to its hype.

“You see the coverage that it’s getting everywhere, especially in the U.S.” Barron said. “It’ll be good in the long run. And things will just be amped up more for the next Olympics.”

https://www.winnipeg.sun.com/sports/winnipeg/jonathan-toews-leading-by-example-in-winnipeg-jets/article_24103fbf-07c5-41c9-b7b8-09df743d5e1d.html

Jonathan Toews leads Jets with heart and experience

By Gordon Anderson

Jonathan Toews is 56 games into his second NHL stint without the ‘C’ above his lapel, but he is still leading with plenty of heart.

“It doesn’t change anything,” Toews told the Winnipeg Sun when asked about his stint in a non-captain role. “I have always encouraged guys to, especially when I was in Chicago, whether they see themselves as elite or not, they are, and you do not have to be wearing a letter to lead by example, and everyone has something to give in that regard.”

After one season, Toews was named the captain of the Chicago Blackhawks in July of 2008, prior to the start of his second season with the club. He was the youngest captain in franchise history at 20 years and 79 days old. He played 64 regular-season games with the Blackhawks in the 2007-08 season. He was ‘Captain Serious’ with the Hawks until his final game in April of 2023.

When Toews arrived in Winnipeg for his media session in early July, he made it immediately known he wasn’t joining the hometown team to usurp or undermine captain Adam Lowry. He wanted to fit in seamlessly, wanted to remain low-key and unassuming, poo-pooing any suggestions of special treatment.

But after 15 seasons of service to the 'Hawks, he naturally carries a captain's gravitas, as natural and automatic as one skate in front of the other in a forward motion.

"I don't think you are going to take the captain out of him just because he doesn't have a letter on his jersey," head coach Scott Arniel said. "He will continue to do the things that he has always done, and that is being a great teammate."

The 37-year-old admitted it has been a tough season, given how the club has struggled to find consistent secondary scoring or consistency in general.

It has also been a difficult season on the scoresheet for Toews. After two seasons away from the game, perhaps the expectations were too high, expecting him to assume the second centre role. Though the team never explicitly said that he was brought to town to fulfill a second centre role, he was slotted as the 2C early on. Either way, it hasn't worked out that way. Clearly, the Jets shot for the stars and got the moon instead.

The 37-year-old has seven goals, and a dozen assists in 56 games played. He scored two goals in his first eight games but scored once in the next 34 games, getting his third goal, in a 5-1 win over the Los Angeles Kings on Jan. 9. Toews admitted it took him until the Christmas break to feel like his old self. He did score four goals in a week's span, between Jan. 9 and 15, but hasn't scored in 10 games since.

Certainly, there has been inconsistency on the scoreboard, and there is no debate there, but Toews remains consistent with his actions, and two specific incidents speak to that case.

After two-one-sided home losses, where the opponents, the dates and scores matter less than his singular deeds on those days. On both occasions, he was the last player remaining on the ice, waiting by the blue line to receive his goaltender with words of encouragement and a firm stick tap to the pads, well after his teammates had departed for the walkway, the dressing room, the media lights, hot water and warm towels.

"There have been some tough moments this season and challenging moments, but I think the biggest, the most important one is to show who you are and what kind of player you are," he said. "I try my best to be myself and lead as much as I can on the ice, while at the same time, keeping a strong perspective and attitude."

Arniel was informed of those actions. And while the coach didn't remember and couldn't speak specifically to the two incidents, he didn't seem surprised Toews would do such a thing.

"He is a team first guy, and that is part of his DNA," Arniel said. "... He is going to do those things."

Canadian Press

https://www.ctvnews.ca/winnipeg/article/jets-rave-about-goaltender-connor-hellebuycks-gold-medal-game-outing-for-us/?taid=699d295746d9d30001876f50&utm_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

Jets rave about goaltender Connor Hellebuyck's gold-medal game outing for U.S.

By The Canadian Press

WINNIPEG — The rest of the hockey world marvelled as Connor Hellebuyck put on a 41-save clinic to snap a 46-year Olympic gold-medal drought for the United States.

Inside the Winnipeg Jets' locker room, though, they just call that a typical night at the office.

As Hellebuyck's teammates gathered for practice on Monday, they reflected on their goaltender's 2-1 overtime victory against Canada in Milan. The overriding sentiment was not shock, but rather a mixture of national heartbreak and quiet validation.

"We've been saying this for a few years now: we think he's the best goalie in the world," Jets captain Adam Lowry said.

"Sometimes he gets unfairly criticized for our team's performance in the playoffs, and I think he went out and showed that he can show up in big games and can win you big games. Sometimes I think we take it for granted how great he is, how easy he makes the game look."

For the Canadian contingent on the Jets, Sunday's gold-medal final presented a unique challenge when it came to where their loyalties lay. They desperately wanted their home country to win, but standing in the way of that was the same player they rely on to bail them out on a nightly basis with the Jets.

"Honestly, I'm cheering for Canada. I'll admit that. I've had that jersey on three times," said Jets head coach Scott Arniel, who won gold with Canada at the 1982 world junior championship. "Canada had all kind of chances to tie it up or to win the thing... It came down to one mistake and it was over. I came out of my chair a few times both ways."

Lowry, who watched the first two periods from bed before anxiously moving to his living room for the third period and overtime, echoed his coach's divided interests.

"I wanted Helly to have a great game. I wanted it to be 1-0 Canada," Lowry said. "Talking to buddies before the game, they were asking me who I thought was going to win and I just said, 'It's tough to bet against Helly. It's tough to bet against the best goalie in the world.'"

The turning point in the game for many, including Arniel, was Hellebuyck's desperation paddle save on Canadian defenceman Devon Toews. While it's a play that will certainly go down in USA hockey lore, alongside those memories of the 1980 Miracle on Ice, the Jets coach had seen that sequence play out a few times before.

"When he made that stick save, I'm like, 'OK, he's getting dialled in,'" Arniel said. "We've seen it. Everyone in Winnipeg and Manitoba has seen this. When he gets on like that, he almost gains more confidence as the game goes. He was a wall."

The appreciation for Hellebuyck extended beyond North American borders. Jets forward Nino Niederreiter, who carried the flag for Switzerland during the Games, was amazed by how his teammate performed on the international stage.

"He stood on his head... he was the Hellebuyck everyone knew," Niederreiter said. "It was good for him to be as great as he was in a big moment like that. Super happy for him. Well deserved."

While the Olympic tournament provided unforgettable moments – with Arniel comparing it to the emotions felt during the 1972 Summit Series – the Jets must now quickly pivot back to the reality of the NHL’s stretch run.

Winnipeg is fighting for a playoff berth, currently 11 points out of the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference. The Jets have 26 games remaining on their regular-season schedule, which will be played over a stretch of just 51 days.

If the Jets are to make an immediate push for the playoffs, it will have to be without their Olympic hero, at least for a few days. Arniel confirmed that Hellebuyck and American teammate Kyle Connor are scheduled to visit the White House on Tuesday evening to celebrate the victory, throwing a “bit of a wrinkle” into their travel plans.

Backup goalie Eric Comrie is expected to start Wednesday’s road game against the Vancouver Canucks, with Hellebuyck slated to return to the crease on Friday when the Jets visit the Anaheim Ducks. The Jets will also be without defenceman Josh Morrissey Wednesday as he returns from Italy to be evaluated by team doctors after suffering an undisclosed injury in Canada’s opening game.

When Hellebuyck does return, the Jets are hoping his Olympic high will provide a much-needed spark for a team trying to string together wins.

“The confidence that he has in himself doesn’t waver,” Lowry said. “To know his game is at an elite level at the world stage, I’d expect he can carry that over coming back to us.”

TSN.ca

<https://www.tsn.ca/nhl/video/2026/02/23/the-talking-point-is-hellebuyck-robbing-toews-the-greatest-save-in-hockey-history/>

The Talking Point: Is Hellebuyck robbing Toews the greatest save in hockey history? (VIDEO)

Connor Hellebuyck's gold medal winning performance was one for the ages, but was his save on Devon Toews the best save in hockey history? TSN Hockey analyst, and former NHL goaltender Jamie McLennan shares his thoughts.

<https://www.tsn.ca/olympics/video/2026/02/22/hellebuyck-carries-usa-to-gold-despite-incredible-showing-by-canada/>

Hellebuyck carries USA to gold despite incredible showing by Canada (VIDEO)

Mark Masters is joined by Pierre LeBrun and Ryan Rishaug to discuss how Connor Hellebuyck was able to silence his critics and help the United States overcome a great performance by Canada in the gold medal game, the myriad of chances the Canadians weren't able to make good on, the Tkachuk brothers reveling in the moment and Sidney Crosby's comments after the game.

The Hockey News

<https://www.dailyfaceoff.com/news/connor-hellebuyck-save-devon-toews-gold-medal-win-usa-2026-olympics-legacy-goalie-hall-of-fame>

Connor Hellebuyck finally wins The Big Game and cements himself as an all-time great goalie

By Matt Larkin

You're the best goalie of a generation, but no one cares if you aren't for the one split second that means everything.

That was the reality for Connor Hellebuyck a year ago. He was in the midst of his third Vezina Trophy season and second in a row, months away from becoming the first netminder in a decade to win the Hart Trophy as the NHL's MVP. He had stopped 69 of 73 shots for Team USA at the 4 Nations Face-Off, good for a .945 save percentage.

But the 74th shot, whipped from Connor McDavid in the slot, was the only one that mattered. It beat Hellebuyck to give Canada the tournament win in overtime. The inferior goaltender at the other end, Jordan Binnington, made the saves he had to make. And Hellebuyck missed out on adding a big-game moment that was glaringly absent from an otherwise Hall of Fame resume.

But Hellebuyck got his do-over one year and two days later at the gold-medal game of the 2026 Milan Olympics, once again matched up against Canada and Binnington, once again entering the game riding a borderline invincible run in the tournament, once again having to prove himself and make that save lest all the lead-up be rendered meaningless as it was at the 4 Nations.

Hellebuyck made that save Sunday. More accurately, he made it several times.

His diving, desperation stick stop on Canada defenseman Devon Toews, preserving a 1-1 tie in the third period, is now cemented as postage-stamp-tier iconic, a save so unbelievable it warrants rewatching several times over. But it's not like Hellebuyck made that one heart-stopping rescue amid a 17-shot workload. Canada, territorially the better team in the men's Olympic final, peppered Hellebuyck with 41 shots. Hellebuyck denied Toews in a moment that will now be replayed along with Mike Eruzione's Miracle on Ice goal – Sunday marked the U.S.'s first men's Olympic gold since that 1980 tournament – but Hellebuyck also survived breakaways from Connor McDavid and Macklin Celebrini. The McDavid one was partially thwarted by defenseman Brock Faber's stick, but Hellebuyck thwarted Celebrini, the tournament's leading goal scorer, cleanly on a breakaway to preserve the lead again after the Toews save.

At the other end of the ice, Binnington sure had his moments, too. Going into the final, he'd saved his nation's bacon in back-to-back elimination games, first with breakaway stops on Martin Necas (regulation) and Radim Simek (overtime) to preserve a tie with Czechia before Mitch Marner's quarterfinal winner, then to keep Canada's deficit at one before the comeback in the semifinal vs. Finland. He made multiple monster saves Sunday, finding pucks through traffic and coming up with a massive glove stop on Quinn Hughes during the 3-on-3 overtime.

But Sunday finally marked Hellebuyck's turn to land on the right side of history. Yes, Canada made some unforced errors, most infamously Nathan MacKinnon's miss of a wide open net on

Hellebuyck's blocker side in the third period. But Faber's double-doink off two posts to end the second negated that. What matters is Hellebuyck made the exact number of stops he had to make to win the highest-stakes game of his career.

And whether his Winnipeg Jets ever reach the Stanley Cup summit, we can safely call Hellebuyck an all-time great goaltender and surefire Hall of Famer.

He already had almost all the NHL hardware necessary to get there anyway, with the three Vezinas, three first-team All-Star selections, a Hart and a .917 career SV% that places him ninth all-time among goalies with at least 500 games played. And with 335 victories by 32, he'll surely join the 400-win club, which has 15 members, and maybe the 500-win club, which is just three goalies deep.

But without Sunday's gold-clinching performance, Hellebuyck would be missing that signature effort that people romantically associate with his name long after he retires. Not anymore. The Americans lay claim to best-on-best men's hockey supremacy for the first time since the 1996 World Cup. It was a crucial victory against a Canada program that should be trending back up in the coming years, with youngsters like Celebrini, Matthew Schaefer, Connor Bedard and Gavin McKenna as potential foundational pieces for 2030 and 2034. The Americans really needed this tournament, they got it, and no player is more responsible for that triumph than the masked man from Commerce, Mich.

Global Winnipeg

<https://globalnews.ca/news/11679222/analysis-winnipeg-jets-connor-hellebuyck-cements-status-nhls-top-goalie/>

ANALYSIS: Winnipeg Jets' Connor Hellebuyck cements status as NHL's top Goalie

By Cameron Poitras CJOB

While watching the gold medal game Sunday morning — just me and my little 16-month-old, who paid attention for about 10 minutes or so before his mind drifted to crackers and multi-sized, multi-coloured rubber ducks — there was a point near the end of the third period when I came to a realization.

It was a harsh realization, a lightning bolt of a thought right between my eyes that eventually proved to be correct.

“Oh no,” I thought, “they're not going to be able to beat him.”

Of course, I'm talking about Connor Hellebuyck, the Michigander and starting netminder for the Winnipeg Jets.

The three-time Vezina Trophy winning, Hart Memorial Trophy winning, two-time William M. Jennings Trophy, three-time NHL First All-Star Team selection — and now gold medalist — Connor Hellebuyck.

While I was 100 per cent all-in on Canada winning, there was that teeny tiny part of my heart and soul, being a fan of Connor Hellebuyck, that was elated for him.

Finally, he got his “big performance,” and anyone doubting his ability “under pressure” and “when the chips are down” can kindly walk off their dock, in their birthday suit, and jump, cannonball style, into a frozen lake.

That, I’m happy about.

Like many, I was critical of his play in places like St. Louis in last year’s playoffs, but I never doubted his ability to rise to the occasion, and would every single time, put this team’s chances to win in his reliable mitts.

However, after more time to mull over the 3-on-3 overtime loss, I grew more disappointed in the play of this Jets team this season.

Now, it wouldn’t be fair not to acknowledge the blueline that Hellebuyck played behind in Milan, including Brock Faber, Zach Werenski, Quinn Hughes and Jaccob Slavin, among other elite athletes. But it’s tough not to consider how the members of Winnipeg’s hockey club have played in front of Hellebuyck. The players, the coaching staff and the management have let him down.

This is who Hellebuyck is, and it feels like his prime is being wasted. His trophy case, now only missing a Stanley Cup, is full to bursting.

Who’s responsible for this team’s demise this season?

The blame can be smeared all around, and any reasons and excuses, rational or not, just tick me off.

But there is one thing, to me, that’s certain.

If the Jets can pull off a Herculean effort to get to the playoffs — one that would include slaying the Nemean Lion, putting down the nine-headed Hydra, capturing the Cretan Bull, all while at the same time cleaning the Augean stables in a single day — it’ll be on the back of the guy that gave his team a chance, despite all the odds and the tilt of the ice, to a 2-1 overtime win at the Winter Games.