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[abc6 / Blue Jackets' Werenski provides 'Golden' assist in historic U.S. Olympic win over Canada](#)

By Joe Durbin – February 22, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WSYX) — It was the most consequential 3-on-3 shift in modern American hockey history, and it was the captain of the Columbus Blue Jackets who delivered the pass that ended a 46-year drought.

Zach Werenski intercepted a puck from Canada's Nathan MacKinnon deep in the defensive zone and charged up-ice, threading a perfect cross-crease pass to Jack Hughes, who slotted home the game-winner 1:41 into overtime. The goal gave the United States a 2-1 victory over Canada on Sunday, securing the first Olympic gold medal for the American men since the 1980 "Miracle on Ice."

For Columbus fans, the sight of Werenski orchestrating the championship-winning play was a crowning moment for a player who has become the face of the Blue Jackets franchise.

"I saw Jack find a soft spot in their coverage and I just tried to get it to his tape," Werenski said during the post-game celebration. "To do this with this group of guys, and to bring a gold medal back to the States—and back to Columbus—is a dream come true."

Werenski's defensive play to start the sequence was just as vital as the assist itself. With the open ice of the overtime format, he stripped MacKinnon—one of the world's most dangerous skaters—before ignited the transition. It was Werenski's sixth point of the tournament (1 goal, 5 assists), capping off a dominant Olympic run where he led all American skaters in time on ice.

The game remained a tense 1-1 deadlock through much of the third period. Matt Boldy opened the scoring for the U.S. early in the first, while Canada's Cale Makar equalized in the second. American goaltender Connor Hellebuyck kept the gold within reach, stopping 41 shots to withstand a heavy Canadian offensive.

The victory marks a historic "double gold" for USA Hockey in Milan, following the U.S. women's overtime win against Canada earlier in the week.

Werenski is expected to return to Columbus later this week, where the Blue Jackets are planning a pre-game ceremony to honor the gold medalist at Nationwide Arena.

ESPN / U.S. pays tribute to Gaudreau brothers at Winter Olympics

By Associated Press – February 21, 2026

MILAN -- Johnny Gaudreau was working hard to make the U.S. team heading to the 2026 Winter Olympics. He and brother Matthew watched the event growing up, always with eyes on playing in it.

"It was their dream," Jane Gaudreau said of her sons.

Johnny and Matthew died on Aug. 29, 2024, when they were struck by an SUV while riding bicycles near their hometown in New Jersey on the eve of their sister Katie's wedding. Their deaths shocked the hockey community, and they have been honored since by retired numbers, a memorial 5K and more.

An elite player a decade into his NHL career and the all-time U.S. leading scorer in international play, Johnny Gaudreau was on track to be in Milan for the tournament that wraps up Sunday when the Americans play rival Canada for the gold medal. Guy Gaudreau said USA Hockey was gracious enough to tell the family their oldest son was on the projected roster.

"He wanted to be on this team," Guy Gaudreau said during the third period of the U.S. semifinal win Friday night. "And it would've been nice if he'd been here."

The U.S. is honoring the Gaudreau brothers with a tribute to them in their locker room at the Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena. A blue No. 13 Gaudreau jersey hangs there as a reminder of the player known as "Johnny Hockey," who was beloved by so many on the national team and beyond.

"It means everything - we all know he should be here with us," said Dylan Larkin, who played with Gaudreau at multiple world championships. "He should be with us. We love him, and I like that we continue to think about him and I wouldn't imagine it any other way."

Jane and Guy Gaudreau, along with Johnny's widow, Meredith, and their two oldest children arrived in Milan on Friday. The Gaudreau parents had been planning a trip to Las Vegas and initially hesitated after USA Hockey invited them to attend.

"Our two daughters, for 24 hours, they just kept at us: 'You have to go. The boys would want you to do this. This would mean so much to John,'" Jane said. "It just means so much to our family, and we're so excited to remember what our boys meant to hockey."

The Gaudreau family connections to players on the roster run deep, from Boston College to the NHL. In addition to the world championships, Johnny played with Noah Hanifin on the Calgary Flames and Zach Werenski on the Columbus Blue Jackets.

"Johnny was close to a lot of guys in that room," Hanifin said. "We know he'd be here with us, so we've been thinking about him and carrying him with us."

Werenski said after he and his teammates advanced to the final that Meredith reached out to his wife a few days earlier to let them know they were coming.

"It's great having them here, and it's super special," Werenski said. "We're happy that we made it to the gold-medal game so they can watch that and be a part of it. It's on us to make them proud."

Not that it would have been much of a debate, but coach Mike Sullivan confirmed what management told the Gaudreaus: Johnny would have been on the team if he were still alive, based on his body of work and how well he has played in a U.S. uniform.

"He was one of America's very best," Sullivan said. "He's just a good person on the ice and off the ice, and I think he's an inspiration to our players to this very day."

Players still talk about Gaudreau, and "all the stories are funny," according to Charlie McAvoy, who played alongside him at worlds.

"Just an amazing person, just an infectious personality," McAvoy said. "The detail, really, with our staff and our equipment staff especially to make sure that he's always with us, little reminders of him in the room, and they just go a long way. You always see them. They're just gentle. They're right there. But we know that he's always with us."

Along with Johnny's No. 13 jersey is that number on the wall alongside Matthew's No. 21. It's similar to what USA Hockey did a year ago at the 4 Nations Face-Off, when Guy Gaudreau took part in practice as a guest coach.

This would have been Johnny Gaudreau's first chance to play at the Olympics after the NHL did not participate in 2018 and 2022. But it almost certainly won't be the last time his jersey hangs in the U.S. locker room at the game, a tradition that could continue for years to come.

"I hope so," Larkin said. "I sure hope so."

[NBC4 / USA men's hockey team honors Johnny Gaudreau, celebrates gold medal with family](#)

By Orri Benatar – February 23, 2026

COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) — Team USA won its first men's hockey gold medal at a winter Olympics since 1980 and spent much of the celebration honoring the late Johnny Gaudreau.

The Blue Jackets star player and his brother Matthew were killed in August of 2024 when an alleged drunk driver ran over them in New Jersey while the brothers were riding bicycles. The Gaudreau brothers died one day before their sister's wedding and while both their wives were pregnant.

On February 22, 2026, the day of Johnny's oldest son Johnny Jr.'s second birthday, the USA men's hockey team won gold at the Milan Cortina Olympics. With the game tied at one goal in overtime, Blue Jackets star and Johnny Gaudreau's teammate in Columbus Zach Werenski passed the puck to Jack Hughes, who put in the iconic golden goal.

In the midst of the American celebrations, Werenski along with American captain Auston Matthews and star forward Matthew Tkachuk grabbed Gaudreau's No. 13 USA jersey and held it up for the Milan audience to see. The jersey was hung in the locker room throughout the Olympics as head coach Mike Sullivan told Johnny's father Guy that Johnny likely would have made the team.

MILAN, ITALY – FEBRUARY 22: Players of Team United States pose for photographs during the medal ceremony following 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. (Photo by Gregory Shamus/Getty Images)

Among the audience and celebrating the dramatic victory in Milan was Johnny's widow [Meredith](#), his father Guy and mother Jane, and Johnny and Meredith's children Noa, Johnny Jr., and Carter. While receiving their gold medals, Werenski and Matthew's brother Brady Tkachuk held up Johnny's jersey and continued to hold onto it as the Star-Spangled Banner played.

After the initial team photo with the gold medals hanging around their necks, Werenski and Dylan Larkin went to Meredith to grab Noa and Johnny Jr. to take a photo with the team while holding their late father's jersey.

Werenski is just the second Blue Jackets player to win an Olympics gold medal and the first to do so with Team USA, who has now won three gold medals in men's hockey.

Team USA ended the Milan Cortina Olympics with 12 gold medals, a record for any American winter Olympic team. With the women's hockey gold medal win as well, it is the first time Team USA has swept the hockey gold medals.

The Columbus Dispatch / Johnny Gaudreau jersey, family on the ice for Team USA gold medal celebration

By Brian Hedger – February 22, 2026

Johnny Gaudreau's No. 13 jersey for the United States made its way from the locker room to a postgame gold medal celebration for the second time in nine months, proudly displayed by the U.S. after a thrilling 2-1 overtime victory over Canada on Feb. 22 at the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics.

The sweater had hung in a stall during the tournament as a memorial to the star, who died Aug. 29, 2024, along with his brother, Matthew, when they were struck by an alleged drunk driver while they biked in Oldmans Township, New Jersey.

Following the winning goal set up by Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski, the U.S. retrieved Gaudreau's jersey while members of his family watched from the stands at Milano Santagiulia Arena in Milan, Italy. Those family members included Gaudreau's 3-year-old daughter Noa and son Johnny, who was celebrating his second birthday.

After the medal ceremony, members of Team USA skated over to Gaudreau's widow, Meredith, and brought the two children over for a photo with the team.

Werenski, Gaudreau's friend and teammate with the Blue Jackets, similarly celebrated an overtime victory for gold with the No. 13 jersey in May 2025 at the men's world championships.

The Columbus Dispatch / Gaudreaus support U.S. at Milano Cortina 2026: 'It gives me chills'

By Brian Hedger – February 21, 2026

Late Blue Jackets forward Johnny Gaudreau enjoyed wagering on sporting events with his teammates, but anything featuring the United States vs. Canada drew extra attention.

Gaudreau, a longtime USA Hockey player, never missed a chance to raise the stakes with his Canadian friends, including Blue Jackets center Sean Monahan.

“It was with everything,” Monahan said. “I’d be getting a text whenever it would be. It’d be mid-summer, and he’d be asking me if I wanted to take Canada in soccer, and the U.S. would be a heavy favorite. We’d go at it a decent amount. It was all for fun, obviously, but that’s something I definitely miss.”

Gaudreau, a Blue Jackets star, and his younger brother, Matthew, were killed by an alleged drunk driver Aug. 29, 2024 while riding bikes in Oldmans Township, New Jersey. The tragedy occurred a few weeks before the Blue Jackets opened training camp for the 2024-25 season, and they’ve embraced the Gaudreau family ever since.

Johnny’s No. 13 jersey hangs in the Jackets’ locker room each game; the postgame player-of-the-game donkey hat award is an ode to his sense of humor; a No. 13 banner hangs at Nationwide Arena; and his teammates don’t go a day without sharing a memory about him.

It’s similar for USA Hockey, which has honored Gaudreau with its national teams since the tragedy. That includes the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, where Johnny Gaudreau’s No. 13 jersey will again hang in the U.S. locker room before a rivalry showdown Feb. 22 against Canada for the gold medal.

Team USA even went a step further prior to a Feb. 20 semifinal victory over Slovakia, bringing in members of the Gaudreau family to watch the U.S. play in the medal rounds. Guy and Jane, parents of the Gaudreau brothers, are joined in Milan, Italy by Johnny’s wife, Meredith, and the oldest two of their three children, Noa and Johnny.

The importance of their presence didn’t go unrecognized by the U.S. team, including Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski.

“It gives me chills,” Werenski said in a USA Hockey video clip posted on social media. “He’s a guy that was USA Hockey. He went to all the world championships. He would’ve been at the 4 Nations (Face-Off). He would’ve been on this team. He really embraced what it meant to be a USA Hockey player, and every time I see that, I realize the importance of it, and I don’t take moments like this for granted.”

Werenski honored Gaudreau in May 2025 after helping the U.S. end a 92-year gold medal drought at the men’s world championships in Stockholm, Sweden. After Buffalo Sabres forward Tage Thompson scored the winning goal in overtime, Werenski jogged back to the locker room to grab Gaudreau’s jersey, which was draped over the championship trophy in a postgame celebration.

Expect a reprise of that scenario if the No. 2 seed U.S. team downs No. 1 seed Canada with the Gaudreau family in the arena.

“We knew they were going over, and you know what ... it’s where they should be,” Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner said. “Johnny played for the U.S. in how many different tournaments? I remember playing against him in the World Juniors (for Canada), and he tore us apart there playing for the U.S. and did after that at the world championships. There’s no doubt he’d be on this team, so that’s where they should be.”

Monahan and defenseman Erik Gudbranson, who each played with Gaudreau in Calgary, shared similar sentiments after the Jackets’ practice Feb. 21 at the Ice Haus.

“He was very near and dear to USA Hockey, for sure,” Gudbranson said. “I mean, how many smaller-end guys are playing in the National Hockey League nowadays because of Johnny Gaudreau? He inspired so many people to play the game and play the game the way he did.”

Gaudreau’s style is reflected in the U.S. roster by Quinn and Jack Hughes, two brothers who overcome their slight builds to excel through elite skating ability, vision and skill. Watching them scoot around the ice might give the Gaudreaus some welcome flashbacks, if not chills.

“It’s great that USA Hockey did that for them,” Monahan said. “Meredith’s a trooper for getting the kids on the plane and getting them down there. I did my first flight [with my son], and I know what it’s like. But it’s a special moment for the family. You carry on that legacy, and Johnny and Matty’s name forever.”