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May 27, 2025

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The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski helps U.S. end drought, honors Gaudreau

By Brian Hedger – May 25, 2025

Tage Thompson scored the overtime game-winning goal to secure the U.S. men's hockey team's first world championship gold medal in 92 years.

Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski played a key role for Team USA, earning a spot on the tournament's all-star team.

The U.S. team honored the late Johnny Gaudreau, a former Blue Jacket, by carrying his jersey during the trophy presentation.

Team USA overcame a strong Swiss team and goaltender Leonardo Genoni, who set a new world championship record for consecutive shutout minutes.

It didn't take a miracle, but it did require Tage Thompson's golden goal to finally end a 92-year gold medal drought for USA Hockey at the 2025 IIHF men's world championships.

Thompson's goal 2:02 into a 3-on-3 OT on May 25 at Avicii Arena in Stockholm, Sweden, lifted the U.S. over Switzerland, 1-0. The only other time the U.S. has won gold medals after a world championship in a non-Olympic year was 1933, and 1950 was the last time the Americans even played for worlds gold.

Blue Jackets star Zach Werenski, one of the U.S. alternate captains, was named to the tournament's all-star team. When the championship trophy was awarded, Werenski carried late teammate Johnny Gaudreau's No. 13 jersey.

He and the team's other captains held it in front of the trophy. They smiled and posed for photos before Clayton Keller (Utah Mammoth) hoisted it amid a confetti shower. It was a picturesque, poignant way to celebrate the end of a long drought while also remembering Gaudreau, a Blue Jackets forward who starred for the U.S. in the 2024 world championship just a few months before he was killed along with his brother, Matthew, while riding bikes on Aug. 29, 2024 in New Jersey.

Werenski finished with one goal, five assists, six points and a +9 plus/minus rating in the seven games he played.

Initially planning to sit out this year's tournament to let his body recover after leading the NHL in ice time, Werenski changed his mind about a week before the preliminary round. He missed the first three games, including a 3-0 loss to Switzerland on May 12, but eventually joined a lineup powered by young NHL talent.

He provided leadership and stability on the blue line, running the top power-play unit from the point and soaking up a lot of important minutes. Werenski was on the ice to start 3-on-3 overtime in the gold medal game, which turned out to be a goaltending duel between the tournament's two highest-scoring teams.

Leonardo Genoni, playing in his 11th world championship with Switzerland, broke former Swedish star Pekka Rinne's modern world championships record for consecutive shutout minutes by going 243:26

without allowing a goal prior to Thompson's winner, and U.S. goalie Jeremy Swayman (Boston Bruins) stopped all 25 shots he faced.

This U.S. championship isn't on the same level of importance as the 1980 "Miracle on Ice" gold medal at the Winter Olympics or the Americans' 1996 World Cup championship, but it does carry significance.

Since forming the U.S. National Team Development Program in Plymouth, Michigan, American hockey has grown into an international power at all levels other than men's world championship teams. The U.S. has traditionally struggled at worlds on the men's side for multiple reasons, but the biggest has been a lack of interest from NHL players not keen on spending a month in Europe after their NHL season concludes.

Canada and European teams don't tend to have that issue. This U.S. team, however, bucked the odds despite icing the tournament's youngest roster.

Their biggest advantages were having Swayman, one of the NHL's top goalies, plus a bevy of championship experience with a group of young stars who'd recently won world titles for the U.S. at younger ages. The U.S. also took Canada to overtime in the gold medal game of the NHL's best-on-best 4 Nations Face-Off tournament in February 2025, which Werenski led in scoring.

That run prompted calls among some U.S. NHL players for more top players to join the men's world championship team. It didn't result in a flood of U.S. stars signing up, but USA Hockey did get enough veterans to join its elite group of young stars that they finally ended the dry spell.

It wasn't easy.

Switzerland entered the game riding an eight-game winning streak, which included five shutouts. The Swiss hadn't allowed a goal since finishing first in Group B — ahead of the U.S. — during the preliminary round. After shutting the U.S. out the first time, 3-0, in Group B play, Genoni shut them out through three more regulation periods.

Thompson's wrist shot in 3-on-3 OT finally gave the U.S. its only goal of the tournament against the Swiss, but that's all the red, white and blue needed for gold.

The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Werenski Shines Again on World Stage

By Mark Sheig – May 25, 2025

For the second time in the span of just over three months, Zach Werenski put on a show for everyone to see at the Men's World Championships. As it turned out, he helped Team U.S.A. make significant history.

Tage Thompson scored in overtime to defeat Switzerland 1-0. The win clinched Team U.S.A.'s first gold medal at the Men's World Championships since 1933, a span of 92 years.

Recall Werenski initially said he wasn't going to play at this tournament. But after reflecting on what wearing that jersey meant, he made one of the best decisions he's ever made. It will go down in history.

Werenski Shines Again

Werenski caught a lot of national attention for his performance at the 4-Nations Faceoff. His six points led the tournament in scoring and was an important part of taking Team Canada to the limit before falling in overtime.

This time, the overtime went Team U.S.A.'s way. Werenski's overall performance helped his team get to that point.

Werenski recorded six points in this tournament. He played a ton of minutes and was a calming influence to a team who was the youngest in the tournament coming in. He helped to give his team confidence in key moments of the tournament.

This was especially seen during the gold medal game.

Werenski played his usual role in key situations while also ensuring there was no panic when Switzerland had a scoring chance with him on the ice. His overall play was rewarded when he was named an All-Star defenseman for the tournament.

Werenski was on the ice for 12 Team U.S.A goals for. He did exactly what management hoped for when he agreed to come to the tournament. His arrival sent a message to everyone on the team. They were on a business trip to win.

For Werenski, it's usually never about his individual accolades although they are starting to pile up after winning gold. He and his entire team will always remember this moment for the rest of their lives. They did it for their country. They also did it for Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau.

During the presentation of the World Championship Trophy, Werenski had a Johnny Gaudreau jersey with him. He proceeded to place the jersey on top of the trophy. Then along with the captains and a few teammates, they took a picture together with Johnny's jersey in the middle. The entire situation was handled with class.

Building a Foundation

This win by Team U.S.A. they hope will be the start of something special in future years. This was the only tournament that the United States couldn't find any success in. It appears the challenge issued by Dylan Larkin worked.

All eyes will now turn their attention to the Olympics in Milan in 2026. Werenski again proved why he should be an integral part of what Team U.S.A. does. He's proving to be an important leader for his team.

The foundation has been set thanks to this year's performance. On top of winning gold at the World Men's Championship, Team U.S.A. won gold at the World Juniors and the Women's World Championship. They have their sights set on continued success as one of the world's powerhouse countries.

Werenski's decision to join helped make this moment a reality. He won't soon forget that.

The Hockey Writers / 2025-26 Blue Jackets Roster Projection 1.0: Significant Questions Persist

By Mark Sheig – May 27, 2025

It's now been over a month since the Columbus Blue Jackets have played a game. They won't see the ice again for a regular-season game for another 4 1/2 months yet. But that doesn't mean we can't start looking ahead to the 2025-26 version of the Blue Jackets.

GM Don Waddell has a lot of business to take care of between now and the start of the season. Besides having to decide on potential moves during this offseason, he has a lot of decisions to make about their free agents.

Waddell told the Hockey Writers recently that many of those free agent decisions would happen after speaking with head coach Dean Evason upon his return from the Men's World Championships. With 14 players to decide on, not everyone will be back with the team.

While we await the decisions the Blue Jackets make, we will start projecting their roster between now and the start of the new season. In all, there will be six editions of projections, one per month.

Today, we will make version 1.0 the pre-NHL Combine edition. As you will see, the Blue Jackets have some important questions they need to answer. They have needs to fill both up front and on the blue line. They also have important questions to answer in net.

Forwards

Using Puckpedia as a guide, there are 11 players under contract for 2025-26 that are either a lock to make the team or will have a great chance to make it. They are as follows in line format.

Boone Jenner – Sean Monahan – Kirill Marchenko

Kent Johnson – Adam Fantilli – ??

Yegor Chinakhov – Cole Sillinger – Mathieu Olivier

Zach Aston Reese- Jack Williams/Luca Del Bel Belluz – ??

The Blue Jackets have a slew of unrestricted free agents to make decisions on. That list includes James van Riemsdyk, Sean Kuraly, Christian Fischer, Kevin Labanc, Luke Kunin and Justin Danforth. We are not listing the UFA's in the minors but you can see the full list [here](#).

In terms of restricted free agents, Mikael Pyhtia is one. The other big one up front is Dmitri Voronkov. He has arbitration rights. Coming off a career-high 23 goals last season, he will be due a raise. He could also be the target of an offer sheet. However Waddell told the Hockey Writers he's not worried about that given how much cap space the team has. PuckPedia lists them having over \$40 million in available space for 2025-26 as of this writing.

It's easy to imagine Voronkov taking one of the spots above once a new contract is signed. But until pen hits paper, nothing is official. van Riemsdyk wants to come back to the Blue Jackets. He's in a holding pattern until there is more clarity on what the Blue Jackets look like after the offseason goes on.

Depending on what you think about Chinakhov and if he's going to have a bounce back year, there is a need for a second-line right wing. Johnson could play that side if needed. Chinakhov could too. But with both being lefties, adding someone to the right side who shoots right is not the worst idea in the world.

As for the fourth line spot, we'll see what they decide with van Riemsdyk and Danforth. There is a chance both do not return for 2025-26. Should there be an opening in the bottom-six, could someone like James Malatesta grab hold of that spot? Jordan Dumais and Gavin Brindley are there too, however another season in the AHL to develop feels like the best situation for them.

Forwards weren't the issue for the Blue Jackets in 2024-25. They could score goals. They really don't have to do a lot here with center ice locked in. That's why the idea of bringing someone in like Mitch Marner doesn't feel like a fit here given what he could get on a contract.

Could someone like Brock Boeser fit here as a signing? Adding him to a line with Johnson and Fantilli would have major potential and would give the Blue Jackets a needed boost on the right.

Expect at least one move of some sort to bring someone in, maybe more if the opportunity presents itself. The more major questions for the Blue Jackets are on defense.

Defense

Here's where things get very interesting. The Blue Jackets currently have five players under contract that project to make the roster.

Zach Werenski – ??

Denton Mateychuk – Damon Severson

Jake Christiansen – Erik Gudbranson

Jordan Harris is an RFA while Jack Johnson, Dante Fabbro and Ivan Provorov are UFA's. We'll see what happens with Harris. He could slot in as the 6/7D similar to last season once a deal is agreed to. Jack Johnson likely doesn't come back. Fabbro and Provorov are the big questions.

Waddell told the Hockey Writers that there is mutual interest on both sides to get a deal done with each player. Waddell is scheduled to meet with Provorov's agent at the NHL Combine to talk. Talks with Fabbro's camp have taken place also. It's a matter of seeing if they can agree on what the new contracts look like.

Provorov's steadiness and availability was a big asset to the Blue Jackets. He's due for a raise. Would signing him limit Mateychuk's development on the left side? There's a lot Waddell has to consider here.

It's the same with Fabbro. His emergence was huge to give Werenski a dependable partner on the right. He too is due a raise. Are the Blue Jackets willing to go there to get this deal done knowing they have Severson and Gudbranson who could each play the right side?

Hanging over all of this is the desire for massive improvement. The Blue Jackets' goals against was a major sore spot and a big reason why they fell short of the playoffs. Re-signing Provorov and Fabbro would signal a run-it-back approach. Can they really run this back given the poor stats?

This is where we expect the Blue Jackets to use their first-round picks in a deal if it comes to that. They need to improve their blue line preferably someone with size who can play the shutdown role. Waddell said both picks 14 and 20 are available in the right deals.

Another reason to think the Blue Jackets could look to outside help on defense is the state of the prospect pool. Barring an incredible training camp, it appears most every defenseman (such as Corson Ceulemans, Guillaume Richard and Stanislav Svozil) are bound for the AHL. The younger prospects still have work to do. Should the Blue Jackets make their picks in the first round, it's reasonable to think at least one will be a defenseman.

Once the Provorov and Fabbro decisions are made, the picture will become clearer. Until then, major questions will persist.

Goaltending

As of now, Elvis Merzlikins and Jet Greaves are under contract for the 2025-26 season. Given how Greaves played down the stretch last season, he made his case for a more full-time role in the NHL.

That leaves the important question of what do the Blue Jackets do with Daniil Tarasov? Waddell told us that no decision was made either way on him. Talks will pick up once more of the offseason has played out.

This situation could go either way. Last season was a major struggle for Tarasov. He didn't play for long stretches. The Blue Jackets elected to play Greaves over him.

With that said, the Blue Jackets do believe Tarasov has a lot more in his game when given a consistent chance. Would they consider carrying three goaltenders? That's not ideal. All would require waivers in 2025-26.

Then there's the question of seeking outside help. Despite the crowd, this can't be ruled out yet. Remember the goals against? With Waddell saying he doesn't anticipate buyouts, that would seem to point to Merzlikins being back since he has the contract barring an unexpected trade.

Speaking of trades, it's reasonable to think the Blue Jackets would be open to a goaltending upgrade via trade if the opportunity presents itself. This will ride on what they decide with Tarasov. A wide range of outcomes are possible from running it all back to a major change.

We'll be back with Version 2.0 after the NHL Draft at the end of June. By then, we may have some important answers to critical questions the team is facing.

CHL.ca / Ritchie scores twice, Tigers sink their claws into Wildcats in second Memorial Cup victory

By Cami Kepke – May 26, 2025

Ryder Ritchie's three-point night vaulted the Medicine Hat Tigers past the Moncton Wildcats in a Memorial Cup catfight on Monday night.

The Minnesota Wild prospect scored twice and added an assist on Gavin McKenna's empty-net goal to secure a 3-1 victory to help Medicine Hat improve to 2-0-0 at the tournament.

The win guarantees that Medicine Hat will advance to the Memorial Cup semifinal, at a minimum.

If the Tigers beat the OHL Champion London Knights in their final round-robin game on Tuesday, they would advance directly to the title match.

"We are grateful for the opportunity, we don't take it for granted," General Manager and Head Coach Willie Desjardins said. "We know what the games are going to be like. We know they're going to be hard. I think we got big contributions. I think Ryder is playing his best hockey of the year and stuff like that makes it good for us. Everybody knows London's a good team. They're that close to winning last year. I think they might even be a better team this year. So we know that's a big challenge for us."

Columbus Blue Jackets prospect Cayden Lindstrom also made his Memorial Cup debut, going 6/11 at the faceoff dot and drawing a high-sticking penalty in the third period to stymie a late Wildcats push.

"It's special to be here, and I'm super grateful to come in and play here with my teammates," Lindstrom said postgame. "Overall, felt good just to be with the guys and compete."

For a second straight game, Minnesota Wild prospect Ryder Ritchie lit the lamp first.

Captain Oasiz Wiesblatt started the play by springing WHL Player of the Year Gavin McKenna for a breakaway opportunity on Mathis Rousseau, with his shot going slightly wide and rebounding off the boards.

McKenna played the puck back to Wiesblatt, who teed up Ritchie to sweep the puck in for his second goal at the 2025 Memorial Cup.

Tampa Bay Lightning prospect Harrison Meneghin held the Wildcats scoreless in the first period with a slew of sensational saves- including a kicking pad stop on Maxim Cote on the doorstep of the Tigers net.

The Tigers sank their claws into the second period as they outshot the Wildcats 17-6.

On a powerplay, rookie Liam Ruck appeared to double the lead as he jabbed at a loose puck in the blue paint and kicked it past Rousseau. The goal was called back after review.

Nonetheless, the Tabbies came up with an undeniable powerplay tally shortly afterward as NHL Draft-eligible defenceman Jonas Woo sliced a pass from the point down low to Calgary Flames prospect Andrew Basha, who made a short pass to tee up Ritchie for his second goal of the night.

Meneghin showed exactly how he earned his entry-level contract with the Lightning in the back half of the frame as Draft-eligible German import Julius Sumpf barrelled down the ice on the breakaway, only to be shut down as the 2025 WHL Playoffs MVP flashed the leather and held onto the puck.

But the Wildcats still had plenty of bite.

Meneghin's fellow Tampa Bay prospect Dyllan Gill chopped the lead in half with a deceptive wrister from the point.

As the Wildcats poured on the pressure with the clock winding down, Ritchie vanquished their comeback hopes by kicking a puck to McKenna for a long empty-net goal.

Meneghin saved 21 of 22 shots faced for a .954 save percentage, with the Tigers outshooting the Wildcats 41-22.

Medicine Hat gets right back to work on Tuesday, May 27, as they close out round-robin play against the OHL Champion London Knights (2-0).

Puck drop is set for 5:00 p.m. MST at Rimouski's Sun Life Financial Coliseum.

Viewers in Canada can tune in on TSN, while fans in the United States and elsewhere can stream the action on Victory+.

[IIHF.com / IIHF Hall of Fame inducts seven](#)

by Lucas Aykroyd – May 25, 2025

Prior to Sunday's medal games at the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship, the IIHF Hall of Fame inducted seven new members at a gala ceremony in Stockholm.

It was a storied class this year. The list includes two great Swedish goaltenders in Henrik Lundqvist and Kim Martin-Hasson, a towering Slovak legend on defence in Zdeno Chara, a Danish trailblazer in Frans Nielsen, a Czech ace in David Vyborny, a Canadian women's hockey icon in Vicky Sunohara, and an important Finnish hockey executive in Kai Hietaranta, who was inducted in the Builder's Category. The event was MC'd as usual by TSN's Gord Miller, the 2013 winner of the IIHF's Paul Loicq Award.

"We celebrate stars and people who did a lot for ice hockey, but this is also a time when they explain how they got there," said IIHF President Luc Tardif in his introductory remarks. "The family, their journey, their coaches. That's important to know about, because behind all these champions, there is always a team effort."

Lundqvist earned his place in IIHF history by backstopping Sweden to the gold medal at both the 2006 Olympics in Turin and the 2017 WM in Cologne, not to mention his reign with the New York Rangers. "The King" set an NHL record as the first netminder to record 30-plus wins in each of his first seven seasons. Here, the 2012 Vezina Trophy winner reminisced about visiting his grandparents in Stockholm at age nine, seeing Avicii Arena (then Globen), and dreaming of playing there for Tre Kronor.

He talked about his feelings about putting on the blue-and-yellow jersey: "It's pride, excitement. That feeling never changed for the next 20 years. When you start playing, I thought about stopping the puck. Now being retired, I reflect on how much the game has given me, not just as a player, but as a person."

Martin-Hasson was just 15 when she got the call to start in the 2002 Olympic bronze medal game in which Sweden edged archrival Finland 2-1. And the Stockholm-born goalie was 19 when she backstopped Sweden to an historic silver medal at the 2006 Olympics, including a 37-save performance in the 3-2 shootout upset over the Americans in the semi-finals. The silver, coming against the defending champion Canadians, marked the first time an IIHF women's tournament did not feature an all-North American final. Martin-Hasson spoke glowingly about her national team coach Peter Elander and captain Erika Holst from that seminal era in Nordic women's hockey.

"Looking at where women's hockey is today, I'm in awe," said Martin-Hasson, who now serves as the general manager of Frolunda's SDHL team. "It's incredible to see the growth, the recognition and the passion surrounding the sport. I feel so fortunate that I played a role in its development, and I'm excited to see where the future takes us."

Chara is renowned among NHL fans for captaining the Boston Bruins to the 2011 Stanley Cup. Yet his legend shines even more strongly among Slovak fans, to whom the 206-metre icon gave a special shoutout in his native language during his speech. Among numerous other feats, Chara is a two-time Ice Hockey World Championship silver medalist (2000, 2012) – the 2000 silver was the first WM medal in Slovakia's young history as an independent nation – and a three-time Olympian (2006, 2010, 2014).

His speech was certainly worthy of a captain, with tributes to family, friends, and other partners aplenty. The veteran of 1,680 NHL games, the most ever played by a defenceman, described hockey as “a way of life, a community, a culture.” “My gift was my strong will,” said Chara, adding that he cherished “every moment of pain and joy that led me to this incredible honour.”

Nielsen, the first Danish-trained player to compete in the NHL, couldn’t hide his emotions as he acknowledged his family and told his fellow inductees: “Thanks for all the good battles over the years!” He played 925 NHL games with the New York Islanders and Detroit Red Wings before returning to Europe. A native of Herning, which co-hosted this year’s WM with Stockholm, he also helped Denmark return to the top division in 2003 after a 54-year absence.

The talented, heart-and-soul forward suited up in nine top-level Ice Hockey World Championships and was thrilled to join the Danish men at their first Olympics in 2022. Nielsen praised the incredible progress Danish hockey has made at every level this season, including appearing in its first WM bronze medal game en route to a best-ever finish.

Of course, there were lighter moments of nostalgia as well.

“My second NHL game was a derby at MSG,” Nielsen recalled. “That’s where I got my ‘welcome to the NHL’ moment. I was stuck on the ice against [Jaromir] Jagr, [Martin] Straka, and [Michael] Nylander for two minutes!”

Vyborny’s list of international achievements is probably as long as Chara’s stick. The gifted Czech centre racked up five WM gold medals between 1996 and 2005 as part of his nation’s “Golden Generation” and added an Olympic bronze medal in 2006, among many other decorations. As during his career, he preferred to let his play do the talking when he was inducted.

The former HC Sparta Praha and Columbus Blue Jackets star, who made special mention of his family, also said: “I’m so happy and excited about getting this honour. Special thanks to the Czech Republic. Big love!”

Sunohara amusingly described how she at first wondered if there was a problem when she saw that Tardif had phoned her in the run-up to the 2025 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 Women’s World Championship in Vantaa, Finland, where she coached Canada to gold. Her induction reflected her tremendous accomplishments as a player, including two Olympic gold medals (2002, 2006) and seven world titles between the inaugural Women’s Worlds in Ottawa in 1990 and the 2007 edition in Winnipeg. Sunohara’s speech was replete with gratitude for everyone from Hockey Canada coaches like Mel Davidson and Daniele Sauvageau to teammates like Cassie Campbell and Jayna Hefford.

“It’s quite emotional,” said the pioneering Sunohara, who has coached with the University of Toronto for 14 years. “Wearing this Canada jersey never gets old. Watching my teammates in great moments and tough moments, it’s very special.”

Hietarinta, who led the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation from 1984 to 1997, presided over a special period of growth for hockey in Suomi. That included the historic gold medal at the 1987 World Juniors and silver medal at the 1988 Olympics. On Hietarinta’s watch, the number of indoor rinks in Finland mushroomed from 12 to more than 100. That included the state-of-the-art Hartwall Arena, which opened to host the 1997 Ice Hockey World Championship.

His speech was laden with memories. Getting his first pair of CCM skates in the 1940's. Travelling to see NHL icons like Bobby Orr and Gordie Howe. Joining the IIHF Council in 1990 and watching the growth of the game worldwide. Hietarinta included special mentions of other Finnish hockey leaders like former IIHF Vice-President Kalle Kummola and Matti Nurminen, the IIHF's current Director General/CEO.

"For Finland, the ultimate highlight was winning the first World Championship 30 years ago here in Stockholm," said Hietarinta. "That victory gave the country a real boost and self-confidence. It proved that we also can be the best. The medals in the 1990's paved the road for the later success of Finland in ice hockey."

The IIHF will hold its next Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Zurich, Switzerland at the 2026 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship.

[NHL.com / United States honors Gaudreau after winning gold medal at World Championship](#)

By Aaron Vickers – May 25, 2025

The United States had a little extra help in securing its first gold medal at the IIHF World Championship in 92 years.

Johnny Gaudreau.

"We did it for a reason. We had a purpose," goalie Jeremy Swayman said. "We had a great game plan, we were building every single game. We knew there was something special in this room, but the biggest thing was having Johnny Gaudreau in our room, too. This gold goes to him and the legacy that he's paved for all USA hockey players. That was something that we were really backing behind. In every single game we knew that he was with us and had our spirit, so this gold is for him.

"He would be here, obviously. We miss him terribly. What he's done for the game, what he's done for USA Hockey ... he's paved the way for a lot of kids like me. It was just really special to get the job done. Mission accomplished, for him."

Johnny Gaudreau and his brother, Matthew, were killed on Aug. 29, 2024. They were riding bicycles at home in Salem County, New Jersey, when they were struck by an alleged drunk driver, who has been charged with two counts of death by auto.

"He's a guy that if he wasn't in the playoffs, he was here playing for USA Hockey," defenseman Zach Werenski (Columbus Blue Jackets) said. "I think that's what every USA hockey player should strive to be. No one deserves this gold medal more than him. It's been awesome honoring him, especially tonight after winning. It makes me emotional thinking about it, but it's an awesome way to honor him."

Gaudreau's No. 13 jersey was present in the United States' locker room throughout the tournament.

On Sunday, it was again front and center after the U.S. won the tournament for the first time since 1933. The players brought it out onto the ice for the trophy presentation after Tage Thompson scored 2:02 into overtime to give the U.S. a 1-0 win against Switzerland.

"I played with him in my first Worlds (in 2018) and obviously played against him," Thompson said. "In the short time I've gotten to know him, just an amazing guy, lots of fun to be around. One of those guys that loves playing hockey, loves being around the rink, loves being around the guys. He's done so much for the game and so much for USA Hockey, so this one is special."

Gaudreau represented the U.S. five times at the World Championship, helping his country win bronze alongside Thompson in 2018. He is the United States' all-time leader at the event in points with 43 (13 goals, 30 assists).

"He has been a part of this for this whole time," defenseman Brady Skjei (Nashville Predators) said. "To honor him in that way was amazing. Johnny was an amazing person. A bunch of us knew him really well. To honor him ... he was such a key person and player for USA Hockey for years. To honor him like that ... I think he's watching us right now and he's very proud."

Skjei added that it was likely Werenski's idea to bring out Gaudreau's jersey during the celebration. Gaudreau played his final two NHL seasons with Werenski and the Blue Jackets before his passing. The two also played for the U.S. at the 2024 IIHF World Championship.

Skjei was right.

"I think about him before I go on the ice every game," Werenski said. "I see his jersey hanging there. In Columbus, it hangs there. Last year's tournament was the last time I got to play with him and share the ice with him. He deserves this.

"I'm just really happy to get a gold medal for him this year."