



**Columbus Blue Jackets News Clips**  
**February 15-18, 2025**

**Columbus Blue Jackets**

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## Columbus Dispatch / Scrappy U.S. tops Canada to send Zach Werenski to 4 Nations Face-Off title game

**By Brian Hedger – February 16, 2025**

Zach Werenski and his United States teammates are headed to Boston after clinching a spot in the 4 Nations Face Off championship Thursday with a fiery 3-1 victory over Canada on Saturday night at Bell Centre.

Werenski, the Blue Jackets' top defenseman, finished with an assist in the win over Canada and now has four points on four assists through the first two games of the tournament. Canada, however, was a bigger personal challenge for Werenski.

Unlike Thursday in a U.S. rout over Finland, Werenski didn't lead his team in ice time and skated just 13:47 on 20 shifts. He was also beaten along with defense partner Charlie McAvoy on Connor McDavid's lone goal for Canada to open the scoring 5:31 into the game.

That was about five minutes after the game's raucous start, which included Canadian fans booing the U.S. national anthem and U.S. players responding by starting two of three fights in the game's first nine seconds — including two by Matthew Tkachuk and Brady Tkachuk.

The elder Tkachuk, Matthew, fought Tampa Bay Lightning forward Brandon Hagel, and his younger brother, Brady, scrapped with Florida Panthers forward Sam Bennett — Matthew's NHL teammate. The fights electrified an arena that was already charged by recent geopolitical tensions between the two countries, and it was an ugly display to start a "best-on-best" rivalry that already has high emotions baked into it.

Werenski was credited with the second assist on the first of two goals scored by Lightning forward Jake Guentzel, who tied it 1-1 at 10:15 of the first with a soft shot from the left wing that squirted through Canadian goalie Jordan Binnington's pads. Werenski was involved at the start of the play in the U.S. zone before Jack Eichel grabbed the puck and carried it to the other end.

He slipped a short pass to Guentzel for what looked like a harmless shot from the lower half of the left faceoff circle, but the puck snuck through Binnington's pads to tie it 1-1 midway through the first. Guentzel also scored into an empty net to seal it with an insurance goal set up by Detroit Red Wings center Dylan Larkin, who finished with two points after adding that assist to his winning goal scored with 6:27 left in the second.

The only bad news for the U.S. happened late in the third when Matthew Tkachuk stopped taking shifts and watched the end of the game from the bench while nursing an undisclosed injury. Canada played without star defenseman Cale Makar, who missed the game with an illness.

## [Sportsnet.ca / USA Player Ratings: Werenski shines in loss to Sweden](#)

By Emily Sadler – February 18, 2025

Nobody's perfect.

Going into Monday night's matchup against Sweden to wrap up round-robin play at the 4 Nations Face-Off, Team USA had an opportunity for a clean sweep of wins but fell short with a 2-1 loss.

Having already locked up its spot in Thursday's final (and learning earlier Monday it would be squaring off against Canada again), Team USA opted to rest a few stars and ice just 17 skaters in this one. With Matthew Tkachuk, Auston Matthews, and Charlie McAvoy all sitting, and Connor Hellebuyck getting a night off to rest up, this game put head coach Mike Sullivan's lineup in a blender.

The lack of continuity showed. Although the Americans sprinted out of the gates to open the scoring 35 seconds in, they spent the next 59:25 trying unsuccessfully to get a second.

Ultimately, the biggest storyline was centred around the players not in the lineup — and, unfortunately for the Americans, that included Brady Tkachuk for the last two periods. The U.S. standout collided with the goal post early in the first frame and after a brief comeback attempt was kept out of the game.

Sullivan didn't shed much light on his players' status post-game. All eyes will be on Team USA's injury report as we look ahead to Thursday.

But before we dive into what's to come, here's a look at how each U.S. player fared on Monday night.

### **Chris Kreider 9/10**

After watching his team's first two games, Kreider was inserted into the lineup with forwards Matthew Tkachuk and Matthews sitting out. He needed just 35 seconds to announce his arrival on the 4 Nations stage. Kreider opened the scoring against the Swedes with a textbook tap-in after Zach Werenski drove the puck to the net and dished it to the forward to do the rest. Will we see him suit up again in Thursday's final against Canada? With health concerns piling up on the American roster, that'll be a storyline to watch these next few days.

### **Brady Tkachuk: Incomplete**

There was a noticeable lack of Tkachuk Brother energy in this one, with Brady joining Matthew on the sideline after a worrisome collision with the goal post in the first period. (He attempted to return after a trip to the locker room, but played just a single 14-second shift and didn't come back out for the second.) There's no overstating the impact Brady Tkachuk has on this squad — we've seen it all tournament, and even though his time on ice against Sweden spanned just 1:55, he still managed three shots and a trio of hits before his departure.

### **Jack Eichel: 8/10**

Even without his Tkachuk linemates, Eichel still made an impact — just ask Sweden's Leo Carlsson, who was sent flying upon attempting to enter USA's offensive zone when Eichel made contact. This wasn't the centreman's strongest game, but his skillset was still on full display: He set into motion the Americans' first goal, had a nifty between-the legs pass, and generally made things happen in the offensive zone — even though the results simply weren't there in this one.

### **Jake Guentzel: 7/10**

The hero of Saturday's showdown against Canada posted zeroes across the board Monday night before finally registering a single shot on net with about three minutes to go. Of course, he wasn't alone in his lack of production in this 2-1 U.S. loss, but it's still surprising considering his run of success in this tournament as well as his playing time Monday night — he led all forwards in ice time and played the second-most on the team behind only Werenski.

**J.T. Miller: 7.5/10**

Miller continues to be one of Sullivan's most versatile players — a huge asset on a night that saw the head coach piece together a lineup marred by injury concerns. Miller finished the game leading the team the team in faceoff win percentage (76.9) and hits (five).

**Jack Hughes: 7/10**

He's been a little snake-bitten this tournament, scoreless through three games and with just one assist to his name, but it's not for lack of trying. He's tied for third-most shots across all four nations, with 10, five of which came Monday — tops among U.S. forwards. He also had a solid defensive effort, with two blocked shots.

**Brock Nelson: 6/10**

Another game, another in-all-alone scoring chance for Nelson, who saw a rise in playing time with Team USA's short-handed lineup but couldn't cash in. He's been good at playing disruptor, though, even getting in Swedish goaltender Samuel Ersson's face and (somehow) dodging a penalty for it.

**Dylan Larkin 7/10**

Larkin's had an eventful tournament, and on Monday night brought a jolt of energy early to a lineup that needed it. He generated a handful of scoring chances in the first frame, and while he was held off the scoresheet, Sullivan should be happy with his efforts.

**Matt Boldy: 6.5/10**

One of several Team USA players with strong ties to the Boston area, Boldy — a Massachusetts kid who starred at Boston College — didn't stand out Monday night, but should be considered an X-factor against Canada considering how versatile a game he's played this tournament and his ability to spark offence in a hurry. He took an obvious interference penalty, which he'd be wise not to commit against Canada's lethal power play.

**Vincent Trocheck: 6/10**

A misplay in the neutral zone, which saw William Nylander intercept a pass from Trocheck, led to the eventual game-winner for Sweden. We all learned soon after Trocheck had injured his hand on the play — though, he would return to the Americans' already banged-up lineup. While he played just 10:48, he made his presence known on the physicality front, throwing a trio of hits.

**Kyle Connor: 6/10**

You can see the moments of brilliance — like his second-period solo effort that was this close to being a highlight-reel game-tying goal — but Connor's quiet tournament continues, without results.

**Zach Werenski: 10/10**

Few Americans shone in this losing effort, but Werenski is the exception — he's been exceptional all tournament, in fact, and once again stood out Monday night. He set up Kreider's game-opening score with a perfect offensive surge, his fifth assist of the 4 Nations Face-Off, capturing the tournament lead in points (tied with Sidney Crosby), and led the U.S. in ice time and shots on goal Monday night.

**Jake Sanderson: 8/10**

If this game was to serve as an unofficial tryout for the Americans' Olympic squad a year from now, Sanderson certainly gave U.S. brass plenty to think about. Playing alongside Werenski for much of this game, Sanderson kept pace and didn't look out of place at all. The 22-year-old even showed off his shot, zinging a wrister past Ersson that pinged off the crossbar.

**Jacob Slavin: 7/10**

After Saturday night's marathon game, Slavin didn't see as much ice time Monday against Sweden and was on the ice for both of Sweden's goals.

**Noah Hanifin: 6.5/10**

A down night after a really great performance on Saturday — then again, you could say the same about most players in stars and stripes in this one — Hanifin logged the fewest minutes of any defender. That's likely Sullivan saving him up for Thursday.

**Adam Fox: 6/10**

Fox took an undisciplined cross-checking penalty early in the third of what was an otherwise uneventful night for the defender.

**Brock Faber: 5.5/10**

Faber was on the ice for both of Sweden's goals, the play that led to the first stemming from the defender being taken down behind the net and giving up the puck. He led the team in giveaways, his performance a steep drop from Saturday's great game.

**Jake Oettinger: 8/10**

Give his helmet designer a 10/10 for the otter dressed as the Statue of Liberty, but Otter the goalie should get some solid praise for his performance, too, as he suited up against Sweden to give starter Connor Hellebuyck some rest before Thursday. He held Sweden to its lowest goal total this tournament, and did so playing behind a lineup that looked a little out of sorts with some key players missing.

## [BlueJackets.com / Tyutin giving back to Columbus hockey community as a coach](https://www.bluejackets.com)

By Garrison McDaniel – February 18, 2025

Although known for his time as a defenseman in Columbus, Fedor Tyutin has found a passion coaching the next generation of Blue Jackets within the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets organization.

Tyutin played eight seasons for the Blue Jackets, where he featured in 553 games – second most ever for a CBJ blueliner – and recorded 39 goals and 185 points.

Now, he is the head coach of the 16U AAA Blue Jackets and has led them to a 34-22 record this season. The Blue Jackets went 2-2-0 this weekend at the T1EHL playoffs this weekend in Blaine, Minn., and they have won 10 of their last 13 games.

Although Tyutin is now in his sixth year with the AAA Blue Jackets, this was never in his plans after his 13-year NHL playing career.

“When I retired from playing, I had no plans,” he said. “My plan was to stay home and coach my own kids and be a dad, be present. That was my plan. And somehow I stopped at the rink one of these days and got offered to help out, and here I am. What is this, my sixth year, or something like that? Yeah, time flies.”

However, this has been a welcome challenge for Tyutin as he has grown a passion for this work and has loved being able to give back to the youth of Central Ohio.

Tyutin, 41, previously served as the AAA Blue Jackets head coach for the 2007 birth year for three seasons at the 13U, 14U and 15O levels and spent last season as an assistant coach with the 18U team.

“It feels like I'm still doing the same thing and getting the same kind of atmosphere compared to when I was playing,” he said. “It's pretty competitive. Even as a coach on the bench, it still gets pretty competitive and stuff. I love that about it.”

Every year, Columbus has grown as a hockey market as more of the city's youth have taken the sport on since the Blue Jackets arrived in town in the year 2000.

That has been something Tyutin wants to encourage. While he originally hails from Izhevsk, Russia, his time playing in Columbus has led to him, his wife Sarah and their three kids to call the city home.

“Every year you can see more kids signing up for tryouts and better kids looking to come and join teams here,” Tyutin said. “It's been growing and good to see a lot of young kids coming. That's how I think, as a community, you get better over time. You want to involve as many kids as you can to become some stars and players.”

Having Tyutin around is a boost to the program as well. Ed Gingher, president of the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets, said that his résumé speaks for itself, and having that level of experience – Tyutin played nearly 900 NHL games – in the organization goes a long way.

“For him to be eager and wanting to give back and teach and coach kids in our program and Columbus-area kids, it's obviously huge,” Gingher said. “His playing career is very impressive. But him as a person, him as a coach, it's been really fun to see him jump in with both feet and wanting to teach and wanting to help. He absolutely loves it. We're very fortunate, and our players are fortunate, that he's a part of the program.”

Gingher now has the program in a really great place with the community it has built. He is proud and excited to see where it will go from here as the players, coaches and parents all lead it to bigger and better things.

"I'm very proud of where the program is at," Gingher said. "We've been very fortunate that I think a lot of the success the program has had has been built around good people. That's good people behind the bench coaching, it's good people that are a part of the program from a player and parent perspective.

"Columbus is a special, special place, and for us to be able to be a part of the hockey community here is obviously something that we don't take for granted."



## [BlueJackets.com / Werenski, Team USA to play for title at 4 Nations Face-Off](#)

By Jeff Svoboda – February 18, 2025

Zach Werenski has traded one shade of blue for another this month, suiting up for Team USA at the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off.

It's a chance for the Blue Jackets defenseman to represent his country in a best-on-best tournament for the first time since joining the NHL, and it's also an opportunity to take the Norris Trophy-caliber form he's displayed all season and show it off on a stage featuring the best players in the world.

Through three games, Werenski has shown he has what it takes to be a standout on the international level, notching three assists in Team USA's opening game win vs. Finland and adding another in Saturday night's big win vs. Canada. With a fifth assist Monday vs. Sweden, he's tied for the tournament scoring lead with five points with Canada's Sidney Crosby.

BlueJackets.com will keep tabs on Werenski as the tournament heads to Thursday's title game between the USA and Canada.

### **4 Nations Schedule**

**Thursday, Feb. 13:** USA 6, Finland 1

**Saturday, Feb. 15:** USA 3, Canada 1

**Monday, Feb. 17:** Sweden 2, USA 1

**Thursday, Feb. 20: Championship Game: USA vs. Canada (ESPN)**

### **Recaps**

#### **Feb. 17: Sweden 2, USA 1**

Thirty-five seconds into Monday night's game, Werenski notched his fifth assist of the tournament

Unfortunately, that was all the scoring for Team USA, as the Swedes scored twice in the second half of the first period and was able to hold the lead the rest of the way.

On the opening shift of the game, Werenski raced the puck up the right side of the ice and put a shot on goal, with Chris Kreider cleaning up the rebound to make it a 1-0 game.

Werenski was all over the ice from there, but the Americans couldn't get another goal. The CBJ defenseman was named third star of the game, skating 23:44 and finishing with a plus-1 rating, six shots on goal and eight shot attempts.

#### **Feb. 15: USA 3, Canada 1**

In a showdown of the world's top hockey powers that lived up to the billing, Werenski and Team USA earned a 3-1 win over Canada on Saturday night in a game that caught the attention of the sports world.

The anticipation for the showdown was high, and only heightened by the fact there were three fights in the first nine seconds of the game. In the end, the United States rallied from an early 1-0 deficit, scoring a goal in each period to get the win.

Werenski assisted on the opening goal by Jake Guentzel to give him four helpers in two games thus far. In the end, Werenski skated 13:47 as Team USA protected the lead, putting two shots on goal among his six shot attempts with two blocked shots.

With the win, the United States advanced to the championship game of the event with two wins in two contests.

**Feb. 13: USA 6, Finland 1**

Werenski had a historic three-point showing as Team USA pulled away to victory with four third-period goals against the Finns.

The CBJ defenseman notched three assists to tie the record for helpers by a defenseman in NHL international tournament history. Team North America's Shayne Gostisbehere was the last to do so in the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

Werenski had the second assist on the first goal for Team USA as Brady Tkachuk tied the game at 1 in the first period. He then added a pair of power-play helpers on Matthew Tkachuk goals in the third period, notching the first assist on tallies that made it 3-1 and 6-1.

Werenski also finished plus-2 and played a team-high 21:45.

## The Hockey News / Zach Werenski Shines In Opening Game Of 4-Nations Faceoff

By Jason Newland – February 15, 2025

In the first game of the 4-Nations Faceoff for the Americans, they were able to take down Finland 6-1. The game wasn't always pretty, but they came out in the third and blitzed the Lions to take the three points.

Zach Werenski played a spectacular game for the Americans. In other news - water is wet.

Werenski was marvelous last night against Finland and continues to be one of the best players on the ice, no matter what team he's playing for.

### **Check out Zach's stats against Finland:**

- He led all Americans in ice time at 21:45.
- He and Charlie McAvoy, who he was paired with, played 27 shifts to lead the team.
- 3 assists - He assisted on the two goals by Matt Tkachuk, and one by Brady Tkachuk.
- +2 rating
- 2 PIM

Zach Werenski is getting his time to shine and hopefully garner some more attention across the league with his play—and it's about time. People in Columbus have known for a while now that Werenski is an outstanding player who just needed to have a healthy season, and he's doing just that.

Zach Werenski and the U.S. team will take on Canada on Saturday night in what is sure to be a wild game in Montreal. Make sure to tune in.

## The Hockey News / The Blue Jackets Have One Of The NHL's Toughest Schedules To Close The Season

By Jason Newland – February 15, 2025

The 2024-25 season has proved to be a very challenging season for the upstart Columbus Blue Jackets.

They came into this season grieving over the loss of their best player but decided they were going to play for Johnny. On opening night, Johnny's widow Meredith gave a speech on the jumbotron where she told the players and fans to just "play hockey," so that's what they are doing.

From even before the season started, the CBJ have had to deal with injuries. Boone Jenner went down with a shoulder injury in camp, Erik Gudbranson also had a shoulder injury in the first few games that put him out long-term, and Yegor Chinakhov suffered a back injury that has kept him out for the last 35 games. Tack on Sean Monahan and Kirill Marchenko, and the total man games lost at the 4-Nations break sits at 228.

Coming back from the break, the CBJ will have 26 games left in the season, and it won't get any easier for the youngsters in blue.

According to Tankathon, The Blue Jackets play the 5th hardest schedule of all 32 NHL teams. That's right, even though every single night for the first 56 games has been tough, it's about to get tougher. Only Detroit, Seattle, San Jose, and Buffalo have a tougher schedule.

The Jackets have 26 games left and will face a schedule with a combined winning % of .564. Detroit has by far the hardest schedule whose opponents have a combined winning % of .587.

In terms of their most difficult remaining games, based on the current standings, the Blue Jackets have three games against Ottawa, and two games against Washington, Florida, New Jersey, New York(R), and the New York Islanders. All either current playoff teams, or teams fighting for the playoffs. They also play singles against teams like Vegas, Tampa, and Dallas.

Tankathon also lists teams like Chicago, Nashville, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh as being part of the "easy" schedule, but as we know, there is no such thing as easy when a team is battling for a playoff spot.

We're almost to the home stretch of the season. When the teams come back after the 4-Nations Faceoff, it'll be a sprint to the finish. For teams like the Blue Jackets, every night will be a battle as they try to secure a wild card position.

They should be getting some reinforcements back soon though. Boone Jenner and Dante Fabbro are expected to be back after the break. Kirill Marchenko has been fitted for a special bubble so he can play after coming back from jaw surgery. His shot and scoring ability have been sorely missed in the last few games.

Buckle up CBJ fans, it's going to be a wild ride in the last 26 games.

**What's Next:** Zach Werenski and Team USA will take on Canada on Saturday night in the 4-Nations Faceoff. The rest of the Jackets will get some much-needed R&R before coming back home to play the Chicago Blackhawks on Feb. 22.

## The Hockey News / Zach Werenski Set To Play In The Biggest Hockey Game Of His Life Tonight

**By Jason Newland – February 16, 2025**

Thursday night in Montréal, Zach Werenski and his U.S. teammates put on a show against Finland.

After somewhat of a sluggish start, the Americans scored four goals in the third period to put the game away quickly.

But now it's time for the big one - The United States versus Canada.

This will undoubtedly be the biggest game in defenseman Zach Werenski's career. It's been a long time since the two rivals have played in a best-on-best tournament, and tonight has a chance to be huge for Team America and Werenski.

Werenski has plenty of international experience. He's played for the U.S. U17, U18, U20, and in the World Championships twice. This past spring, he played in 8 games in the WC and had 7 points. He played alongside teammates Johnny Gaudreau and Gavin Brindley.

Nothing will compare to this game tonight, however.

This game marks the 20th all-time game between the two countries in a best-on-best situation. Currently, Canada holds a 14-4-1 advantage in the series. But Canada has yet to face an American team as stacked as this one. From top to bottom, this USA team has what it needs to beat Canada.

Canada will most likely have Connor McDavid, Sidney Crosby, Nathan MacKinnon, and Cale Makar on the ice at the same time, and that is a scary thought. Guys like Zach Werenski, Adam Fox, Charlie McAvoy, and Noah Hanafin will have the daunting task of trying to slow down the Canadiens.

But the Americans are putting a team on the ice that no other USA team can compare to. This is arguably the most talented group of Americans assembled to date. Auston Matthews, Jack Hughes, Matthew Tkachuk, and his brother Brady have a huge advantage against the Canadian defense consisting of Cale Makar, Devon Toews, and Travis Sanheim.

The U.S. game against Finland drew a massive TV audience, and this one will most likely be bigger than the first one.

Brady Tkachuk said about this game, "I think it's going to be the biggest game I've ever played in my career." "So I'm really looking forward to that. There's a big build-up to it. U.S. versus Canada, it's bigger than just the guys on the ice. It's so many people—past, present, and future."

The pressure is on for the Americans to beat Canada, and for Zach Werenski, it will be the biggest game of his career at any stage. Werenski does have the experience of a Calder Cup Finals appearance back in 2016, but that doesn't come close to comparing to what he will go through tonight. The slightest mistake could cost either team the game.

Good Luck to Zach Werenski and Team USA.

## The Hockey News / Owen Sillinger To Miss The Rest Of The Season

**By Jason Newland – February 16, 2025**

Cleveland Monsters forward Owen Sillinger will miss the rest of the season after suffering a lower-body injury on Feb. 11th against the Rochester Americans.

The 27-year-old undrafted forward from Regina, Saskatchewan has played in 44 games for Cleveland this season, scoring 11 goals and totaling 29 points. Sillinger is the 4th leading scorer on the Monsters. He has 114 career AHL points in 202 games.

Sillinger played one NHL game with Columbus back on Jan. 9th against Seattle, where he played 13:09 and had two PIM. Unfortunately, he couldn't play with his brother Cole due to being out sick.

This loss will be a big blow to Cleveland, who has also lost defenseman Corson Ceulemans to a lower-body surgery that will keep him out long-term as well. James Malatesta has also missed the last 17 games due to an upper-body injury.

Due to the Columbus injury situation, the Monsters have had players up and down all season, including leading scorer Luca Del Bel Belluz, who is doing very well in the NHL. Denton Mateychuk was also called up a few weeks ago and doesn't seem to be leaving Columbus anytime soon.

The Monsters have fallen to 4th in the North Division and have gone 3-3-3-1 in the last 10 games.

This season is going to be tough down the stretch for the Monsters.

## The Hockey News / Zach Werenski Records An Assist To Help Lead America Past Canada In A Thrilling Game

**By Spencer Lazary – February 17, 2025**

If you missed this game, that's too bad.

The lead-up to this game was intense, and fans in the USA and Canada couldn't wait to see the puck drop. And then it happened.

Right off of the opening puck drop, Matthew Tkachuk and Canada's Brandon Hagel decided they were going to start the game with a boxing match. Merely one second later, Brady Tkachuk and Sam Bennett would drop the gloves on the ensuing faceoff. Six seconds after that, J.T. Miller and Colton Parayko decided they were going to get busy. There were three fights in 9 seconds of action. The crowd inside the Bell Centre was going absolutely bonkers, and it was worth watching every second of it.

Play settled down after that and the guys settled into the game. The game was still very physical as both teams combined for 63 hits, but it was much calmer for two-plus periods.

Columbus defenseman Zach Werenski would get onto the score sheet when he was credited with an assist on Jake Guentzel's tying goal at 10:15 of the first period. He touched the puck and went to change as Jack Eichel and Jake Guentzel took off down the ice. He was still on the ice when the goal was scored, so he got an assist.

Werenski had 1 assist, 2 shots, 2 blocks, and played 13:47. He also played a whopping 1:57 on a lone USA power play. His playing time was limited in the third period. Most assume it was due to having a lead and needing to protect it with the other four defensemen who are more "defensive defensemen." Columbus fans weren't complaining at all, since Werenski led all Americans in time on ice on Thursday. Being given a nice little break is good for him.

Zach Werenski is now tied with Jake Guentzel with four points. Those four points also lead all players in the 4-Nations Tournament. His four assists are tops for all skaters in the tournament as well.

The Americans will now take on Sweden at 8 P.M. on Monday night. With the win against Canada, they will play in the Championship game next Thursday. The team they play will be determined on Monday as well. The winner of Canada vs. Finland will go on to play the United States in Boston, so we could get a re-match.

## The Hockey News / 4-Nations Face-Off: Canada vs. USA Had The Greatest Start In Hockey History

**By Spencer Lazary – February 17, 2025**

Last night, hockey fans witnessed what might have been the greatest start to a game—ever.

Team Canada vs. Team USA, Saturday night at the Bell Centre, after a decade without best-on-best play. What more could you ask for?

How about three fights in the first nine seconds of the most anticipated game in years?

It all started right off the opening faceoff when Matthew Tkachuk and Brandon Hagel dropped the gloves, sending the Bell Centre crowd into a frenzy.

Seconds later, Brady Tkachuk called out Sam Bennett, and off the next faceoff, those two went at it.

Then, at the next whistle, J.T. Miller and Colton Parayko squared off for the third and final fight.

It was the perfect way to kick off a game that fans had been waiting for.

Columbus Blue Jackets defencemen Zach Werenski recorded an assist as Team USA beat Canada 3-1.

With Team USA's win, they've secured a spot in Thursday's championship game. If Canada beats Finland on Monday afternoon, we'll get a USA vs. Canada rematch for gold.



## The Hockey News / 4-Nations Face-Off Continues Today With A Doubleheader With The Early Game Deciding Who Plays The U.S.

**By Jason Newland – February 18, 2025**

Even after all the excitement between the US and Canada on Saturday night, the tournament is far from over, especially for the three teams that haven't punched their ticket to the championship game against the United States.

Finland and Canada will take to the ice today inside TD Garden in Boston at 1 P.M. That game will be shown on TNT, MAX, and truTV in the United States. The winner of that game will move on to face Zach Werenski and the Americans.

Team USA will play Sweden tonight at 8 P.M. on TNT, MAX, and truTV. If the Canada/Finland game gives us a regulation winner, Sweden will be eliminated before it even takes the ice against the USA. Sweden can advance to the title game if they beat the U.S. and the Canada/Finland game goes to OT.

Zach Werenski, who is tied for the tournament lead with four points, and has the tournament lead with four assists, will continue to try to pad those stats tonight.

With Canada being a massive favorite over Finland, we are inevitably going to get a rematch of USA vs. Canada, but this time it'll be in the United States. Anything can happen in hockey, and with such an emotional game on Saturday night, might we be in for a Canadian letdown? Probably not, but the storylines are exciting to talk about.

## The Hockey News / Werenski & USA Will Face Canada In 4 Nations Face-Off Finals

**By Spencer Lazary – February 18, 2025**

Canada beat Finland in their Monday matinée, and with that win, they will advance to the 4 Nations Face-Off finals and play the United States of America.

Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski and the Americans will prepare for a rematch, which could surpass the viewership from their first matchup this past Saturday night.

Werenski and the USA still have a game to play before the finals. Tonight at 8:00 p.m. EST, they go head-to-head against Sweden.

Due to Team Canada winning, this game against Sweden doesn't mean anything.

With Connor Hellebuyck and Charlie McAvoy sitting out to rest, Jake Sanderson will draw into the lineup. Jake is the son of former Blue Jackets forward Geoff Sanderson and could be paired with Werenski.

The expectation is that Werenski won't be used as much as he has been in past games, as the USA hopes to get through the game against Sweden with no injuries.

In terms of the 4 Nations Face-Off finals, the game likely won't start the same way it did in their last meeting. With it being the most important game of the tournament for both teams, there may not be as many fights, if any at all.

However, that may not be the case, and there could be even more rough stuff due to the emotions of the game.

Only time will tell what happens in the finals on Thursday, but for now, the USA will focus on their game tonight against William Nylander and the rest of Sweden.

## The Hockey Writers / CBJ Union Junction Podcast: All Blue Jackets' Listener Questions

By Nicholas Arnold – February 15, 2025

The Columbus Blue Jackets' Union Junction Podcast has gone all listener questions. Today on the show, Mark Scheig and Nicholas Arnold dive into a diverse range of questions from you. Everything from what's up with this whole embellishing thing in hockey? To what would a Team Russia look like in the 4 Nations Face-Off? And where does Swensons rank in terms of regional burger joints?

The meat of the conversation – excuse the burger pun – surrounds the NHL Trade Deadline on March 7. Who could the Blue Jackets be targeting? What are they looking to give up in terms of assets in any sort of trade? Also discussed are potential targets ahead of free agency in the summer. This week's is a very wide-ranging conversation all courtesy of you and your questions. Thanks to everyone that submitted.

### **The Blue Jackets' Trade Deadline Situation**

The Blue Jackets are in a position to chase a wild card playoff spot, surprising to many. General manager (GM) Don Waddell says his team is planning on being moderate buyers ahead of the March 7 trade deadline, which is a change in trajectory. There are a few unique situations for them to navigate as they try to add in the short-term, without affecting the long-term growth of the organization.

Should he be available, the Blue Jackets' Ivan Provorov is surely the premier rental defenseman on the trade market. Many thought he was for sure out the door because of his expiring contract at an already reduced cap hit. However, Provorov has expressed an interest in re-signing and his younger brother has just committed to play at the city's Ohio State University. Plus, if you look from a purely defensive perspective, there's a case to be made that he's been the best at preventing opportunities against. And on top of that, with the significant rise in the NHL's salary cap over the next two seasons, there should be enough money available to sign him for the foreseeable future. All of that clouds what was once a pretty cut-and-dry "trade him for future assets" scenario.

The team also has several players on the injured reserve (IR), all expected back before the end of the regular season. That includes their captain Boone Jenner, who has been sidelined all season after shoulder surgery. He should help bridge the gap at center that has been left with Sean Monahan on IR. Others expected back by the end of the season are Kirill Marchenko, Erik Gudbranson, Yegor Chinakhov, and Monahan.

The Blue Jackets get the next couple of weeks off while the NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off tournament plays out. The only Jacket involved is their top defenseman Zach Werenski, who is dressing for Team USA. The rest of their players will get a chance for some rest and relaxation ahead of what is going to be a bloodbath of a playoff run in the Eastern Conference. Jenner is expected back in the lineup after the pause, which should add some energy to the roster. The team's next two games are at home against Connor Bedard and his Chicago Blackhawks on Feb. 22 and against the always-intimidating Dallas Stars on Feb. 25.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Z Nation: Zach Werenski Tallies Three Assists In Team USA's 6-1 Win Over Finland At 4 Nations Face-Off

**By Ed Francis – February 15, 2025**

Columbus, Ohio has long known what Zach Werenski was capable of.

The rest of the world caught a glimpse of it Thursday night.

Werenski tallied three total assists for Team USA on Thursday night in their 6-1 victory over Team Finland, including two power play points and two primary assists.

The three assists from Werenski tied four other players for the NHL International Tournament record for assists in a game by a defenseman, including Bobby Orr and Al MacInnis.

All three assists were to one of the Tkachuk brothers: Matthew and Brady each scored two goals in the win.

After Team Finland took an early 1-0 lead, Team USA needed less than three minutes to tie the game at 1-1 on Brady Tkachuk's first of the night. Werenski would get the secondary assist on the goal after keeping the puck in the zone and using the boards to pass up to Matt Boldy, who immediately found Brady crashing the net.

Werenski's second assist of the night came just seconds into the third period with Team USA on the power play. He takes a pass from Jake Guentzel and passes across the zone over to Matthew Tkachuk, who fires from just inside the blueline. It deflects off the stick of the Finnish defense and ends up in the back of the net to extend the Americans lead to 3-1.

With Team USA up 5-1 just over halfway through the third period, Werenski gets his third assist of the night. This one is again on a Matthew Tkachuk goal and again with the Americans on the power play. Werenski shoots the puck from the high slot and it's deflected by Matthew, who gets his own rebound and puts it into the net to make it 6-1.

Werenski, who was paired with Charlie McAvoy on the top line of defense, finished with 21:45 of ice time to lead all skaters for the Americans.

Team USA's next game in the round-robin tournament is a huge showdown with Team Canada on Saturday night, with puck-drop scheduled for just after 8 p.m.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Battery / Heating Up: Blue Jackets Prepare To Jump Back Into The Fray With Burning Playoff Race, Outdoor Game Looming

By Will Chase – February 18, 2025

Have you missed the Columbus Blue Jackets?

The 4 Nations Face-Off has been a major hit amongst casual and die-hard hockey fans. With off-the-charts intensity in the inaugural best-on-best tournament for country pride, it has delivered on all levels as Team USA gets set for Thursday's championship matchup against either Team Canada, Team Sweden, or Team Finland.

Just imagine what's in store for the NHL with the remaining two months of the regular season to go.

Following the league's two-week break between NHL games, the Blue Jackets return to their intense playoff race when they host the Chicago Blackhawks this Saturday, Feb. 22.

The Jackets went into the break having lost four straight games but could have come away with two points in all four of those games — a 5-3 loss at the Dallas Stars, a 3-2 loss at the Buffalo Sabres, a 3-2 overtime loss to the Utah Hockey Club, and a late 4-3 loss to the New York Rangers.

Columbus is fourth in the Metropolitan Division, currently sitting one point out of a playoff spot. They trail the Detroit Red Wings by one point in the Eastern Conference wild-card race and are two points behind the Ottawa Senators for the first wild-card spot.

With 26 games remaining and the trade deadline at 3 p.m. ET on Mar. 7, the intensity only heats up from here.

### **Back To It**

#### **A soft landing for the Blue Jackets?**

You can't assume anything in the NHL but on paper, it's an ideal matchup from Columbus' point of view as they look to get back into action and gain an important two points against the league's second-worst team from a standings perspective.

But it's up to the Blue Jackets to be ready for Connor Bedard and Co.

The game in Dallas on Feb. 2 was costly as Columbus lost a slew of players in the game including Kirill Marchenko to a broken jaw after a puck struck him on the bench and Dante Fabbro to an upper-body injury.

There was also a controversial third-period goal that looked like a clear high stick but review went the Stars' way and they added one more third-period goal to take the 5-3 win.

#### **So what will round two have in store?**

Dallas holds the third overall seed in the NHL and the second spot in the West as it continues its march towards a fourth straight trip to the playoffs.

#### **Home And Home With Detroit**

The NHL's marquee matchup occurs on Mar. 1, when the Blue Jackets host their first outdoor game against the Red Wings at Ohio Stadium.

To add spice to that matchup, both teams are separated by a point in the standings for a playoff spot and a home and home that begins in Detroit on Thursday, Feb. 27.

Columbus lost a tough game to Detroit late in the Jan. 2 matchup. Since then, neither team has lost many games.

The Red Wings are the second-best team in that span, going 13-4-1 while Columbus is 10-6-2. Detroit's season turned around once they brought in Todd McLellan as their new head coach — McLellan interviewed for the Jackets' gig over the summer — and Detroit is 15-5-1 under McLellan. Only Dallas and Washington have been better since then.

### **Longest Road Trip Left**

The Jackets will have one more large road test as they play at the Lightning, Panthers, Rangers, and Devils from Mar. 4-11. We know how good all of these teams are. The Rangers are the only team not currently occupying a playoff spot and they're two points behind Columbus.

Before the Jackets' current four-game losing streak, they were closing in on the Devils inside the Metro but now New Jersey has an eight-point cushion.

Aside from a date with the Golden Knights to kick off their longest homestand remaining from Mar. 13-20, it'll be much the same for Columbus as they will entertain the Rangers, Devils, and Panthers.

We'll see how the Jackets stay in the race to this point and they have reinforcements coming in the way of Marchenko, Fabbro, Boone Jenner, Sean Monahan, and Erik Gudbranson. And Yegor Chinakhov?

Perhaps a key trade deadline acquisition?

### **Closing Out March**

From Mar. 21-29, the Jackets will head to Pittsburgh to take on the Penguins and New York to face the Islanders before coming home to host the Canucks and then travel to Ottawa.

The Penguins look like a team that will miss the playoffs for a third consecutive season and while Columbus finally ended the losing streak in Pittsburgh, chalk up another big road test in what has always been a tough environment for the Jackets.

Speaking of tough environments, the Islanders have caused fits for the Blue Jackets.

The Islanders have returned to the playoff picture and sit three points behind Columbus. Since the 2018-19 season, the Blue Jackets are 5-13-2 against the Islanders and 1-8-1 at the Islanders — regardless of their building — since then. The last victory for the Blue Jackets on Long Island came on Dec. 23, 2019.

With Ottawa looking poised to continue their playoff run, that matchup figures to be important for both clubs.

### **End Of The Year**

Columbus will close the season with 10 April games, including a back-to-back matchup with the Maple Leafs and Senators and a home date with Ottawa on Apr. 8. They also have a huge matchup with the Capitals as Alex Ovechkin chases down Wayne Gretzky's all-time goal mark. He's 16 away from passing The Great One.

### **Could Ovechkin set the mark against Columbus?**

The current pace lines up for right around Apr. 13-15, when the Jackets play a home-and-home with the Caps. Ovechkin scored his first two career goals against Columbus in his NHL debut on Oct. 5, 2005, at Nationwide Arena.

Columbus caps off the regular season at home against the Islanders.

## The Athletic / Sweden-Finland 4 Nations preview: A rivalry with much more than national pride on the line

By Arpon Basu and Fluto Shinzawa – February 15, 2025

MONTREAL — Teemu Selänne was having coffee and breakfast during a quiet moment at the 4 Nations Face-Off on Thursday morning when he was asked for his recollection of probably the biggest game between Sweden and Finland that ever was played: the 2006 Olympic final between the longtime Nordic rivals.

“Oof,” Selänne responded. “I don’t really remember that one.”

And then he laughed. Of course he remembers. Everyone in his country remembers.

Finland was perfect in the round-robin portion of the tournament, defeating Canada 2-0 and beating the USA and Russia to reach the gold medal game against Sweden. Selänne was the tournament’s leading scorer.

“The whole country, we all knew how badly they wanted us to win,” Selänne said. “It was so close, and for me at least, it was the best national team I ever played on. That’s the only game we lost there. We beat all the big ones. And when all the best players are participating and you feel you’re the best team in the tournament, it’s a big thing.

“Obviously, it was a huge disappointment we couldn’t win the final, but if someone had told us before the tournament that you guys are going to win the silver, I think most of the guys would probably take it.”

For the third time since that game in Turin, Italy, back in 2006 but the first time since the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, Finland will meet Sweden in a best-on-best setting Saturday at the 4 Nations.

Sweden has won the last three meetings, lending credence to how the rivalry is often described by Swedes, usually with a little grin, as a case of big brother against little brother. The grin is a giveaway as to who the big brother is.

But Selänne doesn’t necessarily disagree with the characterization.

“They’ve always had the edge, and that’s why we always want to beat them so badly, because that’s how a family goes,” he said. “The little brother tries to beat the big brother.”

Finland forward Mikko Rantanen remembers that 2006 Olympic final vividly. He was 9 years old, sitting at home, riveted to his television.

“It was a tight game. Finland had the lead at first, and I remember, first shift of the third, (Nicklas) Lidström scored, and that ended up being the game winner,” Rantanen said Friday after practice. “I remember Teppo Numminen gave an interview afterward — I think I was crying at home while he gave it. It was emotional.”

This game is not just another game. It has profound meaning based on a long history between the hockey powers.

But nostalgia and history have little bearing on what will happen on the ice Saturday at Bell Centre, so let’s focus on these teams in the present and what Sweden and Finland need to do to come out on the winning end. Considering the loser will essentially be eliminated from the tournament, a lot more than national pride is on the line.



## **Sweden: A more composed start and getting more from the stars**

Sweden captain Victor Hedman knows the Sweden-Finland showdown will start much better for his team than it did against Canada. Before the puck dropped on Sweden's 4-3 overtime loss, the Canadians had a surge of Bell Centre's signature electricity from a surprising source: Mario Lemieux.

From what Hedman understands, Le Magnifique is not planning on a repeat appearance before Sweden-Finland on Saturday.

"No Mario on the ice to start the game," Hedman said Friday, laughing. "Keep Mario off the ice, and don't take a penalty."

Hedman was referring to how William Nylander high-sticked Nathan MacKinnon just 44 seconds into the game, compounding Canada's rush of energy. Before the Swedes had caught their breath, Canada's bananas top power-play unit had snapped the puck around until MacKinnon drained a Sidney Crosby cross-crease dish.

Stress hurts, even for experienced players such as the Swedes.

"Forty-five, 50 minutes was really solid," Adrian Kempe said. "We talked about it. You have that kind of nervous feeling going into the first game. After that, we just kind of relaxed, went out there and played."

Sweden is not disrespecting Finland. Whenever the two neighbors go head to head, skill sometimes becomes secondary to will.

"It's going to be a lot of fun, for sure," Filip Forsberg said. "Obviously, a rivalry that goes back to medieval times, pretty much."

It is no disrespect, however, to acknowledge that Sweden's roster has the upper hand over Finland's. It was telling, for example, that Sweden's No. 3 line of Jesper Bratt, Joel Eriksson Ek and Lucas Raymond might have been its best unit against Canada.

The smart and dependable Eriksson Ek scored one of Sweden's three goals off a set faceoff play that he triggered by beating Anthony Cirelli on the draw. Moments later, Raymond made the most important move by circling high with the puck and executing a seam pass to Bratt inside the left faceoff dot. After receiving Bratt's slot-line pass, Eriksson Ek dunked the puck past a helpless Jordan Binnington.

"Super dynamic," Bratt said of his third-line mate. "Such a smooth skater. Becomes an offensive threat every time he's on the ice. He's a guy that can get the puck wherever on the ice and he'll make something happen out of it. He's so dynamic. Really fun player to play with. I think our chemistry is going to get better and better the more this tournament moves on."

The problem with Sweden, however, is that the third line should not be generating most of the club's chances against Finland. The Swedes are counting on Mika Zibanejad and Elias Pettersson, their top two centers, to drive the offense on both of their lines. Neither did enough of it against the Canadians. They were like they've been for their NHL clubs: good, not great, and leaving their bosses wanting more.

Zibanejad had two shots, both in overtime. Pettersson had one shot: a 90-footer from the neutral zone.

It got to a point where Sweden coach Sam Hallam switched the first and second lines in the third period. Pettersson and Forsberg, who started on the No. 2 line, moved up to the first with Nylander in the third period. Zibanejad and Rickard Rakell moved down with Kempe.

Zibanejad was back to centering the top line between Rakell and Nylander at practice Friday. Pettersson was with Kempe and Forsberg.

For the Swedes to take care of business against the Finns, their first- and second-line centers have to be harder on pucks and more in the middle of the action in the offensive zone. Defensively, Hallam was satisfied with both of their performances.

“I want them to be solid,” Hallam said. “I want them to do what they did starting the game against Canada, playing smart hockey. It’s tight. Because you’re playing five really good players, there’s not much room out there. I would say it’s a team thing. Who has the best touches, who has less touches doesn’t really matter.”

If the lines stay together, it will be Zibanejad’s job to place the puck on Nylander’s stick. The right wing has the highest degree of game-breaking touch on the roster. Nylander led Sweden with nine shot attempts against the Canadians. None broke through.

“I think he has one more step in him. Definitely,” Hallam said. “For a lot of our guys, we grew as a team; we grew as a group. But we still think we have one more step to take here, hopefully, for Saturday. If you just recognize the start to the game — really unlucky penalty, and they score a goal straight away. You can’t start playing the game uphill. As long as the game went, he looked more and more secure, confident. Hopefully, we can make sure to give him the puck in the right situations even more on Saturday.”

#### **Finland: A goalie change, a return to its identity and a simplified approach**

Finland coach Antti Pennanen’s easiest adjustment from his team’s 6-1 defeat at the hands of the Americans on Thursday came in goal. Juuse Saros is out; Kevin Lankinen is in.

Had Finland gone simply on merit, Lankinen probably would have started against the USA as well since he is having by far the better season. But these decisions are not always solely merit-based; there is some calculated risk involved based on track record. Saros got the opportunity he deserved based on his track record, but now it’s Lankinen’s net to lose.

“It would be a dream come true,” Lankinen said Friday before Pennanen announced the goalie change. “Obviously, not just playing for your home country, but in a tournament like this, where you’ve got all the best players in the world, it’s a special occasion. ... For sure, it would be a dream come true.”

But Finland’s loss to the Americans was not only about goaltending. It was perhaps even more so about converting the chances Finland was able to create with the score tied at 1 in the second period.

“I think (we created those chances) whenever we played fast with speed, trying to go forward, go north right away and not take the puck back too much,” Finland center Anton Lundell said Friday. “It’s a hard game. Whenever you have a chance to attack, you attack.”

Rantanen and Pennanen acknowledged that Finland did not have enough of a shooting mentality when it created those chances, with Pennanen specifically pointing out a two-on-one break when Sebastian Aho tried a saucer pass to Roope Hintz that didn’t connect. Pennanen would have preferred Aho shoot the puck in that situation — or any situation, really, since he and Hintz had no shots on goal.

“Maybe we were over-passing a little bit yesterday,” Rantanen said. “Obviously, things happen quick in the game, but if you execute (those passes), they’re probably in the back of the net. It’s always easy after to say you should have shot when you try to make a play in that moment, but yeah, I think it’s better for us if we simplify a little offensively, get pucks to the net more and crash the net a little bit more.”

Pennanen mentioned on multiple occasions that Finland’s breakouts needed to improve, stating it needed to move up the ice as a unit of five and be less disjointed than it was at times against the USA.

“We had a good meeting with the players, and I spoke with the captains, and we’re on the same page,” Pennanen said. “We need to develop our breakouts a little bit.”

But at its core, Finland’s national hockey identity is based on playing a patient game built around strong puck management, defensive structure and patience. Play a stifling structured game long enough, frustrate your opponent into making mistakes, and pounce on those mistakes when they come.

This Finland team is no different, and Rantanen thinks his team might have gotten away from that identity a bit against the USA and will need to find it against Sweden.

“A couple of turnovers, and they had some time in front of the net where they scored a couple of goals,” Rantanen said. “But I think overall, the turnovers, if we put that number down and play behind their D a little bit more, make their D break it out more, I think that’s going to help us overall.”

From a lineup perspective, defenseman Juuso Välimäki said he expects to be a healthy scratch for a second straight game, so there should be no changes to Finland’s injury-ravaged blue line, a tacit endorsement from Pennanen that the group performed well against the USA.

Up front, however, Kaapo Kakko might enter the lineup after being scratched against the Americans. Who would come out was not clear at Finland’s practice Friday, nor was it clear what kind of line changes Pennanen might make. The line of Aho, Hintz and Patrik Laine generated only one shot on goal, so a change there would not be surprising, but considering the only goal Finland scored came off a less-than-dangerous shot off the stick of defenseman Henri Jokiharju, more wholesale changes up front could also be warranted.

But when little brother goes up against big brother, sometimes tactics and personnel become a bit less important.

“I wouldn’t say I hate Sweden,” Rantanen said. “They have good candy, good chocolate, good meatballs. So I don’t hate Sweden, but the rivalry in hockey, I’m not sure if it’s hate, but it’s big for sure.”

## [The Athletic / U.S.-Canada rivalry gets new chapter at 4 Nations, with a shot at global hockey supremacy](#)

**By Chris Johnston and Michael Russo – February 15, 2025**

MONTREAL — Rare is it that you will find a hockey game so big that it almost feels bigger than hockey. Rarer still is the set of circumstances that required the best players in the world to wait nearly a decade while a pandemic and a never-ending series of logistical hurdles prevented them from pulling on their national team sweaters in a best-on-best environment.

And so on a snowy Saturday night, in the bubbling cauldron of Bell Centre, we will finally witness a collision of what was and what may now be. The wait is mercilessly over. Canada versus USA, the sport's established power versus its ascendant power, coming together to begin writing the next chapter of the story at the 4 Nations Face-Off.

"It's a hockey game that you love to be a part of no matter what experience you've had in the past," Sidney Crosby said.

Both teams opened this event with a victory and are considered co-favorites to win it, but the tournament format comes with no guarantees they'll even meet again in next week's final at TD Garden in Boston.

All they have for sure is a Saturday meeting that's been circled on calendars for months. However, the stew of anticipation has actually been boiling slowly for years while top American and Canadian players found no outlet to stoke a rivalry that burns white hot at the world under-18 championship and world junior tournament, only to be abandoned once they reached the NHL.

Consider that only Crosby and teammate Drew Doughty were on the ice when these countries last met in a men's best-on-best for the semifinals at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. For the other 44 rostered players at this event, this is something brand new.

And the specter of history hangs over everything.

"I'm just in awe of what Canada and USA games used to be like in best on best," American forward Matthew Tkachuk told The Athletic recently. "For us to be able to play in that now, I'm just super excited. That U.S.-Canada rivalry is so big. It doesn't get much better than playing them on a Saturday night in Montreal.

"It's going to be amazing."

Here's a reminder of how quickly time flies: The last major championship in men's hockey by the U.S. came with Keith Tkachuk — Matthew and Brady's father — playing for the 1996 World Cup team that knocked off Canada in the three-game final. And on Thursday night, Keith was helping lift his grandson's baby carriage through the snowbanks left behind by a massive storm on the way to the rink before watching his boys score two goals apiece during a 6-1 win over Finland.

Three of the four goals came after the Tkachuk brothers were united on a line with center Jack Eichel, and that will factor heavily into the Canadian game plan. Big, physical, skilled and unafraid to crash the crease, they are a massive load for any opponent to handle.

**USA Goals: 6**

**Tkachuk Goals: 4**

It's notable that the only non-injury-related change to Canada's lineup following a 4-3 overtime win over Sweden in Wednesday's tournament opener will be dressing tenacious center Sam Bennett. He'll play between Brad Marchand and Seth Jarvis on a trio not designed as a Tkachuk antidote, per se, but one that will look to inflict a physical toll of its own.

Yes, even in a matchup featuring Eichel, Auston Matthews, Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Crosby and a host of other top-billing superstars, everyone on both sides seemed to be expecting a battle measured more by grit and will rather than pure skill.

"It's going to be an emotional game," American forward Dylan Larkin said.

"You're going to get a high-intensity, highly physical, great effort, kind of in-your-face game," Canadian coach Jon Cooper said. "I can't imagine it being anything else."

These countries, and these players, have certainly been through it in other venues and other competitions. Ten of the last 13 gold medals handed out at the World Junior Championship have been claimed by either Canada or the U.S., with the American victories in 2017 and 2021 coming over the Canadians in the final.

But as great as that tournament is, it's not the same as what we have here. When asked about his memories of beating Canada a couple of times as a teenager, Matthew Tkachuk said: "I don't think they had Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon and Sidney Crosby on those teams."

Indeed, this is the truest measuring stick of global hockey supremacy we'll get before the start of next February's Olympic tournament in Milan.

That this Canada-USA game will be played in a city that arguably appreciates the sport unlike any other only adds to the occasion. Larkin was part of the American team that lost a World Juniors game to Canada at Bell Centre on New Year's Eve 2015 and predicted that Saturday's atmosphere could rival a Stanley Cup Final.

"It's a great building, great atmosphere always," he said. "In Montreal, when you play against the Canadiens, it feels like it's the most important thing in the world when you're playing that night, and they have loyal fans, and they're lucky with a great hockey building.

"But I expect it to be 10 notches higher from your normal Tuesday night here against the Canadiens."

Tensions have been ratcheted up with U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly musing about turning Canada into the 51st state since taking office last month and recently imposing a 25 percent tariff on Canadian goods, before later issuing a 30-day reprieve.

Some fans booed "The Star-Spangled Banner" before Thursday's game — there's real concern the reaction could be much louder and much more pronounced on Saturday — which drew criticism from even some of the Canadian players.

"They can boo all they want during the games, but the anthems, those should be off limits," Marchand said. "Those are moments to show respect for the veterans and the millions and millions of people that sacrificed (their) life so that we can continue our freedom and we have the luxury to play a game like this. They should not be booing the Americans during that anthem. They have nothing to do with the political things that are going on.

"I do feel bad for those guys in that moment. I don't think it's right."

Doughty was also disappointed by the anthem booing but said he understands the source of the frustration. The on-ice rivalry with the Americans is something he feels deeply even after spending his

entire adult life in Los Angeles. The 35-year-old traces those feelings back to his youth, when he'd come up against American teams at tournaments and "you'd want to beat them so bad."

He certainly doesn't expect the U.S. to be discouraged or intimidated by the hostile reception they're likely to face again Saturday.

"They want to be the villains," Doughty said. "They want to beat us. I'm sure all of this stuff is making them more hungry. But at the same time, we've got stuff going on, too, that's making us hungry."

"Both teams are going to be starving out there."

The entire hockey world has been starved for this kind of competition since the 2016 World Cup, which has only raised the stakes and sense of anticipation here. It has been too long since we all saw top-level Sweden-Finland and USA-Canada matchups, and now we'll get both on the same day.

Deep down, the U.S. players know they've got a chance to claim the throne of hockey supremacy with the international calendar kicking back into high gear in the coming years — although that's not what is driving them most now.

"It's not so much changing the way hockey is looked at, we just want to play as best as we can and we want to win," Matthew Tkachuk said. "We want to be known as the best, and to do that you're going to have to beat the best."

After years and years of waiting, and with a hockey-obsessed country squarely rooting against them, they find themselves with their shot.

## The Athletic / LeBrun: Canada vs. USA rivalry enters new era with same intensity

By Pierre LeBrun – February 15, 2025

MONTREAL — It is almost 15 years to the day.

Feb. 21, 2010. Vancouver Olympics. Team USA 5, Team Canada 3.

Why is that score relevant? It was Team Canada's last loss in best-on-best hockey, a span of 17 games through the final four games of the Vancouver Olympics, the 2014 Sochi Olympics (6-0-0), the 2016 World Cup (6-0-0) and Wednesday's opening win over Sweden in 4 Nations Face-Off.

"They've not lost since then?" Zach Parise asked Friday. "I did not know that. That's crazy."

I don't think the former Team USA star is alone in not knowing that. Thanks to an eight-and-a-half-year drought without a best-on-best hockey tournament, it's pretty easy to forget these things.

So yes, Team USA is trying to snap quite the best-on-break streak for Team Canada when they meet Saturday night in a 4 Nations round-robin game at what should be a charged-up Bell Centre.

"I hadn't even thought about that to be honest. That's pretty impressive," Drew Doughty, who has been part of it entirely, said Friday about the 17-game win streak for Team Canada in best-on-best. "But we don't want it to stop there. Let's keep it going. We want to win out the tournament. That's the goal always. The U.S. represents a tough challenge."

Scott Niedermayer was Team Canada's captain when that 17-win streak began back in Vancouver.

"That's impressive," the Hockey Hall of Famer defenseman said Friday. "Especially with the idea that the U.S. is strong and they do have good players and some of the other countries as well. So that makes that really impressive, actually."

And as Niedermayer was quick to point out, it more or less parallels Sidney Crosby's amazing streak. He's 22-0 as Team Canada captain dating back to the start of the Sochi Olympics (which includes World Championships as well).

"The record of Team Canada with him leading the charge, it doesn't get any better, obviously," marveled Niedermayer.

But here comes Team USA, which on Thursday night snapped a five-game losing streak in best-on-best dating back to Sochi and the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. This is a new generation of Team USA stars looking to open up an era full of their own championships and gold medals. And knock down Team Canada a peg in doing so.

Two powerhouses colliding Saturday night — and maybe again next Thursday in Boston in the championship game.

"It's a hockey game you love to be part of," Crosby said Friday of the USA-Canada rivalry.

Two-time Olympic champion Chris Pronger points all the way back to the 1991 Canada Cup for when the USA-Canada hockey rivalry truly began to take shape. That year, the U.S. reached that tournament's final for the first time before losing to Canada. All of which set up the next best-on-best event, where the U.S. won the re-branded World Cup of Hockey in 1996.

Pronger played in both the 2002 Salt Lake City and 2010 Vancouver gold medal games. Which one stands out the most for him?

“Probably 2010 because they beat us in the round-robin and there was a lot of maybe swelled heads on their side, thinking that they were going to run roughshod over us as we found our solid footing and figured out how we needed to play and come together as a unit,” Pronger said. “I thought for the most part we dominated that gold medal game and had the better of the chances.”

Ryan Miller was unbelievable throughout that Olympic tournament in 2010 for that underdog Team USA squad that came oh-so-close to the upset, losing in overtime on Crosby’s golden goal.

That Olympic performance was one of those career-defining moments for Miller. That’s how stellar he was.

“It was a great tournament,” Miller said of the experience. “Everyone remembers Sid, and rightly so, capping off the tournament. What’s funny is that, over the years, we ended up training in California. There was a little bit of a bond behind the scenes where he’s really classy about everything, right? There’s a lot of respect between the two of us. That was a cool part of that.”

But USA-Canada on that stage? Nothing like it.

“You want to compete against the best in sport,” said Miller, the former Buffalo Sabres star goalie. “I had a chance to do that in a number of situations, but obviously that one was probably the best chance to play against the best that Canada had to offer.

“I’m still proud of it, but still angry, too.”

It was Parise who tied it late for Team USA, stunning the home Vancouver crowd and sending it to overtime. What a moment right then and there for Parise in his career.

“From an individual standpoint, that was probably the coolest moment in my career,” he said. “Just with the importance of the game. It’s the Olympics, you know what I mean? Just to give ourselves a chance (in overtime) and go in that locker room. You never know, next goal wins.

“We were right there. Unfortunately for us, we were right there. But what an awesome game to be a part of.”

He remembers all of it so vividly.

“Obviously, the gold medal game didn’t go our way. But that gold medal game was incredible,” said Parise. “I remember the pace of the game. It’s just so different than the (Stanley Cup playoffs), it’s one and done. You could just feel the importance of every play that was made. The fans are on the edge of their seats the whole game. It was unbelievable. It was one of the few days in my career where you go in there and you’re genuinely nervous the whole game. At least for me. All game long.”

While Niedermayer takes great pride in captaining Canada to that gold medal — in his native province of British Columbia, no less — he is quick to point out his first best-on-best experience against Team USA was the 1996 World Cup.

“Just a few months ago I watched a few highlights of what that looked like, and man, it was a competition at the very least, wow,” Niedermayer said with a chuckle while recalling what a physical, brawling best-of-three final that was.

“But the U.S.-Canada rivalry, maybe growing up it was Russia-Canada, but for my playing career and currently, it’s definitely the rivalry,” added Niedermayer. “Probably the two best hockey nations. Lots of talent on both rosters. I’m looking forward to it (Saturday night) as a fan for sure.”



The '96 World Cup win for USA Hockey had a lasting impact, to be sure. It was the first time the U.S. felt realistically on the same level as Team Canada at best-on-best. Miller's 2010 silver medallists brought back some of those same feelings, too, as far as the next generation of American stars announcing themselves. That helped pave the way for this current squad.

"I'm glad this generation now has grown up having so much success in World Juniors and Under-18s and we've been waiting a long time to see some of these guys play best-on-best," said Miller. "So, I'm excited to see it. I'm happy for them. And I'm glad the NHL and NHLPA have come to some agreements about continuing to see the best play each other. Finally."

As Pronger pointed out, with back-to-back World Juniors gold medals, USA Hockey is on a roll.

"The American game, if you will, has taken on a whole new level," said the Hockey Hall of Famer. "It's great for fans and it's great for Canada having another challenge outside of what was always Canada-Russia."

Pronger, based in St. Louis, has seen the growth of USA Hockey firsthand.

"Oh absolutely. It's crazy to see the evolution," he said. "And obviously now, with the Tkachuks and the players on the U.S. side and the lineage of the parents, and where players are coming from, Auston Matthews from Phoenix and seeing that southern expansion era of player coming to the forefront now for the U.S. and what it means for the game. And it certainly means a lot for the players."

It's next-level time for Team USA.

"I mean, the talent level has just taken off," said Parise. "I remember when people would always make a big deal of the Canadian teams, like Rick Nash being on a checking line. They had a 50-goal scorer on a checking line. You look at it now, the U.S. has really good players that are playing fourth-line roles. So we've closed that gap. We've caught up. And I think it says a lot for American hockey. It's awesome."

Doughty says bring it on.

"The rivalry is real," the two-time Olympic champion said Friday. "The rivalry with the United States was developed from when I was 8 years old because you start going to play tournaments in Michigan and places around the U.S. and immediately you're kind of taught, 'Don't lose to the Americans.' So that rivalry goes back far. It doesn't stop.

"Even at 35, I want to beat them more than anyone."

## The Athletic / What Finland can learn from going toe to toe with the USA before it all fell apart

By Arpon Basu – February 15, 2025

MONTREAL — The narrative was already getting old for Team Finland.

Even if they repeatedly said they didn't care about being considered an underdog in the 4 Nations Face-Off, there was a sense from the Finnish players that the more they were asked about it, the more they wanted to prove people wrong, to change that narrative.

Through 40 minutes Thursday, Finland was doing that. Or just short of 40 minutes. Exactly 2.2 seconds short of 40 minutes.

That is how much time was left in the second period, one that saw Finland generate numerous chances to score but come up empty while the game was still tied 1-1, when Olli Määttä was called for hooking Auston Matthews off a faceoff in the Finland zone. One intermission later and 15 seconds into the third period, Matthew Tkachuk took an innocuous shot from the top of the faceoff circle, the shot struck the stick of Finland defenseman Niko Mikkola and floated past Juuse Saros into the net, and it was 3-1 for the United States.

A proud group that had put itself in a position to pull off a tremendous upset and change that narrative saw it all undone in less than 20 seconds of game time.

A terribly timed penalty, a bad bounce, and the rout was on.

A 6-1 loss to the United States may look like it only confirmed that narrative, but the reality is far different.

"We knew that even before coming in here, that we can hold our own here," Finland forward Mikael Granlund said. "And that was the case. We saw the first two periods, it was a good hockey game. Either one could have been up 2 or 3-1.

"It was a good challenge, and we know we have a good team; the 6-1 (score) up there doesn't really show what the game really was."

Playing two strong periods and falling apart in the third doesn't get Finland any points in the standings, and being the only team in the tournament without a point will make it extremely difficult to reach the championship game in Boston next week.

But those two strong periods do provide a path forward for Finland to prove something in its two remaining games against archrival Sweden on Saturday and against Canada in Boston on Monday.

"You either win," Finland captain Aleksander Barkov said, "or you learn."

### **The blue line held up**

The biggest question facing Finland was how it would survive the loss of Miro Heiskanen, Rasmus Ristolainen and Jani Hakanpää on defense. Their replacements did just fine, as odd as that sounds after a game that ended 6-1.

Finland played all three of those injury replacements ahead of Juuso Välimäki. Henri Jokiharju scored the lone Finland goal to give them an early 1-0 lead and played just over 19 minutes of solid, low-event hockey on a pairing with Määttä. The third pair of Urho Vaakanainen and Nikolas Matinpalo also did well under the circumstances.

When you consider that as recently as Saturday, Matinpalo was wondering if he would be sent to the AHL by the Ottawa Senators to get some games in with Belleville during the tournament, he did more than fine on this stage. It was unfortunate for him that Matt Boldy's go-ahead goal late in the second period came when Matinpalo was unable to tie up his stick in the slot, because he had played well up to that point.

And in the absence of Heiskanen and Ristolainen, the top pair of Esa Lindell and Mikkola logged a ton of minutes and were effective defensively while getting a steady diet of the most dangerous American players.

The seemingly overmatched Finnish defense was not the reason they lost this game.

"I think they did well," Barkov said, "they moved the puck really well."

### **Shoot your shot**

Finland had a number of excellent scoring chances in the second period with the game tied 1-1 that they squandered or simply passed up. Roope Hintz took a pass in the slot from Sebastian Aho midway through the second and instead of shooting, deferred to Mikko Rantanen on the left flank. The pass failed to connect, and the Finns came away without a shot. Erik Haula had a breakaway from the blue line a minute later and shot wide. Aho and Hintz had a two-on-one break a few minutes later and Aho's saucer pass to Hintz never landed.

Three Grade-A scoring chances. Zero shots on goal.

Finland simply could not afford to do that when scoring chances were always going to be scarce for them.

"When you don't score," Finland forward Joel Armia said simply, "the other team's going to score."

The fact Finland had multiple opportunities to take the lead in that second period and plant a seed of doubt in the minds of the U.S. players is something they can learn from against Sweden. When in doubt, shoot, as evidenced by the Matthew Tkachuk goal that broke things open early in the third.

The line of Aho, Hintz and Patrik Laine combined for one shot on goal and only seven attempts. That's not going to cut it.

### **A change in goal could be in order**

Saros was given a lot of benefit of the doubt in getting this start. He is the standard bearer of Finnish goaltending and had been one of the best goaltenders in the world for a few years entering this season.

But the way Saros has performed this season complicated what should have been a simple decision for Finland on who to start in goal. The reality is Finland needed Saros to be the best goaltender in the tournament for them to have a chance to win it, and that was not an unreasonable ask based on his history. But the current version of Saros doesn't seem capable of doing that.

Backing up Saros on Thursday was his former backup in Nashville, Kevin Lankinen, who has been very good for the Vancouver Canucks this season and has the best numbers of Finland's three goaltenders by a good margin.

Saros had earned that benefit of the doubt, and Finland had to roll the dice that he would magically find his former self, because his former self gave them the best chance to succeed in this tournament. But it was his current self we saw Thursday. Brady Tkachuk banking the first U.S. goal in off Saros from below the goal line was one he needed to stop, and the Jake Guentzel shot five-hole just 11 seconds after

Matthew Tkachuk made it 3-1 was a killer, which is what makes his former backup a viable option, one coach Antti Pennanen acknowledged after the game was a real possibility.

“We go way back, we’ve known each other from probably 15 years old, we’ve been doing junior national teams and camps together,” Lankinen said of Saros after practice Wednesday. “It’s been fun to see his development and you can always see that he’s a special goalie with special talent and athleticism.

“So it’s been fun to watch him, obviously the last couple of years pretty closely in Nashville, to see him develop, but he’s helped my game evolve as well.”

It is probably time for the protege to take over from the mentor.

The 4 Nations tournament format made it so that every game felt like a Game 7. Numerous players have said so.

But for Finland, there are still two games to prove a point they have been dying to make, a point they were in the process of proving for nearly 40 minutes Thursday before it all fell apart. While reaching the tournament final may be a steep uphill battle, proving that point is still very much on the table.

“If you lose Game 7, you’re out. We’re not out,” Barkov said. “We play against Sweden on Saturday, and the preparation starts now for that game. We’re excited, it’s our rivalry and we’ll be trying to give our best.”

## The Athletic / Goalie Tracking: The top storylines in NHL nets, including the rise of 2 future standouts

By Jesse Granger – February 15, 2025

By most measures, the Anaheim Ducks are the worst defensive team in the NHL this season. They've allowed more high-danger shots (8.76) and scoring chances (32.34) per 60 minutes than any other team. And yet, the Ducks are league average in goals allowed.

It's a testament to how great Lukáš Dostál has been. The 24-year-old is only in his second full season in the NHL. He received his first opportunity to be a true starter early in the season when veteran John Gibson missed time, and he has cemented himself as the goalie of the future in Anaheim.

Welcome back to Goalie Tracking, where we examine the details of goaltending and attempt to explain why goalies do what they do. In a position at which margins are razor thin and the game is faster than ever, details are the difference between saves and goals. We try to highlight exactly what different goalies are doing to separate themselves.

This month, we'll examine Dostál's rise to prominence, how Calgary rookie Dustin Wolf is showing maturity far beyond his years and how Ilya Sorokin has rounded back into elite form on Long Island.

Back to Dostál, who is doing something we rarely see: Producing elite statistics despite playing behind the worst defense in hockey. His 26.67 goals saved above expected ranks second in the NHL behind Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck, according to Evolving-Hockey. That metric accounts for the quality of shots faced, which makes it more indicative of goalie performance than save percentage, but it's still incredibly difficult to maintain high GSAX playing behind a very poor defense.

To give context to Dostál's numbers, here is how the primary goalie for every team that allowed the most high-danger chances each season finished in GSAX since 2017-18.

**2024-25**

**ANA**

**Lukáš Dostál**

**26.67**

**2nd**

**2023-24**

**SJS**

**Mackenzie Blackwood**

**11.07**

**26th**

**2022-23**

**ANA**

**John Gibson**

**-2.31**

**76th**

**2021-22**

**MTL**

**Sam Montembeault**

**-14.52**

**112th**

**2020-21**

**CHI**

**Kevin Lankinen**

**-4.99**

**60th**

**2019-20**

**CHI**

**Corey Crawford**

**7.44**

**4th**

**2018-19**

**CHI**

**Corey Crawford**

**1.11**

**25th**

**2017-18**

**NYI**

**Jaroslav Halak**

**-9.23**

**79th**

The only goalie during that time to finish top-five in GSAX playing behind the defense that allowed the most high-danger shots was two-time Stanley Cup champion Corey Crawford, and even Crawford's GSAX figure pales in comparison to Dostál's this year.

Dostál does a lot of things really well, but the two aspects of his game that stand out most are his play-reading and puck-tracking abilities. He plays with excellent structure, rarely breaking from his compact stance as the puck moves around the zone. He keeps his feet underneath him — a bit more narrow than most — which helps him react instantly to the play as it unfolds.

When discussing a goalie's reads, we commonly use the phrase "staying ahead of the play." When a netminder is really locked in, he often sees a pass coming before it happens, allowing him to get into

position for the upcoming shot before the puck even arrives to the shooter. In this example against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Jan. 16, Dostál read the play so well he was literally ahead of it.

Following a tie-up on the faceoff, the puck bounces to Lightning star Jake Guentzel in a dangerous shooting area on the inside edge of the circle. Dostál squares himself to Guentzel, but he reads Guentzel's body positioning so well that he actually starts his push to get over for Nikita Kucherov's one-timer before Guentzel even passes the puck.

Dostál recognizes that Guentzel has the puck directly in front of his body. In order to fire a shot with any kind of velocity, he would need to pull the puck all the way back to his side. From the current position, Dostál knows he can only pass left or right. He also knows Nikita Kucherov is set up for a one-timer in the left circle.

Guentzel ends up fanning on the initial pass attempt, but you can see Dostál had already opened up his left skate to begin his push across, and located Kucherov with his eyes so he knew exactly where he was going. All of this before the puck ever leaves Guentzel's stick. In this case, Dostál ends up too far ahead of the play, but in the vast majority of instances, that pass is getting across on the first attempt and Dostál is giving himself a much better chance at making the save because he anticipated it so early.

Watch how easy he makes this back-door one-timer save look, all because he is early to get his head across and begin tracking the shot.

Why is Dostál so good at tracking the puck? Aside from his eye-hand coordination, he also does himself a lot of favors in the way he navigates his crease. Notice how still his head remains throughout all of these plays. He stays deep in his stance with his legs absorbing any movement (like a car's suspension) as he moves back and forth, keeping his mask at essentially the same level throughout. The lack of head movement makes it easier to maintain visual attachment as the puck zips around the zone.

Compare how Dostál moves side to side on that play to how Andrei Vasilevskiy does in this clip. Vasilevskiy is one of the best goaltenders of this generation, but he bobs his head up and down a lot more as the puck moves around the zone. It just goes to show there isn't one correct way to goaltend, but Dostál's calm, structured movement works for him.

Dostál and Gibson have alternated starts since the veteran returned from his injury. Both are playing exceptionally despite the lack of defensive structure in front of them. One thing that's clear from watching Dostál play is that this isn't some hot streak where he's diving around and pucks are simply hitting him. His success has been the result of an intelligent, sophisticated game that should only improve with experience.

### **Wolf hasn't looked like a rookie**

Speaking of young goalies cementing themselves as a core piece for a franchise, what a season it has been for Wolf in Calgary. He ranks sixth in the NHL in GSAx (18.69) and 11th in save percentage (.912). To this point, he has stopped the fifth-most goals saved above expected by any goalie 23 years or younger since Evolving-Hockey began tracking the stat 17 years ago.

### **John Gibson**

**2016-17**

**24.38**

### **Carey Price**

**2010-11**

**21.65**

**Jake Oettinger**

**2022-23**

**21.65**

**Jeremy Swayman**

**2022-23**

**20.99**

**Dustin Wolf**

**2024-25**

**18.69**

Wolf's most impressive attribute is his skating. We discussed that in detail in December, but what has stood out about Wolf's game lately is how in control he seems to be. Still in his first full season in the NHL, he's no longer a timid rookie trying to fit in. Wolf is already conducting the defense in front of him like a seasoned vet.

This play early in the game against the Winnipeg Jets on Jan. 18 is a great example of Wolf's composure and authority on the ice. It's one of the most anxious plays a goalie can face, with an unexpected turnover happening right in front of the net.

Calgary defenseman Kevin Bahl (No. 7) was caught off guard by the pressure of Winnipeg's Adam Lowry (17) and threw a panicked pass that went straight to Nikolaj Ehlers (27). This set up a scramble situation with very little defensive structure, but Wolf handled it perfectly.

Bahl nearly compounded his mistake by challenging the puck carrier, Ehlers, and leaving Lowry all alone on the weak side. His first step was toward Ehlers with the puck, but you can see Wolf peek over to see Lowry winding up for a one-timer, and he immediately directed Bahl to take away the pass.

You can see Wolf's extended glove hand pointing to Lowry, and we can surmise he also called out for Bahl to take away the pass because he immediately retreated and got his stick in the passing lane. It's not just that he makes the call. Everything about his body language shows he feels completely in control of the situation. In other words, "I've got this."

Wolf makes the head check, identifies the passing threat and helps his defenseman sort out coverage all in a matter of seconds. He does it all on a surprise play that developed instantly with a shooting threat barreling toward him. It's seriously impressive stuff from the rookie.

Once Bahl took away the passing option, Wolf fully committed to the shot. Because he stayed square to the shot, the rebound deflected harmlessly into the corner and the scoring threat was over. A goalie with less conviction on that play might flatten out along his goal line to prepare for a potential pass, which would likely kick the rebound into the slot.

He's still very young, but this is Wolf's team at this point. He's playing with confidence, and with good reason. He's the biggest reason the Flames are in the Western Conference playoff chase. In Wolf's 33 starts, Calgary has a .621 points percentage. For reference, that would be the ninth-best record in the NHL, between Florida (.623) and Toronto (.618). In the 22 games Wolf didn't start, Calgary has a points percentage of only .432, which would be the fourth-worst in the NHL.



Don't underestimate the value of having a goalie in net that the entire team trusts, and believes is in control of the game.

### **Sorokin is back**

On Jan. 17, the Islanders were in last place in the Metropolitan Division, eight points out of the final wild-card position in the East. Less than a month later, they're right in the thick of the playoff chase, thanks in large part to Sorokin.

Yes, he suffered a couple of losses to end the hot streak heading into the break, but prior to that, he was on one of the hottest stretches by a netminder this season. In seven starts between Jan. 20 and Feb. 4, Sorokin went 7-0-0 with a .960 save percentage.

A major strength of Sorokin's game is how well he covers the bottom of the net. His speed and agility to move laterally, combined with his ability to keep his pads sealed in the most precarious of positions, makes it really tough to beat him along the ice.

It's a big reason Sorokin generally has a high save percentage on shots from in close. Over the last four years, he's stopped .838 percent of shots inside of 29 feet, compared to the league average of .814 according to NHL Edge data.

This sequence of saves against the Lightning on Feb. 1 is a great example of how well Sorokin seals the ice with his pads.

Sorokin made three saves in less than two seconds, all of which were too close for him to have any reaction time. He made the saves because of his great pad seal. It's easy for a goalie to keep the bottom edge of his pads sealed to the ice when he's in the butterfly, but it becomes increasingly difficult as you stretch your leg to each side. Reaching with the pad while keeping the seal requires a lot of internal hip rotation, of which Sorokin has plenty.

Not to pick on Calvin Pickard, but here are examples of what it looks like when a goalie reaches his pad without maintaining the seal. First, on this play against Minnesota on Jan. 15, you can see Pickard's right pad lift off the ice when he stretches it to the far post.

It didn't end up mattering on this occasion because the shot was high, but later in that same game, it was costly. On this play, Minnesota forward Ryan Hartman crashed the net right off the faceoff. Pickard made the initial save, but when he stretched to stop the rebound attempt, his pad lifted off the ice slightly and Hartman's shot slid underneath.

The body's natural reaction is to lift the knee to stretch the leg out as far as possible. Sorokin does an exceptional job of keeping his knees down and pads flush with the ice, no matter how far he stretches in either direction. Watch this sequence from Feb. 1 again, focusing on his pads.

It's remarkable how well he seals the ice. Here's another example, this time on a rush chance in transition. Not only does Sorokin keep the ice sealed with both pads as he slides across in desperation, but he also makes a follow-up save on the rebound that he barely saw coming, all because of the seal.

When Sorokin is at his best, he's one of the most entertaining goalies to watch. Luckily for us — and the Islanders — that has happened a lot more often as of late.

## The Athletic / Ranking every Canada-USA matchup from a men's best-on-best hockey tournament

By Sean McIndoe – February 15, 2025

On Saturday night, after over eight years of waiting, it's finally back: Canada vs. USA in a best-on-best men's hockey tournament.

OK, maybe the 4 Nations Face-Off doesn't have quite the same claim to "best-on-best" status as some of the tournaments that have come before it, given that only four teams are competing. But those four teams are bringing the very best players they have available, so yes, this is a best-on-best matchup. And it should be a good one.

Tomorrow marks the 20th time in men's hockey history that Team Canada has faced Team USA in a true best-on-best, by which we mean the Canada Cup, the World Cup and the Olympics in years in which the NHL sent its players. Canada has dominated the head-to-head with a record of 14-4-1, but it's been closer since the dawn of the World Cup and Olympic era, and this year's matchup is basically a coin flip.

We'll see how it turns out, and whether we have to settle for just this one game or get a rematch in next week's championship game. For now, let's look back on those 19 previous matchups and rank them from worst to best.

### **No. 19. Canada 8, USA 3 (1981 Canada Cup round-robin)**

This is the biggest blowout in the rivalry's best-on-best history and it's not all that close — and it came in a half-empty Northlands Coliseum. In fairness, it was a closer contest than the score would suggest, with Canada scoring five times in the final 10 minutes to take the lead and then pull away. But given that the two teams would meet in a better game with higher stakes just a few days later, it's not a tough call to put this one in the last spot.

### **No. 18. Canada 6, USA 3 (1991 Canada Cup round-robin)**

The flip side of the previous entry, the score was flattering here, as Canada jumped out to a 5-0 lead on the strength of big games from Wayne Gretzky and a teenaged Eric Lindros. Considering they'd meet in the final a few days later, this game was quickly forgotten by everyone, even our AI overlords.

### **No. 17. USA 4, Canada 4 (1984 Canada Cup round-robin)**

Thankfully, this will be the only tie we'll encounter in the rivalry's history. It was historically significant at the time, marking the first best-on-best meeting between the two teams that Canada hadn't won, and it clearly meant a lot to the Americans based on their celebration of the tying goal with four minutes left. (Fun side game: See if you can count how many times goalie interference would be called on that play based on today's rules.)

Still, any hopes for a rematch in the final were dashed when Team USA was pummelled 9-2 by the Swedes in the semis, and to this day this tournament is remembered more for Canada's 3-2 overtime win over the Soviets in that same round than anything else, including the final.

### **No. 16. Canada 4, USA 1 (1981 Canada Cup semifinal)**

This was the first (and until 1991, the only) time the two teams had met in an elimination game. Canada picked up where it left off in the round-robin matchup, scoring three first-period goals to run its total to eight in the last 30 minutes the two teams had played. The game tightened up from there, but the Americans never really got close. Canada would go on to be embarrassed by the Soviets in the final,

making 1981 probably the most forgettable Canada Cup tournament, at least from a North American perspective.

**No. 15. Canada 4, USA 2 (2016 World Cup round-robin)**

This was best-on-best with a small asterisk, as the existence of the under-23 Team North America meant that names like Connor McDavid couldn't take part in this matchup. Still, it delivered a solid game, with Team USA scoring early and late and Canada controlling in between. The game was part of a disappointing 0-for-3 showing by the Americans, who were eliminated from the playoffs with this loss.

(By the way, the two teams also split a pair of pre-tournament exhibition games, which occasionally show up in these tournaments but we're not counting on our overall list because come on.)

**No. 14. Canada 4, USA 2 (1976 Canada Cup round-robin)**

The first-ever best-on-best meeting between the two nations saw the underdog Americans put up a solid fight against a heavily favored Canadian team that would cruise to a tournament win. Canada jumped out to a 3-0 lead early, but the Americans fought back in front of 21-year-old goalie Pete LoPresti, who was awarded their player of the game honors. Team Canada's player of the game? Bobby Orr. Yeah, there may have been a slight talent disparity between these two rosters.

**No. 13. Canada 1, USA 0 (2014 Olympics semifinal)**

Is it weird that I have virtually no recollection of this game, even though it's one of the most recent? Maybe not, since this edition of Team Canada was simultaneously one of history's best teams and also its most boring, playing a stifling defensive game on the way to an undefeated tournament. The only goal came from Jamie Benn and was assisted by, according to this international announcer, somebody named Jaybauw Meester.

**No. 12. Canada 2, USA 1 (2004 World Cup round-robin)**

The 2004 World Cup was a decidedly weird affair, playing out just days before the start of the lockout that would end up wiping out the entire NHL season. It kicked off with this low-scoring matchup, which saw Martin Brodeur outduel, uh, Robert Esche. I would make a joke here about goaltending mismatches in international hockey, but, well, you know.

**No. 11. Canada 3, USA 2 (1987 Canada Cup round-robin)**

Despite how history has come to remember it, this tournament did include teams other than Canada and the Soviets. Team USA was there, and while they ultimately missed the playoff round, they gave Canada a tough game. It took three goals from Mario Lemieux — or as he called it in 1987, “an off night” — to get past a 37-save performance by John Vanbiesbrouck.

**No. 10. USA 5, Canada 3 (2010 Olympics round-robin)**

It would be overshadowed by what would happen between these two teams a few days later, but this game had some meaningful stakes with first place in the group on the line; the American win gave them a first-round bye and an easier path through the playoff round. Brian Rafalski played the hero with a pair of first-period goals, including one that came less than a minute in.

**No. 9. Canada 4, USA 1 (1991 Canada Cup final, Game 1)**

**No. 8. Canada 4, USA 2 (1991 Canada Cup final, Game 2)**

The Americans at least put up a fight, especially in the second game, which saw Canada need a late short-handed goal from Steve Larmer to take the lead for good, as Bill Ranford outdueled Mike Richter. The mini-sweep was a letdown after the legendary three-game final in 1987, but it was progress for

Team USA, who finished second in a best-on-best for the first time ever. They'd have to wait five years for their shot at taking the last step, but they'd be ready.

**No. 7. USA 5, Canada 3 (1996 World Cup round-robin)**

It might seem strange to list a round-robin game this high on our list, especially given that these two teams would play three more games with much higher stakes within two weeks. But with five years having passed since the two teams had met in the 1991 final, the "Canada" stripped out of the Canada Cup, and the Americans icing by far their best team ever, there was a lot of anticipation for this matchup. Mix in a feisty Philadelphia crowd, and the intensity was at an all-time high.

How high? Well, how many times have you seen a full-line brawl in a best-on-best international tournament?

That all took 20 seconds to start, by the way. Luckily, we no longer have any Tkachuks around to make trouble so we should be (checks earpiece) oh no.

**No. 6. Canada 4, USA 1 (1998 Olympics round-robin)**

Coming just a year and a half after the hotly contested 1996 World Cup, the NHL's first foray into the Olympics had already been penciled in for another USA-Canada final. This game was assumed to be a warmup for the 1998 gold medal showdown that, of course, never came. As it turns out, I remember this game primarily for two things: Surprising Team Canada pick Rob Zamuner scoring a goal on a gorgeous feed from Gretzky, and (far more importantly) Mike Myers showing up on David Letterman a few days later and taunting the American audience by continuously finger-flashing the 4-1 score. Luckily the Americans wouldn't have seen it since none of their hotel room TVs were working for some reason.

**No. 5. Canada 4, USA 3 OT (1996 World Cup final, Game 1)**

**No. 4. USA 5, Canada 2 (1996 World Cup final, Game 2)**

**No. 3. USA 5, Canada 2 (1996 World Cup final, Game 3)**

We saw what happened in the round-robin a few slots up. This was the main event.

The opener featured an American tying goal in the dying seconds of regulation leading to a Steve Yzerman winner in overtime. That would be the first of just two best-on-best overtimes these two nations have ever played, and yes, we'll get to the second one in a bit.

The Game 1 loss felt like a massive missed opportunity for the Americans, as the remainder of the best-of-three shifted back to Canadian ice. But Team USA missed the memo about a coronation and fought back with an impressive 5-2 win in the second game to even the series and set up the first winner-take-all showdown in the rivalry's history. They delivered a classic in front of a rabid Montreal crowd (which included a young future writer for The Athletic who didn't regain full use of his voice for about a week). Canada took a 2-1 lead into the dying minutes before the Americans unloaded for four straight goals to capture their first and so far only best-on-best title.

With only two slots to go, there's no surprise as to which games are left. Let's see if the order surprises you ...

**No. 2. Canada 3, USA 2 OT (2010 Olympics gold medal game)**

**No. 1. Canada 5, USA 2 (2002 Olympics gold medal game)**

I can absolutely see the case for swapping these two. Having these two nations play sudden death with a gold medal on the line made for irresistible drama, especially after Team USA forced the extra period

with seconds left in regulation. And there's no question that Sidney Crosby's golden goal is almost certainly the most famous moment the rivalry will ever produce.

**In fact, let's watch it a few times:**

The ending was phenomenal — so good that it almost entirely compensates for the first 59 minutes of this game being a defensive-minded slog. If you wanted to put 2010 at the very top of your own list, be my guest.

But if you're old enough to remember 2002, you know how this game felt important in a way that no meeting between these two countries before or since ever has. For Team USA, this was the game that everything had been building toward for decades — a chance to claim hockey's international crown once and for all, on home ice, in front of a massive TV audience both at home and around the globe. Meanwhile, Canada was in the midst of a full-blown existential hockey crisis after the disappointments of 1996 and 1998, and we'd spent years reminding each other that the country hadn't won Olympic gold since 1952. The Americans desperately wanted to win. The Canadians desperately needed to.

The game didn't have overtime, but it had everything else. This was the game that featured Mario Lemieux somehow giving us arguably the greatest goal of his legendary career without even touching the puck. The game had 14 future Hall of Famers and counting on Team Canada, plus seven more on Team USA, meaning more than half the players in the game were all-time legends. It had a breathtakingly tense third period, until the dam finally broke late. It gave us Bob Cole at his very best, with Jah-yoe Sakic and Surely That's Gotta Be It.

It should be in the conversation for the single greatest hockey game ever played.

And despite all that, it's only barely ahead of the 2010 OT thriller on my list. If you're American, maybe you think the 1996 finale is right there with them.

**One thing we can agree on:** When everything clicks just right, these two national teams can deliver a moment that lives forever. Let's see what we're in for on Saturday night.

## The Athletic / Stanley Cup Projections: Brock Faber to Matt Boldy game-winner catapults Team USA's new generation in 4 Nations opener

**By Michael Russo – February 15, 2025**

MONTREAL — Mike Modano, along with 1980 Miracle on Ice heroes Mike Eruzione and Rob McClanahan, were surprise guests at the United States' team dinner on Monday night.

The three-time Olympian who also represented the U.S. in two World Cups shared some words of wisdom with the group his friend and longtime USA Hockey linemate, Bill Guerin, put together.

The gist?

"Don't waste the opportunity to play in an event like this," Modano told The Athletic on Thursday night. "Top to bottom, this is the most talented U.S. team probably put together."

The U.S. won gold at the 1996 World Cup of Hockey, the last time the Americans won a best-on-best tournament. They won silver at the 2002 Winter Olympics. Modano says it's close, but this 2025 team assembled is the best collection of talent the United States has ever iced.

Let's be blunt: Since winning a silver medal at the 2010 Olympics, the Americans have failed dramatically in best-on-best competitions. Five straight losses. Flaming out in Sochi in 2014. Embarrassing themselves at the 2016 World Cup in Toronto by going winless in three games, including losses to the Czechs and ... Team Europe.

So enough is enough, Modano, Eruzione and McClanahan told this new generation of talented Americans.

Two young, up-and-coming, already well-decorated Americans that Modano gets to watch on an everyday basis in his consulting role with the Minnesota Wild are Matt Boldy and Brock Faber.

So it was only fitting that Boldy and Faber, who have connected on 24 goals in their Wild careers, teamed for the winning goal Thursday night during the United States' 6-1 thrashing of Finland in its 4 Nations Face-Off unveiling.

With the United States looking tight and having trouble finding chemistry during some white-knuckle moments in a 1-1 game late in the second period against what should have been the overmatched Finns, coach Mike Sullivan tweaked his lines by uniting the Tkachuk brothers and separating a struggling Faber and Noah Hanifin by moving Faber onto the second pair with Jaccob Slavin.

And just like that, Faber got the puck at the point, looked up, saw a shooting lane open and Boldy's just standing there. He fired at his Wild teammate's stick and, boom, the go-ahead goal and eventual winner — the first of four American goals in a span of 5:56 between the second and third periods — was deflected home.

"My job is the easy part," Faber said. "His job is the hard part making a nice tip like that."

Boldy, at 23 and 314 days, also had the primary assist on Brady Tkachuk's first-period tying goal to become the youngest player with a multi-point game for the USA at an NHL International Tournament since Brian Leetch (23 years, 192 days) in the 1991 Canada Cup semifinals.

After a career-high 69 points last season, Boldy, who played at Boston College and will get to play in front of his entire family when this tournament moves to his hometown of Boston next week, led all

scorers in last year's World Championship in scoring. He also won a gold medal at the 2021 World Junior Championship.

Faber, the youngest U.S. player at 22 and second youngest in the tournament, was provided a dream come true when he was traded by Los Angeles to his hometown Wild three summers ago. A Wild die-hard as a kid, former University of Minnesota captain and the NHL's Calder Trophy runner-up last season, Faber captained the U.S. in one World Junior Championship, won gold as Boldy's teammate in another and was a 2022 Olympian.

Like so many of their teammates Thursday night, they are a huge part of the future of USA Hockey with the NHL hoping to go to best-on-best tournaments every other year starting with the 2026 Olympics in Milan.

"One of the things that's impressed me in just observing (Boldy) in the time that we've been here is he has a quiet confidence about him," Sullivan said. "He belongs, and he knows it. It's very easy in these environments for a young player to get intimidated, and he's not, and I think that speaks to his maturity and the quiet confidence the way he carries himself."

The Tkachuk brothers — Matthew and Brady — took Thursday's game over by combining for four goals and an assist with their dad and Modano's former USA linemate, Keith Tkachuk, proudly watching from the Bell Centre stands.

There are few things more annoying than having to face one Tkachuk brother. So imagine two on the same line like Sullivan pulled out of his bag of tricks in the second period.

Sullivan said he and the coaching staff discussed playing the Tkachuk brothers on the same line entering the tournament and always knew they'd have the option in the hopper if ever needed. But in a short tournament where there's no room for error and little time to wait for things to play out in terms of teammates finding chemistry, Sullivan didn't waste any time when nothing was happening for the Americans in the second period.

He made the tweaks, and the game immediately turned.

"Everyone's so skilled, everyone has that ability to make plays," Boldy said. "Sometimes it's hard when you always have that thought to make a play. Everyone's kind of thinking that way. So for us to be able to simplify and get pucks in and play the right way, I think speaks a lot to the group. It's a lot of energy. You've been waiting for this for so long. You're a little bound up, so to kind of settle down there and get going and then the plays started happening."

The Tkachuk brothers will deservedly get most of the accolades on Friday. Brady and Matthew became the first set of brothers in NHL International Tournament history each with multiple goals in the same game. They were the third with multiple points, following Aaron and Neal Broten with USA against West Germany in the 1984 Canada Cup round robin as well as Marian and Peter Stastny with Czechoslovakia versus Finland in the 1976 Canada Cup round robin.

And it was Boldy who scored the big goal to finally give the Americans the ability to take a deep breath and loosen the heck up.

Brady Tkachuk captained Boldy in last May's World Championship. He saw firsthand how talented he was as he played on a line with Brock Nelson and the late Johnny Gaudreau.

"I think he already is a star in the league, personally," Tkachuk said. "Like he's just such a great player the way he plays. He can play so many different types of games, and I think that just makes him so valuable and versatile."

Added Boldy's center, J.T. Miller, "He's a very special player. What he's accomplished in the league so far as a young guy has been pretty impressive."

Boldy became the youngest player with an NHL International Tournament goal for the Americans since Adam Deadmarsh (21 years, 127 days) against Canada in the 1996 World Cup.

He hopes he has a lot more goals in him, not just in this tournament as the United States strives to end its run of ineptitude, but in many more tournaments.

"You just want to make a difference," Boldy said. "It's so many talented players in here. It's maybe a different role than I play in Minnesota. But ... it's anything to win. That's what matters. I don't think anyone in this room is on a different page in terms of that mindset. So that speaks a lot to the guys in here. And I want to get the job done."

The United States was in hostile territory Thursday night.

Team USA in the Bell Centre where they won the 1996 World Cup. So it wasn't a shock to anyone when the fans did everything they could to buoy Finland toward an upset.

But in the end, this new crop of talented Americans was too skilled, too deep and finally broke the game open with an onslaught of goals early in the third.

The Tkachuks combining for five points. Boldy, Jake Guentzel and Jack Eichel with two points apiece. Zach Werenski with three assists. Points from the likes of Auston Matthews, Jack Hughes, Kyle Connor and Faber. And, of course, Connor Hellebuyck recovering from an early bad goal.

Now the youngest team in the tournament moves on to the showdown everybody has been waiting for since the NHL and NHLPA announced this tournament a year ago.

Canada versus the United States. Saturday night. Bell Centre.

What a night this will be.

"I can't wait," Guentzel said. "As a kid, you watched USA and Canada all the time. Now to experience it, in Canada, ... it's going to be a lot of fun."



## The Athletic / Team USA angered, motivated by boos from Montreal crowd at 4 Nations Face-Off

By Chris Johnston – February 15, 2025

MONTREAL — Team USA heard “The Star-Spangled Banner” booed inside Bell Centre before its opening game at the 4 Nations Face-Off, raising tensions ahead of a matchup against the host Canadians on Saturday night.

“I didn’t like it,” American forward Matthew Tkachuk said after Thursday’s 6-1 win over Finland. “And that’s all I’ve got.”

The NHL knew this was a possibility after the American anthem was booed here before a Devils-Canadiens game last week, but hoped that the climate had been turned down when U.S. President Donald Trump issued a 30-day reprieve on his plans to institute a 25 percent tariff on Canadian goods.

However, Trump has also mused about the possibility of making Canada the 51st state and earlier this week ordered a 25 percent tariff on all imports of steel and aluminum into the U.S. from all countries.

“It’s unfortunate, obviously, and we wish it wasn’t the case,” NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told reporters Wednesday. “But from time to time things happen and people have strong feelings about it. Obviously, we’re aware of what’s been happening here.”

Before the Americans faced Finland on Thursday night, Bell Centre public address announcer Michel Lacroix urged fans to be respectful of the national anthems to uphold the spirit of the competition.

Still, a significant number of fans audibly booed — cameras showed Matthew Tkachuk fuming at the end of his team’s bench while it happened — before some others in the crowd attempted to drown them out with cheers.

“These guys are hockey players, and they’re here to play hockey,” said American coach Mike Sullivan. “They’re also proud Americans and it’s a privilege to represent your nation, and all of us that have the opportunity to participate and be part of this U.S. team. It means a lot to all of us. ...

“We just want to play hockey. We want to compete. We want to represent our nation in the right way.”

The negative reaction from the crowd stirred a range of emotions in the American players.

J.T. Miller thought it was something that could be used as added motivation.

“I think we like it,” he said. “Not politically, but maybe just as a sense of, we know where we’re at in Canada and I think that fires us up more than anything. So it’s great.”

“Everyone has their own views on things,” said teammate Brock Faber. “I’m honored to wear the red, white and blue. For us, we’re just focused on winning games. Obviously the fans here are going to be against us. And, you know, it’s going to be the same thing when it’s USA-Canada, or whoever, USA-Sweden back home in Boston, right?”

“So, fans are passionate.”

The harsh reception should only fuel the anticipation ahead of Saturday’s Canada-USA showdown. Matthew Tkachuk told Sportsnet that he’d been dreaming about that game for nine years, while his brother Brady said it was going to be the biggest game of his life.

It's worth noting that some of the Canadian players here, including Brad Marchand, have urged the home fans not to boo the American anthem.

"They might just be booing us because we're the U.S. team here," said American defenseman Zach Werenski. "Obviously, I'm a proud American and I love playing for the USA and being an American. I don't want to get into the political side of it, but it is what it is.

"I like to just view it as they want us to lose because we're the U.S. team."

## [Sportsnet.ca / 'Feel the tension': Canada tweaks lineup for nasty USA showdown](#)

By Luke Fox – February 15, 2025

BROSSARD, Que. — Jon Cooper is thinking what you're thinking.

The coach of Team Canada is dropping a nail gun into a barrel of dynamite.

The answer for Matthew Tkachuk, a Florida Panthers loose cannon dressed in a Team USA sweater, will be Sam Bennett, an even looser Panthers cannon all decked out in Red, White and Bruise.

"It'll be interesting if Sam and Matthew meet in a corner at some point," said a smiling Cooper, who also happens to coach the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"I hope nobody's sitting here thinking Sam was brought here just to play against USA."

Not just to play USA. But, yes, to play USA — the meanest roster among the four nations facing off in Montreal and Boston.

Sitting in his stall after an intense, hour-long practice at the Canadiens-turned-Canadians practice facility on the big-box-store outskirts of Montreal, Bennett concedes that "it's difficult sometimes" to strike that fine balance between aggression and over-aggression. Which could prove costly for both sides, considering the fearsome firepower of these power plays.

"When I found out I was in, I already started feeling that energy and that juice. So, I think the best way is to try and not think about that. Just avoid overthinking. Just act like it's another game," Bennett said. "And then as soon as you get out there, your body's gonna treat it like not just another game."

Oh, this ain't just another game.

This is U.S. versus Canada, best-on-best, for the first time in 11 years. And it'll unfold inside a North American cathedral.

**Memo to the arena folks in Montreal:** You might want to double-check the bolts on the roof so that sucker doesn't get blown clean off Saturday night.

"It's a big game. Playing the Americans in Montreal, best-on-best tournament. It's what you dream of. It's exciting," said Canada's Connor McDavid. "Everybody knows, even playing minor hockey when you play against an American team, you can feel the tension."

Simply hanging around the athletes and a city smothered in snowfall, one feels the tension rising all week. The way Canada's power play sparked like a fantasy in under 13 seconds. How the Tkachuk brothers ran smack through the boos and chased the poor Finns out of the building and made them switch goalies already.

If the 4 Nations Face-Off is an amuse-bouche for the Olympics, Games 1 and 2 this week were but appetizers for Saturday's feast.

"Growing up as a young kid, when you go play American teams and stuff like that, you want to beat them so bad," Canada's Drew Doughty said. "And I still have this feeling, at 35 years old, how bad you want to beat the Americans."

"This is probably the most exciting matchup of the tournament."

On the matchup front, Cooper will be tweaking the lineup he deployed in Wednesday's 4-3 overtime victory over the lighter-hitting, smoother-skating Swedes.

An all-Lightning third line, which Cooper knows and trusts, unites familiar friends Anthony Cirelli, Brayden Point and Brandon Hagel. Cooper deployed that trio in the final minute of regulation to secure a point versus Sweden.

Travis Konecny sits for Bennett, who will centre Brad Marchand on a fourth line you love to hate.

Bennett told Cooper before the circus began that he would gladly be a healthy scratch for every game. He just wanted to take part.

"And so, you're cheering for somebody with that type of attitude," Cooper said. "He has shown in the last couple playoffs, he rises to the occasion, these big moments. Especially when the physicality and the game is at its brightest, he's done a heckuva job — and we expect that from him tomorrow."

More concerning and significant is Canada's blueline situation.

The loss of Shea Theodore (week-to-week) with an injury suffered in Game 1 forces the versatile Travis Sanheim onto Doughty's third pairing.

Moreover, the country's stud No. 1 defenceman, Cale Makar, missed Friday's practice due to illness. All due respect to Theodore, but Makar is harder to replace.

The all-situations Norris winner has logged more ice than anyone in the tournament (28:06) and quarterbacks Canada's power play.

#### **Does Cooper expect Makar to dress?**

"'Expect' is a big word, but I'm confident," the coach said. "I'm confident he'll be there."

If Makar is unable to play, the next man up is Thomas Harley, who is not yet eligible to practise with Canada and had originally planned to meet the team in Boston Sunday.

The NHL will not force Canada to start a game with five defencemen. If the Canadians did, Marchand said he'd move back, despite his inability to skate backward.

"I mean, yeah. I'll play goalie, if you want me to play goalie," Marchand quipped.

He's kidding. Sort of.

Beating the U.S. means that much to Marchand, one of just three Canadians on the '25 squad who hoisted the 2016 World Cup.

"Somehow, it's ingrained in you. I think it's probably just from growing up watching the different series and different games that have been played. Whether it's Olympics or World Cups or world championships, world juniors — those games are ones that you remember ... the ones you look forward to," said Marchand, acknowledging the buildup.

"You could go 100 years, and everyone will still know the importance and get up for it — just as much they would if there was a day in between games. That rivalry will go on forever. It'll always be the biggest rivalry in hockey."

If we discount the 2016 World Cup experiment, the layoff between the 2014 Games and Saturday has been so long, not one member of today's Team USA was on that Sochi squad. Doughty and captain Sidney Crosby are the only tethers for Canada.

#### **Does that gap lessen the hate, soften the rivalry?**

“It’s probably made it grow, in a way — because of all these guys that haven’t played yet. They haven’t played (the U.S.) since world juniors or wherever, the last time they could play for Team Canada,” Doughty said.

“The wait has just amplified it, made you more hungry. And I know that the Americans are feeling the same way about playing us. So, it’s going to be a hard-fought game. I suggest everyone watches that one.”

OK, Drew. But only because you asked.

**Team Canada’s projected lineup Saturday versus Team USA:**

Reinhart – McDavid – Marner

Crosby – MacKinnon – Stone

Hagel – Cirelli – Point

Marchand – Bennett – Jarvis

Toews – Makar

Morrissey – Parayko

Sanheim – Doughty

Binnington

Hill

## [Sportsnet.ca / Canada vs. USA at 4 Nations Face-Off has potential to be best hockey ever seen](#)

By Eric Engels – February 15, 2025

MONTREAL — “I think it’s going to be the biggest game that I’ve ever played in my career,” said Brady Tkachuk on Thursday.

When Canada and USA face off in Montreal on Saturday, it has the potential to be the best game we’ve ever watched.

If that seems hyperbolic, well ... fine.

But it’s been eight-and-a-half years since Canada and USA played on this stage, and even longer since we’ve seen the best of both nations play, and it’s fair to say that the evolution of the game since the 2016 World Cup has likely promised us an unprecedented hockey display between some of the best players to ever suit up for either country.

Back in 2016, Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon, Jack Eichel and Auston Matthews played for neither Canada nor USA. They are four of eight players participating in Saturday’s game to have suited up for the under-23 North American team, and they laid the foundation for what we’ll see on the very same ice surface on which they changed the game together.

“It’s the speed, the skill, the finesse, the way they think the game is unbelievable,” said Team USA’s Jaccob Slavin on Friday morning. “I think, from a pace standpoint, the game is so much faster now and guys are making those skill plays at such a higher level. I think that’s what you see showcased every night in these games especially...”

Jarmo Kekalainen called the 4 Nations Face-Off opener between Canada and Sweden Wednesday “one of the five best games I’ve ever seen.”

The assistant general manager for Team Finland played in Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux’s NHL in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He then began his career in management in his home country before building up a reputation as one of the game’s most prominent scouts. Kekalainen was GM of the Columbus Blue Jackets from 2013-2024. We’re talking about a hockey lifer who’s seen thousands of games through the most trained eyes one can have, and he agreed the first game of this tournament was likely just the appetizer to Saturday’s main course.

If you’re wondering what participating in it means to Slavin, he says he’d have skipped a much-needed vacation just for this one alone.

The 30-year-old defenceman plays in the most demanding system in the NHL with the Carolina Hurricanes. He’s counted on to win the biggest one-on-one matchups night after night. And he said that even if you scrapped the whole tournament and had nothing but practice for five days leading into Saturday’s game, he’d have “been on the first flight here.”

“These are games that you dream about playing,” he added. “You see the highlights of them growing up, but now you actually get to do it.”

Dylan Larkin thought this opportunity would arise many times since suiting up for that U23 NA squad in 2016. But with the NHL skipping the 2018 and '22 Winter Olympics, the wait has felt interminable.

“I think Team North America was a cool experience, and we were all young and in the same part of our lives and whatnot,” the 28-year-old said. “But you look at it, there’s a lot of guys on that team — most of

us that made that team probably — that would've been able to make Team USA and represent our country, and that means a lot, and it would've been a great experience. Luckily, we're back here and playing 4 Nations..."

Fortunately for hockey fans, this could be the best game we've ever seen, precipitating several of the best ones ever thanks to the agreement between the NHL and NHLPA to continue sending players to the Olympics and revive the World Cup. It makes Saturday's game the first page in a new and most exhilarating chapter in the rich history between Canada and USA.

The 1996 World Cup, won by USA, really kickstarted the modern rivalry. It was propelled forward by Canada ending a 50-year gold medal drought at the 2002 Olympics with its 5-2 win over the Americans in Salt Lake City.

McDavid said after Canada's practice on Friday that the 2010 Vancouver Games provided his greatest Canada-USA memory.

"That was a great game," he said. "So exciting, obviously, ending in a Canadian win in overtime."

Crosby delivered the golden goal that day. He was in uniform for the 1-0 win over the Americans in the last true best-on-best game between both nations — at the 2014 Olympics — and he's one of only three Canadians playing in Saturday's game who also dressed for the 4-2 Canada win over USA in September of 2016 at the World Cup.

Drew Doughty and Brad Marchand are the others, and they're approaching this next one as the opportunity of a lifetime.

"There's no bigger rivalry than Canada-U.S. in hockey," said Marchand. "They're the games that everybody dreams about playing growing up. They're memories that will last a lifetime. We're all really looking forward to it. Can't come quick enough."

For USA coach Mike Sullivan, it's coming fast and furious, and he can't wait to watch it unfold from what he said is "the best seat in the house."

"These are the generational talents that pave the way for the evolution of the game with some of the things they do out there and their creativity and the way they think the game and execute at such a high level," Sullivan said. "It's an amazing honour for us."

The Americans put on a show in a 6-1 rout of Finland on Thursday, with both Brady and Matthew Tkachuk treating it like the biggest game they'd ever participated in.

But this one feels bigger — and has the potential to be that much better.

"It's unique, and it's going to be incredible," said USA's Charlie McAvoy. "The atmosphere's going to be amazing, the rivalry speaks for itself. It is certainly where your mind goes when you think about dreaming about this as a kid and you think about playing in an event like this. That's the team that comes to mind; it's USA versus Canada (in Montreal) on a Saturday night. That's what you dream of and it's right in front of us, so I know we all can't wait for the opportunity."

### **Quick Hits**

- When asked about Florida Panthers superpest Sam Bennett's entry to Canada's lineup, Slavin said, "I have a good history with him."

He was reminded a lot of players in the NHL do and retorted not all of them have been left lying on the ice unconscious by Bennett.

"He's a physical guy who plays hard," Slavin said, "but it doesn't change what we do."

- The Americans out-hit Finland 32-16 in Thursday's game, and had the puck for most of it. So, obviously, they're up to that task.
- Sullivan on defending Canada's power-play unit of Crosby, McDavid, MacKinnon, Makar and Sam Reinhart: "Obviously, it'll be a big challenge. It's hard to key in on any one aspect of the group, they have threats in all positions. I think we're going to have to make sure that from our standpoint, we've got to just make sure that we're there for one another. We've tried to instill a certain foundation of our penalty kill, both in-zone and off the faceoffs, and the forecheck up the ice; some of the critical aspects of killing that's important for success. We just have to make sure that foundationally we're on the same page and we're locked in. We're going to have to win faceoffs. We're going to have to win puck battles. We're going to have to make clears. If we can make the entries difficult for them and potentially limit their zone time, that goes a long way to helping us have success."

Sweden wasn't able to do any of that, with Canada scoring 12 seconds after William Nylander took a high-sticking penalty in the first period.

What the Swedes did well was stay out of the box after taking that one penalty, which was naturally a huge factor in them getting to overtime.

- We mentioned three players who played for Canada last time there was a game of this magnitude against the U.S. The Americans have none here, and have the youngest roster in this tournament.

Doesn't necessarily mean anything. Just a point of fact.

- A quick scan of the resale market for Saturday's game has last-row tickets being sold for a whopping \$867.15 apiece.

What won't cost a thing is the fan fest the NHL and NHLPA are throwing right outside the arena Saturday, starting at 11 a.m. and running all the way up to 8 p.m., with chances to take photos with the 4 Nations Trophy and get autographs from NHL alumni.



## [Sportsnet.ca / Canada vs. USA preview: What to expect in fierce rivalry game](#)

By Justin Bourne – February 15, 2025

**At the risk of sounding overdramatic:** We deserved that, hockey fans.

If you hung in there through the games with no spectators, a flat cap jamming up rosters and zero high-end international play since 2016, again, we deserved those opening games. The 4 Nations Face-Off opened in the most fitting arena in Canada and started by giving us a Connor McDavid to Sidney Crosby to Nathan MacKinnon goal.

Chef's-kiss stuff. It was a long time coming, and a storybook start.

**Now, it's built to this:** Rivalry night, on the backs of a hotly contested Finland-Sweden game, in Montreal — Canada versus USA.

Here are my thoughts on Canada and the U.S. so far, and on what to expect on Saturday.

### CANADA

**1.** Crosby has multiple Hart Trophies, McDavid does too, and MacKinnon should have more than one (and may get there after this season). The tippy-top of the Canadians roster is something nobody can match (the Americans included), and it's their ultimate advantage.

Crosby's first touch is Lionel Messi-esque. Pucks come flying toward him, in the air, flapping like butterflies, and the second he gets a touch, they're immediately calmed and in a great spot to be moved.

McDavid and MacKinnon legitimately looked like they should be playing in a league above whatever this level is, and Drew Doughty called Game 1 "the fastest game I've ever played in."

These guys pull the game in their wake while everyone else just tries to keep their heads above water. It's wild to have two on the same team. The opposition is almost forced to have bad gaps to keep from getting beaten wide, so there should be room laterally for the more east-west players.

**2.** Canada's defence was thrown a serious curveball in Game 1, but I was really impressed with how they handled it. Yes, I think some of the struggles that came with the injury of Shea Theodore led to awkward pairings and players playing their off-sides (allowing Sweden back in the game), but raw ability took over. Colton Parayko defended brilliantly, Josh Morrissey was all over the ice and Devon Toews was rock-solid while getting robbed on a great shot.

There's suddenly some reason to be nervous with Theodore out and Cale Makar missing practice Friday with an illness, but Travis Sanheim will get a shot, and having three solid pairs simplifies things for Canada's back-end.

If Thomas Harley steps in, there would start to be real concern. Two guys playing in their first games in big spots would be a little nerve-wracking, particularly as Doughty seems to still be finding his pace after return from prolonged injury.

**3.** Jordan Binnington was simultaneously the reason the first game was close and the reason Sweden didn't steal it entirely. He wasn't fazed by a couple of questionable goals, and he locked it down in overtime.

Canada's options for Saturday night are to go back to the guy who got the win, who has felt the weight of the building and the most nervous moments, and pulled through, or throw Adin Hill his first start in a

tough spot. The U.S., Saturday night, after not having played a game yet ... to me, it would be too big of an ask.

He should be ready if Binnington is shaky early, but you gotta go back to No. 50.

## USA

**1. To quote a good buddy:** “The Tkachuks are two-thirds of the Hanson Brothers out there.” And that’s true, only I’m not sure how often the Hansons scored two-thirds of the Chiefs’ goals in a given game as the Tkachuks did against Finland.

They were the talk of Game 1, united on a line in the second period, where they had immediate success. Brady Tkachuk has called the 4 Nations Face-Off “the best hockey experience of his life,” and Matthew Tkachuk has said they’ve been waiting for a game like the upcoming one against Canada for nine years. “We’ll be ready,” he said.

They’ll be ready.

**2.** The Americans seem to have a head start on chemistry. Many of them have played together over the years through the development program, and there have already been several stories of their off-ice bonding. Auston Matthews made a Bill Guerin joke at a team dinner (after which Guerin called him and pretended to cut him from the team), they’ve had Miracle on Ice alumni at meals and they have Johnny Gaudreau’s jersey as a player of the game item. They’re united in their distaste for having their anthem booed, too.

There seems to be a bond that’s formed quickly, and in a short event like this, it’s certainly an advantage.

**3.** The rout against Finland allowed the Americans to loosen up and find themselves in Game 1. Connor Hellebuyck got the win despite a shaky goal against, Matt Boldy continued his rise, Matthews and Jack Hughes showed tremendous chemistry, and their D looked solid. When Tkachuk says they’ll be ready, I expect that to extend to their whole team.

## CANADA vs. USA

**1.** Expect the glass to rattle. In the Americans’ first game, Matthew Tkachuk said of his brother Brady’s eight hits that they “felt like 28.”

Well, Canada is bringing in Sam Bennett, and it’s putting him between Brad Marchand and Seth Jarvis (what a nightmare line that would be to play against in a long series). There has been some sneaky animosity in these games, from the Canadians not liking a shot at their net after a period ended versus Sweden, to the Americans shoving around to protect Hellebuyck. With the stakes being what they are, I expect the opening five-to-10 minutes of this game to be marked by finished checks.

But it’s a one-game battle here (possibly two, if you zoom out), and a big question for Canada will be how much it wants to get caught up in that part of the game. Matthew Tkachuk is 24th in NHL scoring this year and Brady is 60th. Three of the top-five scorers in the NHL are Canadian and Makar is the top-scoring D.

The Canadians don’t have many shrinking violets, but they can’t get too caught up in the physical stuff. The game will settle in at some point, and they’ll want that courage at the net front, not after the whistles.

**2.** The goaltenders are going to have a disproportionately large say in the outcome of this game, and there’s a fascinating battle shaping up.

Hellebuyck has a reputation as the guy who's one of the few best in the world, who struggled in big playoff games last year and people aren't sure of his ability to deliver a title just yet. Meanwhile, Binnington is inarguably not as good as Hellebuyck over a huge sample size, but he has the reputation as a gamer who lives for the big moments.

What will prevail? Will those reputations become further cemented, or will they be flipped on their heads?

**3.** What tends to happen with highly emotional games is that players are all amped up and not thinking quite as clearly, while the refs are on high alert, aware it's a big game. And, so, guys cross lines looking to gain every conceivable edge, the refs call penalties and special teams end up having an outsized impact on the game's outcome.

On the Canadians' first power play against the Swedes, they scored 15 seconds in, playing the next 59 minutes without a special-teams opportunity. The Americans finished their game with two power-play goals on four opportunities, a total that is an advantage to them heading into Saturday.

Special teams are a science and take communication and chemistry from the players on the ice. Both teams have had some time to work on things, but there will still be mistakes and opportunities.

Any number of things can influence a single game. Coaching, a flash of brilliance from an elite player, a random bounce, who knows. All I know is that this is a game the players have been looking forward to for almost a decade, and fans should be excited too. And if we're lucky, maybe it's just a preview of an even bigger showdown five days later.

## [Sportsnet.ca / U.S. Player Ratings: Tkachuk brothers steal the show](#)

By Emily Sadler – February 15, 2025

When you enter a tournament with very little time to practice alongside your new teammates, chemistry can be hard to come by.

It helps if you're brothers.

Matthew and Brady Tkachuk stole the show Thursday night — separately, at first, with older brother Matthew packing a punch on the top line while the younger Brady opened scoring on the third and brought his signature physical edge. But when USA head coach Mike Sullivan made a mid-game adjustment to bring the two together up top? Well, that changed this story completely.

Through the first 40 minutes of Thursday's matchup against Finland, the Finns won the puck battle, giving their foes in stars and stripes very little room to play. They were the first to light the lamp, too, surprising USA with an early marker in the first frame. But once the Americans finally started scoring, there was no questioning the outcome of this game.

Sparked by a pair of goals just 11 seconds apart early in the third period, USA defeated Finland 6-1 in what was a physical affair.

The Americans entered this tournament as favourites, the assembly of players the deepest U.S. roster the nation has ever put together. Considering how the evening unfolded against Finland, it's easy to see why. Here's a look at the star-studded U.S. squad, and how each player performed Thursday night.

### **Jack Eichel: 9/10**

Eichel started the game alongside one Tkachuk and finished it sandwiched between the two as the perfect setup man for the top-line brothers. His speedy zone entries and sharp set-up abilities were on full display all night — he set up both brothers in the third period — and that chemistry should continue against Canada on Saturday.

### **Kyle Connor: 6.5/10**

Connor's quiet night came as a bit of a surprise, considering he entered the tournament as the top-scoring American in the NHL and started Thursday's game suiting up on the team's top line alongside Eichel and Matthew Tkachuk. His demotion to the third line late in the second period reflects that slow start, but once there, Connor was quick to contribute with his new linemates — his helper on Matt Boldy's game-winning goal soon after being bumped reflects his versatility in this star-studded lineup.

### **Matthew Tkachuk: 10/10**

The heart and soul of the Stanley Cup champs down in Florida brought that same grit and goal-scoring to the top line of the American squad, leading the club with two goals and an assist — including one to help set up brother Brady's third-period marker — and was named the game's top player for his efforts. Watching him play alongside his younger brother was a joy.

### **Brady Tkachuk: 10/10**

From a gritty first goal to get the Americans on the board to a pretty backhander to help close things out in a statement game, Brady Tkachuk's night read like a storybook. After earning a promotion mid-game from the third line to the first, Brady brought the checking-line energy to the top trio, finishing the matchup with a team-leading eight hits to go with his pair of goals.

**Jake Guentzel: 8/10**

Thursday marked Guentzel's first game representing his nation at any level, and he made the most of the opportunity, hitting his stride — along with the rest of his squad — in the third period. Just 11 seconds after assisting on Matthew Tkachuk's power-play marker to open the third frame, Guentzel got a goal of his own with a five-hole shot to give the Americans a solid 4-1 lead.

**Auston Matthews: 8/10**

The chemistry and style of the Brothers Tkachuk made for the biggest story of the game, but Matthews' instant chemistry with linemate Jack Hughes looked pretty natural, too — not to mention, really fun. The boos that rained down early on from the Montreal crowd cooled down, but his game heated up — and while he wasn't prolific on the stat sheet, tallying just one assist, Matthews' team-leading ice time among USA forwards tells us just how happy head coach Mike Sullivan is with his captain's tournament-opening efforts.

**Jack Hughes: 8/10**

With three shots on net but none that lit the lamp, Hughes' strong play alongside his captain and Guentzel wasn't really reflected on the scoresheet, but considering his quick chemistry with his captain, Mat Hughes — can we call them that? — seems due for a breakthrough soon.

**J.T. Miller: 7/10**

The early theme for Team USA in this tournament? Physicality. Miller, known for being a vocal teammate and a physical presence, wasted no time sending that message and setting the tone with a net-front scuffle in Finland's zone in the first minute of the game. He may have also made the save of the matchup, blocking a shot from Teuvo Teravainen that would've seen the Finns regain their first-period lead.

**Matthew Boldy: 8/10**

After setting up Brady Tkachuk's goal to tie things up 1-1 in the first period, Boldy scored one of his own in the second when he smartly tipped a shot from Wild teammate Brock Faber that ultimately served as the game-winner. During a post-game interview, Matthew Tkachuk credited Boldy's marker with giving the team a much-needed jolt of energy in what had been a tight game through much of the first 40 minutes.

**Vincent Trocheck: 7/10**

Known for his solid faceoff percentage in league play, Trocheck once again provided a reliable presence on the dot. He delivered a few well-timed hits early and came up clutch with some blocked shots, too.

**Brock Nelson: 6/10**

Nelson pounced on a puck early in the first frame and caught Saros by surprise with a sharp shot that beat him — but not the crossbar — in what was an otherwise uneventful night for the depth forward, whose 9:42 of ice time ranked lowest on the team.

**Dylan Larkin: 7/10**

It's hard to stand out when you're playing on the fourth line of a star-studded club, but Larkin's role on this squad is well-defined, and he played it accordingly. Larkin, who played just 11:14 Thursday night, was held off the scoresheet but still made an impact with some solid PK play and a trio of hits in what was a physical game.

**Zach Werenski: 9/10**

With Quinn Hughes unable to play due to injury, all eyes were fixed on whether Werenski — who co-owns the league lead in scoring among defencemen alongside Hughes — could pick up the slack. The answer was a resounding yes — No. 8 was great Thursday night, contributing a team-high three assists while logging major minutes with a team-leading 21:45.

**Charlie McAvoy: 7/10**

Like Matthews, McAvoy didn't exactly get the warmest reception in Montreal. His game took a little while to heat up, too. Suiting up alongside Werenski, McAvoy didn't stand out and, in fact, led USA defenders in giveaways, with three.

**Jacob Slavin: 7/10**

Sullivan turned to Slavin early and often in this matchup, the Hurricanes defenceman logging the second-most minutes on the squad. He came up with two blocked shots in what was otherwise a quietly solid effort for the veteran rearguard.

**Adam Fox: 7/10**

He wasn't the best defender on the ice Thursday night, but let's consider this one a chemistry-builder. Having Fox stride alongside another smooth skater in Slavin is an enticing duo, and it showed.

**Noah Hanifin: 6/10**

The only USA defenceman with a minus rating and ice time below 15 minutes, Hanifin's night was fairly forgettable, save for a breakaway scoring chance that saw him sprung from the penalty box but stumped by Saros.

**Brock Faber: 8/10**

Faber's heads-up play from the blue line late in the second period, which saw him fire a puck on net for Wild teammate Matt Boldy to tip, was a beautiful sight for those watching in The State of Hockey. The youngest player on USA's squad fit right in on the club's loaded blue line, getting plenty of opportunity in the wake of Quinn Hughes' absence.

**Connor Hellebuyck: 8/10**

The NHL's top goaltender in just about every stat that matters, Hellebuyck didn't exactly steal the show on Thursday night — but he didn't have to. Aside from a knuckle-puck that fooled him stick-side early in the first frame, giving the Finns the game-opening score, Hellebuyck held strong with a 20-save performance.

## The Athletic / How Team USA beat Canada to clinch berth in 4 Nations Face-Off final: Takeaways

**By Fluto Shinzawa – February 16, 2025**

MONTREAL — Team USA, riding the surge of three first-period fights in the opening nine seconds, claimed a 3-1 win over Team Canada on Saturday at the Bell Centre. Matthew Tkachuk started the fisticuffs against Brandon Hagel. Brother Brady Tkachuk followed with a tilt against Sam Bennett. J.T. Miller completed the set by fighting Colton Parayko.

According to Brady Tkachuk, he and his brother were among the participants in a Saturday group chat that discussed the possibility of off-the-drop fisticuffs. Matthew Tkachuk started it by asking Hagel to fight.

“Had to send a message,” Matthew said. “We’re here in Montreal on a Saturday night. We want it to be our time. That’s the message sent right from the get-go.”

Brady felt like he had no choice but to follow.

“Matthew’s fight to start it off was just such an energy boost,” Brady said. “I think I was more excited, more nervous than my own. Then Millsy to cap it off, to (go) against a big guy like that, he did a great job. It was a pretty awesome experience.”

Jake Guentzel does not get involved in such confrontations. Nevertheless, he enjoyed it.

“That was just unbelievable,” said the skilled forward. “The start of the game, that was pretty electric, getting the fans into it. Hats off to those guys. It just gets you into the game. You’re already into the game, but just seeing those guys go out like that, that was pretty cool. Everyone just ramped up even more.”

Meanwhile, the Americans stifled the explosive Canada offense by limiting the Canadians to 26 shots. Connor Hellebuyck, playing his signature technically sound game, stopped 25 shots, including a Connor McDavid high-slot chance in the third to keep it 2-1.

“It’s pretty cool to see all the best players in the country chipping pucks in the third, blocking shots and doing the little things that count,” Matthew Tkachuk said. “I had a front-row seat for it. It was pretty cool to see the buy-in from everybody. You’re seeing some of the best players in the world doing it. I think it speaks volumes to what type of character we have on that team. Growing up, it’s kind of instilled in us.”

Team USA, with six points, has earned a spot in the 4 Nations Face-Off championship game on Thursday.

### **Matthew Tkachuk injured**

Tkachuk was limited in the third period. The winger stayed on the U.S. bench, but he did not take a single shift since 7:24 of the third. It was one of three shifts for the power forward in the third period.

Tkachuk did not disclose what he was dealing with in the third. It’s unknown whether he’ll be available for the Americans’ game against Sweden on Monday. Coach Mike Sullivan classified it as a lower-body injury.

“Felt good,” said Tkachuk. “Feels way better after a win. Should be good.”

### **Larkin emerges in second**

Dylan Larkin started the tournament as America's No. 4 right wing. He will not be back there anytime soon.

Larkin, promoted to third-line center against Canada, was electric in the second period. He nearly executed an inside-out move in front of Jordan Binnington, but rang his shot off the left post.

Larkin made up for his miss later in the second.

The Americans made a stout play in the defensive zone. Matt Boldy picked off a Sidney Crosby pass to initiate a two-on-one rush for Larkin and Miller. Meanwhile, Thomas Harley had gone off the ice for a change after getting the puck into the offensive zone.

With only Travis Sanheim back for Canada, Larkin pushed the pace and whistled a shot on net, never even looking at Miller as an option. Larkin's shot sizzled through Jordan Binnington, giving the Americans a 2-1 lead.

### **Limited offense for Canada**

The Canadians had 26 shots, but not enough of high quality, especially from the top six. Nathan MacKinnon and Mitch Marner had one shot each. Crosby had none.

"It was tough to generate offense both ways," said McDavid (three shots). "Two teams that have got a lot of respect for each other offensively, and it comes down to a shot. I think that's the way we expected it to go."

### **Quiet but steady play from Slavin**

Jacob Slavin does not have the dynamic offensive game of Zach Werenski. But Slavin, the steady left-shot defenseman, led the Americans with 17:28 of ice time through two periods. The stay-at-homer was on the ice for both of his team's goals.

Slavin is not the fastest skater either. But he is smart positionally and has a good stick.

### **McDavid vs. McAvoy**

Charlie McAvoy is one of the league's stouter defenders. But McAvoy was helpless against Connor McDavid's ludicrous speed. In the first period, after taking an outlet pass in the neutral zone from Drew Doughty, McDavid punched the turbos, blew past McAvoy and catapulted a backhand over Hellebuyck for the game's opening goal.

### **McAvoy seemed to take it personally.**

Later in the first, McAvoy dropped McDavid with a hip check, then shoved his head toward the ice. On the following shift, McAvoy thumped McDavid along the boards. McAvoy and partner Werenski were tasked with matching McDavid, Sam Reinhart and Marner.

"That also is a message-sending moment," Matthew Tkachuk said of McAvoy flattening McDavid. "Probably one of the plays of the game. They just scored a goal. The building was rocking. Charlie comes in there and he pops McDavid. Like, one of the hardest hits I've seen. I thought we did a great job of handling our emotions and hitting when possible. I thought Charlie was incredible tonight."

### **Binnington shaky early**

Jake Guentzel approached with pace off the rush. He took a tape-to-tape pass from Jack Eichel. But Guentzel was outside the left dot when he released a 22-foot shot. Most goalies stop such shots with ease. But Jordan Binnington let Guentzel's shot slip through his pads, tying the game at 1-1. It was a shot Binnington had to stop.



While it was Guentzel's goal, Eichel created the chance. The center stripped Devon Toews in the defensive zone and rapidly carried the puck through the neutral zone. Eichel has been the Americans' best transition center.

### **Makar out, Harley in**

Cale Makar did not play against the U.S. because he was sick. Harley, added to Canada's roster, replaced Makar on defense. Harley took Makar's usual spot next to Devon Toews.

Brad Marchand served as the No. 2 alternate captain in Makar's place. McDavid is the other alternate.

Marchand played with Sam Bennett and Seth Jarvis. Bennett replaced Travis Konecny.

### **Healthy scratches**

Chris Kreider, Jake Sanderson and Jeremy Swayman were the healthy scratches for the Americans. They were also out of uniform against Finland in the tournament opener.

Konecny and Sam Montembeault were the healthy scratches for Canada.

### **Sullivan knows Crosby best**

There is no coach who knows Crosby better than Mike Sullivan. So whatever the Team Canada captain does, such as set up his team's winning overtime goal in the tournament opener, is no surprise to Sullivan.

"He's a big-game player," said the Team USA coach. "I've witnessed it firsthand for a decade now. Sid tends to be at his best when the stakes are high. That's what I witnessed the other night. I anticipate he'll be at his best against us."

## The Athletic / Canada vs. USA 4 Nations Face-Off game begins with 3 fights in first 9 seconds

**By Arpon Basu – February 16, 2025**

MONTREAL — It didn't take long for the mayhem to start.

There were three fights in the first nine seconds of the game between Canada and the United States at the 4 Nations Face-Off on Saturday.

As the puck was dropped for the game's opening faceoff, Team USA's Matthew Tkachuk and Team Canada's Brandon Hagel dropped the gloves. They had a spirited fight, with each player landing big blows, before Hagel dragged Tkachuk to the ice, triggering a thunderous roar from the sellout Bell Centre crowd.

As Hagel got up off the ice, he took a victory lap and threw his hands in the air, raising the volume in the building even more.

Off the ensuing faceoff, Brady Tkachuk and Sam Bennett dropped the gloves again. One second had ticked off the clock since the first fight.

On the scraps, according to somebody at ice level, Matthew Tkachuk asked Brandon Hagel to fight. After the fight, Brady Tkachuk yelled to Sam Bennett, "We're going next." Bennett was on the bench, so he came onto the ice for the faceoff to accept the challenge. And JT Miller was...

And then, they played hockey.

For six seconds.

As an American scrum formed around the Canada net, Colton Parayko and J.T. Miller dropped the gloves, the third fight in the first nine seconds. Parayko is listed at 6-foot-6 and 228 pounds. Miller is listed at 6-foot-1 and 218 pounds. It showed.

Canada got a power play out of that last fight as Miller was tagged with an extra two minutes for cross-checking.

And then, they actually played hockey.

## The Athletic / Cale Makar out for Canada vs. USA, Thomas Harley to make 4 Nations Face-Off debut

**By Arpon Basu – February 16, 2025**

MONTREAL — Defenseman Cale Makar was a late scratch for Canada ahead of its much-anticipated showdown against the United States at the 4 Nations Face-Off on Saturday because of an illness.

Thomas Harley, who flew to Montreal on Friday night in case Makar couldn't go, was added to the Canada roster and dressed against the United States.

Canada lost defenseman Shea Theodore for the tournament when he was injured Wednesday after taking a clean hit from Sweden forward Adrian Kempe, leaving Canada with six healthy defensemen. Canada had already lost defenseman Alex Pietrangelo to injury before the tournament, naming Drew Doughty as his replacement.

Makar missed Canada's practice Friday because of an illness, but he was on the ice Saturday for the morning skate. He is considered day to day.

"I'm feeling a little bit better," Makar said Saturday morning. "We'll see how it goes this afternoon and stuff. Yeah, not great but better today, so we'll see how it progresses."

Cale Makar will not play tonight, but remains eligible for the tournament. Brad Marchand will serve as an alternate captain tonight.

Makar, an alternate captain for Canada, leads all NHL defensemen in scoring this season with 63 points in 57 games and was the quarterback on Canada's potent top power-play unit. In his absence, Brad Marchand will act as an alternate captain.

Harley very nearly wasn't in Montreal for the game. After Theodore's injury, the NHL initially ruled that for Canada to add a defenseman, it would have to lose another defenseman to injury, but it allowed Canada to contact Harley and have him travel to Boston as an emergency option. After further talks between the NHL and NHL Players' Association on Friday morning because Makar fell ill and missed practice, it was ruled that Harley could come to Montreal but could not take part in any Canada meetings or practices unless Makar was unable to play.

"I don't want to put these guys in a tough spot, so it was great we were able to bring Harley in, at least have that option if we need it," Makar said Saturday morning. "Again, feeling better today, and we'll see how the afternoon progresses, but obviously going to do everything I possibly can to play in this one."

Canada already had Travis Sanheim making his 4 Nations debut as a replacement for Theodore but wound up having two young defensemen entering the lineup against the United States.

## The Athletic / How Finland stunned Sweden in 4 Nations Face-Off overtime thriller: Takeaways

By Michael Russo and Pierre LeBrun – February 16, 2025

MONTREAL — Sweden vs. Finland never disappoints.

In a back-and-forth contest, at least in terms of lead changes the first two periods, the latest chapter between these two border rivals ended in a 4-3 win for Finland, with 2011 world champion Mikael Granlund scoring 1:49 into overtime when he fired a shot off a two-on-one past Linus Ullmark.

“It’s always great to beat Sweden,” Granlund said. “Those games are fun to play. There’s so many people in Finland, in Sweden to watch these games. It’s great to come (out) on top, and at the same time we are alive in this tournament. Everything is in our own hands.”

Recently traded from San Jose to Dallas, Granlund scored after Kevin Lankinen made two big saves in overtime, one on Mika Zibanejad and the other on Adrian Kempe after the Los Angeles Kings forward cut to the net behind Granlund.

Zibanejad, Rasmus Dahlin and Erik Karlsson scored for Sweden, while Anton Lundell, Mikko Rantanen and Aleksander Barkov scored regulation-time goals for Finland. In his home arena, Canadiens sniper Patrik Laine had two assists, and Rantanen made a tremendous spinning pass for the eventual “third assist” on Barkov’s tying goal.

The game marked the eighth meeting between Finland and Sweden at an NHL international tournament, all in the round-robin. Six of the eight contests have been decided by a margin of two or fewer goals.

The countries met in the Olympic gold medal game in 2006 in Torino with Sweden edging Finland by a goal. The two countries have also played for gold four times at the World Championship, each winning twice (Finland: 2011 and 1995; Sweden: 1998 and 1992).

This was the appetizer for what we’ve all been waiting for: a Canada-United States, Saturday night showdown at 8 p.m. ET.

The United States will clinch a berth in the 4 Nations Face-Off final Thursday night in Boston if it beats Canada in regulation.

Canada, Finland and Sweden each have two points. Finland had the head-to-head tiebreaker on Sweden courtesy of its win Saturday, while Canada has the head-to-head tiebreaker on Sweden courtesy of its overtime win Wednesday.

### **Lankinen takes No. 1 gig from Saros**

Team USA is unmatched with its goaltending depth and stability in this event. It’s Connor Hellebuyck’s net unless he gets injured and, if that happens, Jake Oettinger is not only next in line, but arguably the second-best goalie in the tournament.

Further proof of this? Seeing Juuse Saros on the bench for Finland in its rivalry matchup with Sweden.

Over the past few years, Saros has been regular in the Vezina Trophy conversation but has struggled this season — his .899 save percentage is the lowest in his nine-year NHL career. Now, what’s happening in front of him as far as the Nashville Predators’ overall team struggles is part of it, sure, but still. He could

be feeling the burden of that eight-year extension signed last summer, a contract paying him \$7.74 million a year that doesn't kick in until next season.

Speaking of contracts, Kevin Lankinen needs one as a pending UFA for the Vancouver Canucks. He's been a terrific story this season, signed late in the offseason amid health concerns surrounding Thatcher Demko. Finland giving Lankinen the start against Sweden marked a big moment for him.

"Kevin has played very well for us when we needed him to play well," Canucks GM Patrik Allvin said via text message Saturday. "Very happy to see him getting an opportunity to start today!"

The opening goal given up to Zibanejad wasn't a great one, but overall Lankinen was solid on Saturday. He made a couple of key saves in OT, had no chance on Dahlin's rebound goal and got beat by a world-class snipe that was vintage Karlsson.

Many Swedish media members before the 4 Nations tournament thought Linus Ullmark would be tabbed as the starter, but head coach Sam Hallam went with Filip Gustavsson instead. The Swedish coaches might have hesitated on starting Ullmark because he played only two games for Ottawa before the tournament after missing six weeks with injury. It's likely the Swedish coaching staff wanted Ullmark to benefit from a few extra days of practice before using him.

The reality is that Sweden had the goalie rankings in this fashion when rosters were announced on Dec. 4: 1) Jacob Markstrom, 2) Ullmark and 3) Gustavsson.

But when Markstrom was injured with the Devils, Gustavsson seized on the opportunity with Minnesota. In the 4 Nations Face-Off opener, he was sensational in an overtime loss to Team Canada. But that A-plus performance was downgraded to a C-minus Saturday, pulled after the first period, giving up two goals on four shots.

The second goal he gave up late in the first period wasn't a great one. Rantanen half-fanned on a shot that still found a way through with Gustavsson off his post.

Hallam said after the game that the decision to pull Gustavsson was due to illness.

But could it be Ullmark's net now the rest of the way? One would think he may start Monday night against Team USA in Boston, which would be a homecoming for the former Boston Bruins netminder.

### **Like a Panthers practice drill**

If this was a two-on-one drill in South Florida, let's just say, Gustav Forsling didn't play it right and coach Paul Maurice would have let him know.

After Zibanejad's early goal, the Finns tied the score 1-1 during an all-Florida Panthers two-on-one spurred by Dahlin's ill-advised stray up the boards in the offensive zone.

Eetu Luostarinen, the Panthers forward, teed up his Florida and Finnish teammate, Lundell — aka "Baby Barkov" — for a one-timer howitzer that sailed past a sliding Gustavsson.

### **Vintage Karlsson**

Pittsburgh Penguins Erik Karlsson and Team Sweden Erik Karlsson are evidently two different things. Like, night and day.

Some observers before the event even thought Sweden should dress Rasmus Andersson over Karlsson, given the excellent season the Calgary Flames defender is having — and, well, the excellent season Karlsson was not having in Pittsburgh. That was never a realistic discussion. Karlsson is a legacy player who was among the first six named last June by Sweden. There's just no way Hallam was doing that.

Karlsson had another impactful game Saturday, after looking terrific against Canada in the opener. His second-period goal, on an absolute gem of a wrist shot, was the Karlsson of old. His pace and vision throughout the game were impressive.

“He’s playing smart. He joins the rush but not all the time, when it’s a good opportunity, and he scored a big goal for us today,” Hallam said. “When he’s on the ice, it feels calm and composed and he has the swagger to make those big plays. He’s also a real important character in our room and a leader for us.”

International hockey has a rich history of players finding their very best when donning their national uniforms. Karlsson has shown time and again he’s that guy for Sweden.

### **What they’re saying**

**Rantanen:** “That felt like a playoff game.”

Erik Haula on Granlund: “He’s done so much for Finnish hockey and he rises to another level in these games.”

**Barkov:** “Honestly, I didn’t expect (playmaker) Grann to shoot when he had a three-on-one, but I’m so glad he did because he has an amazing shot.”

Karlsson on what needs to change for Sweden: “I mean, a lot. For the most part in the Canada game we played with a little bit higher intensity and played with straight lines, we were a little bit more careful with the puck in certain areas when we didn’t have full control of it. Today we did the exact opposite. And all the credit to them, they did a great job waiting for those opportunities and creating momentum from that and putting us on our heels. They capitalized on the chances they got; they got a power play goal, we did not. Again, they played a solid game and we did the opposite.”

**Sweden defenseman Victor Hedman:** “It’s frustrating, obviously. But for us, we hope to still have a chance. See how the (USA-Canada) game goes tonight. But the bottom line is we need three points against the U.S. (on Monday). Two points in two games is not what we imagined going into this. But that’s how it is right now. We just have to regroup.”

## The Athletic / Inside the world of NHL goalie equipment: Free custom gear, new sticks every game, 'kid in a candy store'

By Fluto Shinzawa – February 16, 2025

As a boy in Darien, Conn., Spencer Knight did not think it got cooler than seeing Henrik Lundqvist play goalie for the New York Rangers. It had nothing to do with Lundqvist's performance. Knight loved Lundqvist's equipment.

"Red and blue. TPS," Knight recalled with a smile of Lundqvist's pads. "He always had cool masks."

Knight is now an NHL goalie. The 23-year-old might have selected a different profession had it not been for Lundqvist's stuff.

"Yeah. Yeah. One hundred percent," said the Florida Panthers goalie. "That's the one thing that got me into it."

Like his counterparts, Knight has one job: Stop the puck. But NHL goalies have unique preferences for custom equipment that they have developed over time. The Bauer stick Knight uses, for example, is not the same as the CCM model that partner Sergei Bobrovsky prefers.

Goalies also have endorsement deals, and some bias is unavoidable. NHL players tend to put performance first when it comes to their equipment, though.

Goalies are also not above emphasizing aesthetics. It is the one position where NHLers can personalize their looks with paint jobs on their masks or graphics on their pads that promote self-expression.

"As corny as it sounds, look good, feel good, play good," the Seattle Kraken's Joey Daccord said. "If I look good and feel good, then I feel like I can play confident and just go out there and do my thing."

With assistance from GearGeek, an online database of NHL players' equipment choices, here is how some goalies like their equipment and why they prefer things just so:

### **Joey Daccord, Seattle Kraken**

#### **True Catalyst PX5 glove, Warrior Ritual V2 Pro+ stick**

The glove is Daccord's No. 1 priority. Last year, Daccord used the same glove for all 50 starts. He breaks in his glove for one or two months in practice before it's ready for game action. In comparison, he needs just one practice in a new blocker until he's comfortable wearing it in a game.

"My glove is very important for how the rest of my body feels. If my glove feels stiff, the rest of my body feels stiff. Swear to God. If I don't feel comfortable with my glove and my hand catching pucks, I feel like it carries on throughout the rest of my body and I feel really stiff. So it's really important for me that my glove is perfect. When my glove's right, I feel like the rest of my body can move freely."

Daccord is one of the NHL's best puckhandling goalies. He is not quick to switch his sticks.

"I don't go through a ton of sticks. I don't break a lot of sticks. Probably use 20 or 30 during the year."

Because of how active he is with his touches, Daccord emphasizes mobility to chase pucks down.

"As a goalie, there's nothing worse than being in there and feeling restricted by your gear. If you put on a new chest protector and it's really stiff, you can feel kind of restricted by your gear. So for me, it's finding whatever's going to help me perform my best and feel my best."

## **Spencer Knight, Florida Panthers**

### **Bauer Konekt 2 skates**

Knight likes to take each part of his gear and get it dialed in through trial and error. With his skates, Knight focused on the cut of his blades. He is currently at 7/8", a relatively shallow hollow. This cut lets him glide around the crease. But he is cautious about taking his tinkering too far.

"One thing I like to play around with is my blades. I've gotten incrementally duller. I'm at 7/8", which is pretty shallow. I've played around with that. I'll be really finicky with that. But then I get to a point where I've got to stop. I'm like, 'All right, I'm out. I've got to focus on what's important.'"

## **Joonas Korpisalo, Boston Bruins**

### **True Pro Custom One Piece skates**

Korpisalo used to wear a True boot with a Bauer cowling. When he switched several years ago from Vaughn to True pads, Korpisalo ditched the cowling. He's happier now.

"It's a complete feel of the skate. There's no rivets or something that might loosen up. That's the biggest change I've made: the skates. It's perfect. Especially the response you get from pushing, not catching your edge. Not having a separate cowling, it feels like I can transfer the power right away. I use the skates as long as I can. The previous True skates I had, I used for two years. I find it hard to change skates."

Korpisalo is not finicky with his gear. He knows others who are.

"I'm not a gear nerd in any way compared to some other goalies. The stuff some of the goalies know about the gear is mind-blowing. I'm like, 'Huh, I never even thought about that.'"

His father, Jari Korpisalo, was a skilled forward in Finland. He used his connections to acquire used gear for his son.

"Never new. Never. I got my first new gear when I signed my first pro contract in Finland. I think I was 18. First time I got my own mask, own gear. Before that, I always used someone else's. So maybe that's where it stems from. If I have gear, I'll be fine. It's really expensive. Growing up, you might grow an inch or two inches a year and grow up from the gear. It didn't matter what gear I had. I just managed to go through with it. I was lucky my dad knew a lot of people. I did have a mix and match: red glove, blue blocker. Of course, I was looking at other kids like, 'I wish I had that.' My dad was like, 'Nope. You're going to play with those. You're not getting new gear.' I respected that."

## **Jake Oettinger, Dallas Stars**

### **Bauer Supreme Shadow pads, Bauer Vapor HyperLite2 stick**

Oettinger keeps Bauer busy. He wants his pads hard and stiff.

"I like new gear. I like new stuff pretty much every month. I feel great and I have confidence when I have new gear. It makes me feel big. So I try to switch as much as I can. I like hard, stiff stuff. I just don't like soft gear."

Oettinger feels the same way about his stick. He's got the specifications dialed in. As long as it's fresh, he's happy.

"New stick every game. Same curve and flex I bought when I was 12 from Total Hockey. Same stick for a while and I don't see it changing anytime soon."



Oettinger's parents bought him new equipment when he outgrew his gear. Oettinger signed an eight-year, \$66 million contract on Oct. 17, 2024. He joked he can pay them back now, especially because he gets new stuff whenever he wants without paying a dime.

"It's insane. Kid in a candy store. We're very lucky. It's probably one of the nicest parts about playing at this level."

### **Calvin Pickard, Edmonton Oilers**

#### **Vaughn Ventus SLR3 Pro Carbon pads, Warrior Ritual V2 Pro+ stick**

Pickard has worked with Vaughn for multiple seasons. When the company releases new pads, Pickard takes them on with no questions asked.

"I just make sure I have a little bit of team colors on the pads. But the Vaughn guys will come up with a new pad and I'll be like, 'Sure, sounds good. I'll use it.' Not very particular with gear at all."

Pickard is hands-off with his stuff. Some goalies are not.

"I've played with those guys. I don't have a ton in common with them. I don't know how to have those conversations with them. As long as it's firm and not broken down, I can use it. Once they get broken down, the next set comes."

Pickard's Vaughn loyalty only goes so far when it comes to his stick.

"Their sticks were so bad that I just approached them. 'Guys, I can't use these things. They just chip.' So they're like, 'Yeah, they're no good anyways. Go use whatever you want.'"

### **Stuart Skinner, Edmonton Oilers**

#### **CCM Axis XF Pro pads**

Good pads are Skinner's priority, and not simply for stopping pucks. Seamless movement is critical.

"There's a lot of different things that go into making a pad. The way I'm able to feel out there. The seal on the ice. The way I'm able to get a seal on my posts. Being able to come out of the post into whatever position I'm in."

It's been a process for Skinner to find a solution he likes. Part of this is because of his evolution.

"You get older. You feel like maybe you don't need a strap. 'What's the point of the strap?' Or you think you need a little more strapping on the calf. Or I need more help around my ankles because I'm getting older. So there's a few things that change as time goes on. Obviously how the game changes, too. The game is played a lot in RVH. So I've changed some strapping in my boot. I don't have any strapping in there right now. The game's played (in RVH) so much. So I just felt I don't need extra weight there."

### **Jeremy Swayman, Boston Bruins**

#### **True L87 pads**

Some goalies like straps and buckles to secure their pads. Swayman recently did away with his.

"Now I'm all Velcro. It's a little different. It makes it a little lighter. It's been really awesome to see how True's adapted to new ways to make goalie pads more efficient, fit better, maneuver better on the ankle and knee. What feels good for me is when I'm in a butterfly, if I can touch the top of the pads together without crossing them over and there's no gap there, that's a pretty good fit. And where my knee's landing on the pad. Just so there's proper weight distribution throughout the whole pad so I'm not having squeakers go through my five-hole or even over the pad too."

Swayman wore used pads until he was 16 in his first year of junior. Using custom gear still makes him marvel.

“There’s no bad days. I don’t take it for granted, ever. That’s something that’s able to ground me. I remember pretty well how much I wanted new pads. Now you can go into the equipment room and grab a new goalie glove. It didn’t used to be like that. It’s a good feeling. It makes you work hard and earn it every day.”

## The Athletic / Which hockey hometown can create the best forward line? Ranking them 1 to 15

By Peter Baugh – February 16, 2025

In the lead-up to the 4 Nations Face-Off, one of the many intriguing questions was whether Canada would roll out a line of Nathan MacKinnon, Sidney Crosby and Brad Marchand. Those three players are not only from the same giant country. They're also from the same metropolitan area: Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The ability to form an elite line of forwards from the same hometown got me thinking. What other cities could pull off comparable groupings? Could any other metropolitan area come close to that one? Thus began the quest to form hometown lines.

Hometowns and birthplaces are different, which makes this exercise difficult. William Nylander was born in Calgary when his dad was on the Flames, but he represents Sweden internationally and considers Stockholm home. For this project, I tried as best as possible to put players with where they spent their formative childhood years before leaving for junior hockey, college or the pros.

A good distinction is where a player brings the Stanley Cup. Matthew Tkachuk, for example, was born in Arizona during his dad's playing days but grew up in the St. Louis area and brought the trophy there after the Panthers' Stanley Cup win in 2024.

Here are some ground rules for how I compiled these lines:

- When evaluating a city, I went with anyone whose hometown is within a 40-mile radius as the crow flies. That covers players who are from suburbs of big cities.
- If a player represents a country, his hometown must be from that country. Jack Hughes, for example, spent a lot of childhood in Toronto but represents Team USA internationally. Because of this, he's ineligible for the Toronto line.
- Some of these lines took creativity. Not everyone is an exact positional fit. I didn't punish lines in the rankings if they had three wings and no natural centers.
- Obviously this list only includes forwards. Perhaps we can do a later story looking at defensive pairings by hometowns.

Rankings are subjective, based on how I think the lines would do against each other.

Let's dig in.

### **1. Halifax**

#### **Nathan MacKinnon, Sidney Crosby, Brad Marchand**

Halifax is not one of the 10 biggest metropolitan areas in Canada but has produced some of the game's biggest stars. All three of these players have won Stanley Cups. Crosby and MacKinnon have both won the Hart Trophy, and Marchand has a pair of top-five finishes for that award. It's a stacked line, even if Crosby and Marchand are past their peaks.

### **2. Toronto**

#### **Mitch Marner, Connor McDavid, Robert Thomas**

In terms of production this year, the Toronto line has a case to be ahead of the Halifax one. McDavid is a one-of-one player any season, and Marner is having a career-best year. Robert Thomas is playing at close to a point-per-game pace, too, and had 86 points in 82 games in 2023-24. He gets the third spot on this line, but there are plenty of other options, including John Tavares, Tom Wilson, Anthony Cirelli and Sean Monahan. The geographic parameters of this exercise cost Team Toronto another strong forward in Mark Scheifele, who likely would have made the roster. He's from Kitchener, about 65 miles outside Toronto.

If this exercise was focused on making two complete lines, Toronto would be No. 1. But this is about getting three star players together, and Halifax gets the slight edge.

### **3. Moscow**

#### **Alex Ovechkin, Ivan Barbashev, Nikita Kucherov**

Kucherov was born in Maykop, well south of Moscow, but moved to Moscow at a young age. Two future Hall of Famers, including arguably the greatest goal scorer ever, plus a two-time Cup winner in Ivan Barbashev, make for a line that would put a lot of points on the board.

### **4. Stockholm**

#### **William Nylander, Mika Zibanejad, Jesper Bratt**

You could come close to forming a full lineup of NHL forwards solely with players from around the Stockholm area. Nylander and Bratt are locks for the group. Both are in their prime and are big point producers on playoff teams. Zibanejad has had a down year, but he still averaged a point per game over the previous three seasons. He gets the nod over Rickard Rakell, William Karlsson and William Eklund. Gabriel Landeskog would have been another strong candidate, but he has been out since Game 6 of the 2022 Stanley Cup Final with a knee injury.

### **5. Phoenix**

#### **Matthew Knies, Auston Matthews, Tage Thompson**

There's a real case for this line over the Stockholm one. Matthews is one of the game's premier players, and Thompson has shown he can score close to 50 goals in a season. There's a dropoff to Knies, who isn't the same level of star but could get to 30 goals this year. If Knies continues to develop, Phoenix could jump the Swedish capital before too long.

Thompson moved around growing up, living in 11 different places. But he was born in the Phoenix area and spends his summers there. For our purposes, we're counting it as his hometown.

### **6. St. Louis**

#### **Brady Tkachuk, Clayton Keller, Matthew Tkachuk**

Both the Tkachuk brothers were born in Scottsdale, Ariz., while their dad was playing for the Coyotes, but they were in St. Louis during their formative years. When Matthew won the Stanley Cup, he spent his day with the trophy in St. Louis. He and Brady are both top-level players with an edge to their game, and Keller has emerged as a point-per-game player for Utah.

If this was an actual line, it would likely struggle without a natural center. But as stated above, I'm giving grace when it comes to positions.

### **7. Tampere, Finland**

#### **Roope Hintz, Aleksander Barkov, Patrik Laine**

Hintz and Barkov are two of the best two-way forwards in the league. Pair them with Laine's goal-scoring ability and you have a line no one would want to go against.

Barkov is probably a more valuable player than teammate Matthew Tkachuk, the top forward on the St. Louis line, but Tampere's trio ranks slightly lower as a whole.

## **8. Boston**

### **Chris Kreider, Jack Eichel, Matthew Boldy**

All three of these players grew up near Boston and chose to play their college hockey in the city, with Kreider and Boldy going to Boston College and Eichel spending a year at Boston University. Eichel is the headliner. He's already shown he can be the top center on a Cup-winning club and is now in the midst of his best regular season. Boldy is a top-line player for Minnesota and certainly belongs in this trio. Kreider, meanwhile, is in the midst of a difficult season. Conor Garland, Charlie Coyle or Matthew Beniers could have a case to supplant him. But given Kreider's pedigree (a 52-goal season in 2021-22, 39 last season), he gets the nod.

## **9. Vancouver**

### **Sam Reinhart, Mathew Barzal, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins**

If I redo this exercise in five years, this line could be close to the top. Connor Bedard and Macklin Celebrini were tough omissions, and they both seem bound for stardom.

For now, this line is good but not among the elite. Reinhart is an exceptional two-way player who scored 57 goals last year. He was the only lock to make the Vancouver team. Nugent-Hopkins had a 104-point season — 35 more than any other point total he's had in a season — and was a key piece on a team that reached Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final in June. He's a good complementary player. Barzal can play center and is a brilliant skater who can produce points.

## **10. Detroit**

### **Kyle Connor, Dylan Larkin, Alex DeBrincat**

All three of these players can put the puck in the net, especially Connor, who is eighth in the league in goals since the start of 2017-18, his first full season. Dylan Larkin is a steady, responsible center who consistently scores over 30 goals, and his Red Wings teammate DeBrincat has scored as many as 41.

## **11. Turku, Finland**

### **Artturi Lehkonen, Mikko Rantanen, Kaapo Kakko**

As was the case with the St. Louis line, the Turku trio doesn't have a natural center, though both Rantanen and Kakko have played the position in spurts this season. The newly traded Rantanen's resume speaks for itself, and Lehkonen is one of the most clutch players in the game. He twice sent his team to the Stanley Cup Final with an overtime winner (Montreal Canadiens in 2021, Colorado Avalanche in 2022) and had the winning goal in Colorado's 2022 clincher. The third spot comes down to Kakko and Matias Maccelli from Utah. I'm going with Kakko, mostly because of his increased production since joining the Kraken in December.

## **12. Pittsburgh**

### **Logan Cooley, J.T. Miller, Vincent Trocheck**

Two-thirds of this line already plays together with the New York Rangers thanks to a blockbuster that sent Miller there on Jan. 31. The end to Miller's tenure with the Vancouver Canucks was tumultuous, but

he's elite when at his best. He had 103 points in 2023-24. Trocheck, his childhood friend and now teammate, can play with top-level talent, as he showed by forming a dominant line with Artemi Panarin and Alexis Lafrenière last season.

At 20, Cooley is by far the youngest of the three, but he's shown high upside since coming into the league. The Coyotes drafted him No. 3 in 2022, making him the highest-drafted player ever from the Pittsburgh area.

### **13. Chelyabinsk, Russia**

#### **Artemi Panarin, Evgenii Dadonov, Valeri Nichushkin**

Panarin, who is from 25 miles south of Chelyabinsk, headlines this trio. He's been a prolific offensive player since coming into the league in 2015-16 and has two top-three finishes in Hart Trophy voting. Nichushkin was a key member of the 2022 Avalanche Stanley Cup team and, when on the ice, is an elite two-way wing. Dadonov, who has played nearly 600 NHL games, rounds out the grouping.

This is another centerless line. Yakov Trenin is also from Chelyabinsk, and he can play center, but Dadonov edged him out.

### **14. Calgary**

#### **Taylor Hall, Brayden Point, Dylan Holloway**

Point was a central part of the Tampa Bay Lightning's two consecutive Stanley Cup championships and is an offensive force. Holloway, who signed an offer sheet with the St. Louis Blues over the summer, is an up-and-coming player. And Hall brings experience. He's been more of a middle-six player in recent years but has a Hart Trophy to his name.

If this were an exercise in making a five-man skater group, Calgary would be near the top. Josh Morrissey and Cale Makar would make for an elite defensive pair to go with this line.

### **15. Minneapolis-St. Paul**

#### **Jake Guentzel, Anders Lee, Brock Boeser**

Minnesota produces a lot of great players, but they're lower than expected on this list. All three of these forwards are good players but not consistent game-breakers, though all three have scored 40 goals at least once in their careers.

Honorable mentions

#### **London, Ontario**

##### **Nick Suzuki, Bo Horvat, Nazem Kadri**

Horvat was born in London and grew up just close enough to qualify (Rodney is 36 miles from London as the crow flies). Travis Konecny, also born in London, grew up just outside the required radius. He is welcome to file an appeal.

#### **Winnipeg**

##### **Mark Stone, Brett Howden, Seth Jarvis**

Stone and Howden won the Stanley Cup together in Vegas, and Jarvis is an up-and-coming player who made Team Canada for 4 Nations.

#### **Edmonton**

**Jake DeBrusk, Brandon Hagel, Dylan Guenther**

Hagel's emergence as a standout in Tampa Bay helps make this a potent line.

**Karlstadt, Sweden**

**Leo Carlsson, Joel Eriksson Ek, Fabian Zetterlund**

We'll give Sweden some more love in the honorable mention category, and this line could be on the rise. Carlsson and Zetterlund are both young.

**Montreal**

**Jonathan Huberdeau, Anthony Duclair, Alexis Lafrenière**

None of Canada's forwards for 4 Nations is from Quebec, and that's reflected in this exercise. Still, you can make a solid line of Montreal-area players.

## The Athletic / Inside U.S. hockey's rise in goal — the weekend of meetings that changed everything

By Jesse Granger – February 16, 2025

A decade ago, some of the brightest minds in American goaltending locked themselves in a hotel room in Ohio and didn't come out until they had rewritten the way goalies were being developed in the United States.

It happened inside a suite at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Columbus in May 2015. The group gathered around a table in the living room portion of the suite. On one side sat Mike MacMillan, national coach-in-chief at USA Hockey. Across from him were longtime goaltending coaches Steve Carroll, Billy Switaj and Kevin Reiter, and longtime scout, coach and TV analyst Dave Starman.

"Those two days are one of my favorite moments of my entire hockey life," Starman told The Athletic. "We needed goaltending to be narrowed. It was just too broad. There was a lot going on and we figured if we don't start to get this under one umbrella, so we have a set formula on how we want to develop goalies, we're not going to do it well."

In those 48 hours, the group rewrote the coaching education curriculum for goalies and developed what would eventually become the American Development Model (ADM) for goaltending. Their biggest focus was educating youth coaches around the country on how to design drills that better serve their goalies, even if they have no goaltending expertise of their own.

Fast forward 10 years, and the United States is producing elite goalies like they're coming off a factory conveyor belt. The United States entered the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament this week in Boston and Montreal with three stars to choose from in net, and plenty of other talented netminders who didn't make the cut.

Connor Hellebuyck, who stopped 20 of 21 shots in the tournament-opening win over Finland, leads the way. He's having a historically great season for Winnipeg, with 35.89 goals saved above expected (no other goalie has more than 27), on track to become the first goalie since Martin Brodeur in 2008 to win three Vezina Trophies.

At 26, Jake Oettinger has already cemented himself among the league's elite in Dallas. In an era in which most teams are turning to goalie tandems, Oettinger is proving to be a workhorse capable of carrying his team on a nightly basis. Jeremy Swayman burst onto the scene over the last two seasons for the Bruins, signing an eight-year, \$66 million contract in October.

Any of those three is good enough to start for several other national teams, as could a handful of other American goalies who won't be making the trip. Vancouver's Thatcher Demko was the runner-up to Hellebuyck in last year's Vezina voting. Joey Daccord is having an excellent season in Seattle, as are Joseph Woll and Anthony Stolarz in Toronto.

The last generation of American goaltenders — headlined by Jonathan Quick, Ryan Miller and Craig Anderson — took a step in the right direction, but the current generation is on a different level, and the next wave of American goalies could be even better.

Dustin Wolf, age 23, is living up to the hype in his rookie season in Calgary. The California native is having one of the better debut seasons we've seen from a goalie in the last decade. Spencer Knight (23), Drew Comness (22), Jacob Fowler (20) and Trey Augustine (19) are all elite goalie prospects at various stages of development.



How did we reach this point? It starts with coaching at the grassroots level, which improved greatly after that 2015 meeting in Columbus.

“The big thing was educating coaches,” Reiter explained. “You don’t have to be a goalie coach, but you need to be educated enough to give the goalies some type of feedback, and think about them and incorporate them when you’re coming up with your practice plan.”

Reiter and others observed typical practices and realized the vast majority of drills were not beneficial for the goalies. The netminders faced shot after shot with little to no rest or instruction. The rapid-fire nature of most drills actually builds poor habits for the goalie, who must abandon tracking rebounds to get ready for the next shooter in line. They also don’t force the goalie to make reads, so they will often cheat to get in position for the shot they know is eventually coming. None of that translates to real-game situations.

“We were focused on the 12-14-year-olds because that was the retention age that we lost good goalies, because they felt like they weren’t getting enough good coaching to justify the financial investment,” Starman said. “The way that we wanted coaches to teach the position, mentally, physically and emotionally, were the building blocks not only for the kids, but for the coaches who were coaching them.”

Because goaltending differs greatly from every other position in hockey, most coaches without experience in the position avoid teaching it. The group at USA Hockey came up with a plan to teach coaches around the country how to help their goalies and broke it into levels that eventually became the bronze, silver and gold coaching certification program.

It was two days of constant debate in that hotel room, with each coach playing his own role.

“For all the right reasons, Billy Switaj is a little bit of a contrarian,” Starman recalled. “He’s also very detailed. No matter what ideas we came up with, it would always circle back to Billy who would say, ‘Wait a minute, are we thinking about this?’”

Switaj goaltended at Boston College in the early 1980s, then went on to become the head coach for Kent State from 1989 to 1994, and is now the Mid-American District Coach-In-Chief for USA Hockey.

“Steve Carroll brought a lot of historical perspective,” Starman said of Carroll, who has more than 30 years of goalie coaching experience. “Every time we talked about changing something, Steve would go over the potential ramifications.”

“MacMillan and I are like the odd couple,” Starman said with a laugh. “We think alike, act alike, but the smallest thing can send us off on a tangent. I would say Mike and I probably wasted a good couple of hours just trying to prove the other person wrong.”

The group discussed how to teach bigger goalies versus smaller goalies because the styles obviously needed to be different. They settled on the fundamentals of goaltending: Stance, skating, positioning, save selection, rebound control and recovery — each connected to the biggest key, play-reading.

“We felt like, when we walked out of that room we had done something really significant,” Starman said. “Like we had laid the framework for what was coming next. We really felt like we put the skeleton in for people to build around as this thing evolved. We knew it wasn’t the end of the discussion, but that we had restarted the process that needed to be restarted.”

Immediately after, they organized two large coaching clinics, one in Minnesota and the other in Buffalo. Both were well attended and started the momentum that has carried through to today.

“It was a huge success,” Starman recalled. “It showed us two things. Number one, we can make this work. Number two, there are a lot of coaches out there that want to learn this information, because they might not have an ex-goalie in their program.”

Plenty of people who weren’t in that hotel room also helped build USA Hockey’s goaltending development into what it has become. Phil Osaer brought expertise and pushed the program forward as manager of goaltending for USA Hockey before joining the Tampa Bay Lightning, and eventually the Detroit Red Wings as the head of goaltending scouting and development.

Steve Thompson took over as manager of goaltending for USA Hockey in June 2019, and has emphasized youth development and magnified the spotlight on goalies within the organization. David Lassonde is in his fifth season as goaltending coach for the United States National Team Development Program (USNTDP) and has helped the program to several gold medals.

Finally, you won’t speak to anyone at USA Hockey without them raving about the work of Ron “Digger” DeGregorio, who has helped shape American hockey for more than 40 years, is currently the co-chair of the USA Hockey Board of Directors and is in the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame.

“Without Ron’s support, ability to fundraise and energy, none of this happens,” Starman said. “Ron, to me, is like the Wizard of Oz. The man behind the curtain. He has done so much for the growth of goaltending development in the United States.”

These development overhauls put American goalies on the right track from a younger age. The USNTDP has vaulted the elite goalies to another level. The program started in 1996 and has produced more than 400 NHL draft picks and nearly 100 first-round picks. It has consistently produced top players throughout its history, but with its purchase and renovation of the 9,800-square-foot workout facility in Plymouth, Mich., in 2015, the program reached new heights.

Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel, Matthew Tkachuk, Jack, Quinn and Luke Hughes and many others have come through the USNTDP. The program has also produced plenty of goalies, including Oettinger who played there from 2014-16. He is representing the U.S. at the 4 Nations Face-Off this week and credits the USNTDP for his development.

“If I wouldn’t have made that team I don’t know where I’d be today,” Oettinger said of the program. “I feel like it just propelled me so much, and I needed that badly. I was so raw before I made that team. That opened my eyes to everything about goaltending. I had goalie coaches and stuff growing up, but just the training I got when I was there — on ice and off ice — learning about nutrition and just growing up, was huge.”

Oettinger was coached by Reiter at the USNTDP, who scouted and recruited him from Lakeville North High School in Minnesota.

“I remember watching him in the Minnesota state championship game as a freshman, and just how cool, calm and composed he was,” Reiter said. “He’s on the bench grabbing some water during the TV timeouts. You watch the kid on the other end who was a senior, but he’s down in his butterfly moving all around, you could tell he was nervous. Jake was so calm.”

Oettinger and Reiter worked together nearly every day for two years.

“He had such a big impact on my career; I owe him so much,” Oettinger said. “Prior to that, I was just playing hockey. I had no rhyme or reason to what I was doing, or why. As much as goaltending is about instincts, you need a game plan and I had none. That was the first time I really worked on, ‘When the puck is here, I need to be here,’ or watched video. I felt like I was exposed to a whole new side of goaltending, and just jumped in head first.”

Oettinger transformed from a raw goalie relying on reactions and athleticism to one of the most technically proficient netminders in the world. His positioning and angles are second to none, making tough saves look easy on a nightly basis in the NHL.

He believes the environment at the USNTDP, and the subsequent years playing college hockey, could be one of the main reasons the country is producing elite goalies. Compared to the typical development path of a Canadian goalie, who plays major junior hockey in the CHL, Oettinger can see how the American model might allow for more growth.

“The CHL is hard on goalies, I think,” Oettinger said. “It’s high-scoring, and I just think the way the U.S. does it with the super-focused development for two years, and then you get to go to college and have all the time in the world to work on your game, is just a better way about it, at least in my opinion.”

Jake Oettinger gives credit to his time with the USNTDP. (Courtesy of USA Hockey)

While the USNTDP obviously wants to win games, the focus is far more on the development side compared to major junior hockey, where coaches’ jobs are on the line if they don’t produce results.

“I think it’s kind of nice to not have the pressure of being in the CHL,” Oettinger said. “You’re 16 years old, it’s not going well and next thing you know you’re not playing at all. At USNTDP, you feel like you can learn from your mistakes in games, then have all this time to work on my game for a year, get my feet underneath me, and go from there. That year was all about getting better, getting stronger, maturing and growing up.”

The extended runway that Americans often get means fewer talented goalies will be lost in the shuffle. The best goalie at age 14 doesn’t always end up being the best goalie at 18, and there are plenty of examples of late bloomers who ended up being elite goalies.

Look no further than Hellebuyck, who never went through the national program. He spent a season after high school proving himself in the North American Hockey League, then went on to the University of Massachusetts Lowell, where he was a fifth-round pick by Winnipeg in 2012. If he were to have grown up on a more rushed, win-now development path, things may have gone differently.

Hellebuyck, Oettinger and Swayman give the United States a wealth of options in net for the first best-on-best international hockey tournament in years. Looking at the career trajectories of the younger goalies, the options may look even better for the 2026 Olympics.

It’s clear, American goaltending has never been in a better place.

On a recent road trip to Toronto, Oettinger ate dinner with his former USNTDP goalie partner, Woll. The two reminisced and marveled at how far they’ve all come.

“We were just talking about how crazy it is that me, him and Swayman were the three goalies for our World Juniors team (in 2018), and now we’re all starters in the NHL,” Oettinger said. “It’s just crazy, and it’s awesome.”

## ESPN / Grades, top players from the USA's thrilling win over Canada

By Ryan S. Clark, Greg Wyshynski – February 16, 2025

A 4 Nations Face-Off game that began with three fights in nine seconds produced some of the best hockey on display in recent memory. The result: a 3-1 win for the United States over Canada, much to the dismay of a majority of the fans at Montreal's Bell Centre on Saturday night.

The victory gives Team USA six points and clinches a spot in the championship game this Thursday. Each of the other teams has two points, so Monday's matchups will determine whom the Americans will face for the title:

Here are grades for the U.S. and Canada, our biggest takeaways, key players to watch in the next game and lingering questions.

### **Grading the teams**

#### **United States: A**

Team USA's opening win over Finland on Thursday was the kind of emphatic, confidence-building victory the Americans needed before facing their archrivals. But it also was important for proof of concept about this roster. It established two scoring lines, anchored by Auston Matthews and Jack Eichel. It showed that star players on their NHL teams could adapt to becoming role players on the national team -- players such as Dylan Larkin, who scored a critical goal against Canada. It was a win that showed the Americans as poised and in control of their emotions.

Everything they exhibited in that matchup with Finland informed this effort against Canada on Saturday, underscored by a strong performance from Connor Hellebuyck in goal. It was a victory in the most hostile of environments for the Americans, a total team effort in a cyclone of emotions.

The Canadians will note the absence of Cale Makar due to illness and that the game's importance was diminished following Sweden's overtime loss to Finland. The Americans -- who of course are missing Quinn Hughes for the entirety of the tournament due to injury -- certainly will take that under advisement as they travel back home celebrating an epic win, clinching a spot in Thursday's championship game in Boston and ending Canada's 17-game "best-on-best" tournament winning streak, per ESPN Research. -- Greg Wyshynski

#### **Canada: B-**

Maybe placing such a high emphasis on a single play could be considered unfair when it comes to Canada's overall performance. But in a game between the two most talented teams in the tournament, there was going to be little separation.

The Americans found that separation in the second period, with Matt Boldy breaking up a Sidney Crosby cross-ice pass that was further compounded by a line change. That saw an odd-skater rush in the other direction, with Larkin firing a shot for what proved to be the winning goal in just the second period.

Mistakes often have the potential to prove costly, with the notion that miscues are further amplified by facing the reigning Vezina Trophy winner in Hellebuyck, who could win the award again this season. Even with the copious high-danger scoring chances Canada created later in the game, it wasn't enough to overcome the gaffe that led to the winning goal. -- Ryan S. Clark

### **What we learned**

### **Hellebuyck answers the critics**

Hellebuyck is considered the best goaltender in the world, having won the Vezina Trophy last season and the favorite to claim it again for the Winnipeg Jets this season. But the 31-year-old American has his detractors, who point to his lack of success when it matters most. In the Stanley Cup playoffs, he has a 33-49 career record and back-to-back first-round exits with a save percentage under .890.

While some felt the goal he surrendered against Finland was specious, he was solid for the rest of the contest. Against Canada, he gave a goal to Connor McDavid on the rush -- what NHL goalie hasn't? -- but was a formidable last line of defense the remainder of the way with 20 saves, coming up some big stops in the third period.

Hellebuyck was one of the players in this tournament who needed a strong showing -- for his confidence and to cement himself as the starter for the 2026 Winter Olympics ahead of a very crowded field. So far, he is making a statement. -- Wyshynski

### **Canada found countermeasures but still missed Makar**

Even with Dallas Stars defenseman Thomas Harley on standby, there were questions that Canada needed to answer when it came to how it would effectively replace one of the game's best defensemen. Makar finished with a little more than 28 minutes of ice time in Canada's overtime win against Sweden. It was the most of any skater for either team.

Makar's absence went beyond his ice time. It meant having to find someone who could operate on the first-team power-play and penalty-killing units. Canada turned to Josh Morrissey to operate in Makar's place on the power play, only to finish 0-for-2. As for Harley, he would finish with two shots in 18:47 of ice time. It's not overstating it to say Canada needs Makar back for Monday's game against Finland. -- Clark

### **Historic, chaotic start**

Maybe it was the emotions of the rivalry manifesting in the only way they could have. Maybe it was the Florida Panthers' Matthew Tkachuk seeing Brandon Hagel, an NHL rival with the Tampa Bay Lightning, in the starting lineup and finding himself unable to do anything but drop the gloves -- which was brother Brady Tkachuk's theory. Maybe it was the Tkachuk brothers honoring their dad, Keith, who held a share of the record for earliest fight in an NHL international game at 20 seconds during the 1996 World Cup of Hockey.

That's a record that fights by the Tkachuks and J.T. Miller against Hagel, Sam Bennett and Colton Parayko shattered. Whatever motivated three fights in the first nine seconds of Saturday night's showdown, it turned a rivalry hockey game in a round-robin tournament into a cultural moment on Saturday night. People who don't talk about hockey were talking about hockey, which is what the NHL wanted out of this tournament -- even if the catalyst for that spike in interest was something no one could have predicted.

The best rivalry in hockey, United States vs. Canada, just got better, with a return game potentially on tap next week. -- Wyshynski

### **Where were the individual displays for Canada when it needed goals?**

Looking ahead to this game, there was a hearty debate over which side was more talented. The way McDavid found space and burst past Charlie McAvoy for the game's first goal is arguably the strongest example that those on the Canadian side were right.

But outside of that lone moment? Many of Canada's stars struggled to find the necessary openings that would allow them to utilize their talent. Perhaps the most evident example came in the third period, when reigning Hart Trophy winner Nathan MacKinnon used his speed on a zone entry only to rethink his approach once Jacob Slavin arrived to take away what appeared to be a path toward the net.

Much of the frustration had to do with the Americans relying on a tight structure, which made finding those opportunities difficult until later in the third period. It amounted to Canada ending the night with 12 high-danger chances, according to Natural Stat Trick. That's more than the 10 high-danger chances it mustered against Sweden -- but with fewer goals to show for it. -- Clark

### **Players to watch**

#### **Jake Guentzel**

##### **F, United States**

What a tournament for the Lightning winger. He had a goal and an assist against Finland followed by two goals -- including an empty-netter -- against Canada.

Guentzel has always had the reputation of rising to the occasion as a Stanley Cup playoff performer with the Pittsburgh Penguins and Carolina Hurricanes. He is the leader for tournament MVP. -- Wyshynski

#### **Sam Reinhart**

##### **F, Canada**

Part of what made Canada one of the initial favorites to win was the squad's scoring depth. That includes Reinhart. Since the 2022-23 season, only five players have scored more NHL goals than Reinhart, who is on pace to finish with more than 40 for a second straight campaign.

But against the U.S., he finished with zero goals on no shots, in the wake of a performance against Sweden in which he scored zero goals on three shots. -- Clark

### **Big questions for the next game**

#### **How do they approach a (potentially) meaningless game?**

The Americans are in the championship game next Thursday. That they know. Who their opponents are is a mystery.

Canada's game against Finland on Monday afternoon will determine if they've punched their ticket for a rematch, or if the U.S. game against Sweden carries any import. Do the Americans play another goalie in the game to give Hellebuyck a rest? Does Matthew Tkachuk heal up whatever was ailing him in the Canada game, to give Chris Kreider his 4 Nations debut?

All in all, these are good problems to have for the tournament leading Team USA. -- Wyshynski

#### **Can the space that eluded Canada against the U.S. be found against Finland?**

Much of what allowed the United States to have success against Canada was its ability to take away time and space, while also blocking shots and using a physical style -- finishing with 30 hits. Could Finland look to employ a similar strategy Monday when it faces Canada for a championship game berth on the line?

Finland overcame giving up six goals in its first game to the U.S. by making it difficult for Sweden to find chances of any kind by taking away space. It's one of the major reasons why Sweden finished with only two-high danger chances. If Finland employs a similar system Monday, what adjustments does Canada have to make to force a rematch with the U.S. -- and avoid an earlier-than-expected exit? -- Clark

## ESPN / Grades, top players from Finland's overtime win over Sweden

By Ryan S. Clark, Greg Wyshynski – February 16, 2025

After a 6-1 loss to the United States on Thursday, Finland roared back Saturday against rival Sweden. A tightly contested game went back and forth before heading to overtime, where the Finns pulled out the 4-3 victory off the stick of Mikael Granlund.

Following the overtime win, the Finns move into third place in the round robin with two points, holding the tiebreaker over Sweden, which also has two points:

Here are grades for both teams, our biggest takeaways, key players to watch for the next game as well as lingering questions.

### **Grading the teams**

#### **Finland: B+**

This was the Finland that was expected to show up in its opening game against the United States but struggled to find consistency. It's not that Finland didn't have its moments of cohesion in its first game. But what made Finland's performance on Saturday afternoon different was it applied pressure at all times.

The U.S. gashed Finland for high-danger scoring chances at a rate of 2-to-1. Come Saturday, Finland limited Sweden to just two high-danger scoring chances and didn't give up any in the third period and in overtime. Finland also received offensive contributions from its stars that were elusive against the U.S.

Now that it has a win in hand, Finland's prospects for the 4 Nations look much different than they did Thursday, after having what was one of the men's national team's worst performances in recent memory. -- Ryan S. Clark

#### **Sweden: C-**

Giving up four goals to this Finland team and its depth challenges should be disqualifying, even if one of those goals came in the 3-on-3 overtime. The Swedes fell behind thanks to a leaky goaltending performance from Filip Gustavsson. Twice, they gave up goals in the final three minutes of a period. They couldn't convert on the power play and gave up a power-play goal to the Finns.

So many of their offensive standouts are slumbering in this tournament: Elias Pettersson, Filip Forsberg and Elias Lindholm are all scoreless in the tournament. Adrian Kempe and Jesper Bratt went scoreless against Finland.

The math isn't mathing all that great anymore for the Swedes. They entered the game with a loser point from the Canada loss in overtime, facing a Finland team that was skated out of the rink by the Americans. With a three-point regulation win, the Swedes would have been in prime position to challenge for a spot in the championship match. Instead, they earn their second-straight charity point -- and a much harder road to the final that goes through the U.S. in Boston on Monday. -- Greg Wyshynski

### **What we learned**

#### **The Finnish adjustments worked**

Changes were likely after Finland lost by five goals against the Americans. Finland coach Antti Pennanen and his staff opted to go with Kevin Lankinen in goal to replace Juuse Saros, who allowed six goals against the U.S. They decided to bring in Kaapo Kakko after he was a healthy scratch, while shuffling a

top-nine forward corps that saw Mikael Granlund move to the second line and Patrik Laine move to the third.

Lankinen finished with 21 saves, with a number of them playing a role in keeping the game tight -- perhaps none more than a right pad save at the start of OT. Kakko was initially awarded the goal that tied the game at 3-3, although it would be later given to Aleksander Barkov. Even with that change, Kakko was still at the net front -- something Finland struggled to do with regularity against the U.S.

Moving Laine to the third line saw him start the sequence that led to Anton Lundell scoring the game's first goal. After zero points in the first game, Laine also had an assist on Finland's power-play goal. As for Granlund? He responded by scoring the winning goal in OT. -- Clark

### **Sweden swaps in Ullmark**

Sweden ran it back with Filip Gustavsson in net against the Finns, after he stopped 24 of 28 shots in Sweden's 4-3 overtime loss to Canada -- including seven in the extra session. So it could be argued he earned the chance to go in the second game. He did not earn the right to continue beyond the first period of that game, however, giving up two goals on four shots that included a Mikko Rantanen flub on the power play that Gus misplayed.

Enter Linus Ullmark, the former Vezina Trophy winner who had just come back from an 18-game absence with a back injury. He made an immediate impact in the second period with a pair of saves that kept the deficit at one goal. He couldn't exactly be faulted for Barkov's goal, as his crease was more crowded than an IKEA on a Saturday afternoon.

He certainly played well enough to make coach Sam Hallam regret not giving him the crease for Game 2, and almost certainly has earned it for Monday's game against the Americans. -- Wyshynski

### **Three the not-so-hard way for Finland**

Finding ways to keep its opponents within reach is one of the hallmarks of Finland's strategy. It's something the Finns did against the U.S. when they trailed by a goal entering the third period only to allow three goals on the first four shots in what was a 6-1 loss. What Finland accomplished in the third period against Sweden was noteworthy for more reasons than just how its defensive structure held firm.

Finland was able to survive an early third-period penalty against Sweden, something it failed to do against the U.S. But even that early penalty ended with captain Aleksander Barkov getting a breakaway. Barkov's shot went wide, but it was the first of what were a few point-blank chances Finland had in the third, another item it struggled to find in its opening game.

The ability to find those scoring chances while also limiting Sweden to zero high-danger scoring chances in 5-on-5 play allowed Finland to go from a deflating opening game to one that it won in overtime two days later. -- Clark

### **Swedish defensive depth makes difference**

The Swedes had one clear advantage in their lineup entering the 4 Nations Face-Off: a deep, mobile core of defensemen who could contribute plenty of offense. One of their three goals against Canada came from a blueliner in Minnesota's Jonas Brodin. But that dynamic D was on full display in the overtime loss to Finland.

Rasmus Dahlin went hard to the net to convert a Joel Eriksson Ek pass for the game-tying goal in the second period. Just over five minutes later, Erik Karlsson blazed through the neutral zone and scored off a William Nylander feed to give the Swedes the lead -- and, in the process, perhaps reminded other NHL



teams that if they need a scoring D-man and have an extra \$10 million of cap space annually for the next two seasons, give the Pittsburgh Penguins a call before the March 7 trade deadline. -- Wyshynski

### **Players to watch**

#### **Esa Lindell, D, Finland**

Let's go back to the first game of the tournament. Actually, let's go back to before the first game. Finland entered the 4 Nations Face-Off facing questions about how it could manage without three of its best defensemen -- Miro Heiskanen, Rasmus Ristolainen and Jani Hakanpaa -- who were missing the tournament because of injuries. Those questions came up again after Finland's loss to the U.S. on Thursday.

There's a chance that will persist through Monday's game against Canada, but what Lindell did against Sweden silenced that narrative for at least one game. The Dallas Stars defenseman finished with 28:20 in ice time, which was the most of any skater on either team. He led Finland with four blocked shots and was the anchor of a unit that now heads into Monday facing a major test. -- Clark

#### **Elias Pettersson, C, Sweden**

There was already a magnifying glass on Pettersson before the tournament after the Vancouver Canucks traded J.T. Miller to the New York Rangers, ostensibly choosing Pettersson in resolving the ongoing feud between the teammates. His offensive underachievement this season (34 points in 49 games) was assumed to be a product of that internal strife. Fans wanted to see immediate results. Pettersson had one assist in the four games since the trade.

It was hoped that maybe 4 Nations could flip the switch for him, putting his NHL worries behind him. He had no points and one shot on goal against Canada. He had no points and one shot on goal against Finland. His coach removed the most productive player from Pettersson's line -- Adrian Kempe -- and moved him with Mika Zibanejad and William Nylander late in the game.

Pettersson has more game to be his best in this best-on-best tournament. We haven't seen it yet. -- Wyshynski

### **Big questions for the next game**

#### **Can Finland carry this over into its Monday date with Canada?**

A loss, even if it had been in overtime, would have led to a discussion about what Finland must do between now and the 2026 Olympics if it wants to medal. That conversation will eventually happen, but winning in overtime against Sweden now has Finland waiting to see the outcome of the Canada-U.S. game with the belief that the championship game feels more in play than it did Thursday.

Facing the U.S. in its first game provided Finland with a blueprint for what it needed to do against Sweden to avoid a consecutive loss. The way it played against Sweden gave Finland more insight into how its physical, two-way identity can win games and give the Finns the continuity they lacked against the Americans. Now it's a matter of determining how Finland can translate what it did against Sweden into a similar result against Canada for a berth in the title game. -- Clark

#### **How will Sweden scramble its lines?**

Coach Sam Hallam made one aggressive lineup change during the loss to Finland, moving Adrian Kempe from Elias Pettersson's line to Mika Zibanejad's wing, dropping Rickard Rakell off the top line. Does he run that back against the U.S.? Does he scramble his bottom six?

Will there be changes to a power play that's yet convert in this tournament (0-3), such as giving Jesper Bratt more ice time or Kempe any ice time, having not spent a second on the man advantage in two games despite 25 goals in the NHL regular season? Is it Leo Carlsson time?

Something's gotta change for Sweden and change fast, with the Americans looming on their home ice on Monday. --Wyshnski

## [Sportsnet.ca / 'Not backing down': Fight-filled Canada-USA epic worth the wait](#)

By Luke Fox – February 16, 2025

MONTREAL — Mike Tyson once mused that everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.

Well, Team USA's plan was to punch 'em in the face.

Embracing the villain role in Canada, Matthew Tkachuk told younger brother Brady he wanted a piece of Brandon Hagel as soon as he saw his cross-state, cross-country rival's name on the lineup card.

Then he asked Hagel, who obliged in a snap. A lit fuse right from the drop of the puck.

"I wasn't saying no," Hagel said of the fight. "Listen, I don't think he was expecting what he got from me.

"I'm not backing down. I mean, a little bit of the talk was, these guys are going to take over the Canadian way. But I'm not gonna let it happen."

Human nailgun Sam Bennett hopped the boards for the following draw and shed gloves with Brady.

The next shift, Colton Parayko and J.T. Miller threw down.

Yes, the long-awaited Canada–U.S. showdown began with two fights in three seconds, and three scraps in first nine seconds.

"The message we wanted to send is: It's our time. We're in a hostile environment, and we wanted to show that we're not backing down," Matthew Tkachuk said, following Saturday's 3-1 win for the Americans that secured their birth in the 4 Nations Face-Off final.

"It's just a group of guys that are fired up to play their biggest rivals in this type of environment, so we had an absolute blast from the start."

Truth be told, we all did.

This night met the hype.

It was nasty and political, loud and mean, nerve-wracking and exhilarating.

"An adrenaline rush," Brady Tkachuk said.

High-end skill matched with hard-nosed defence. All-world goals and bone-crushing hits, 31 of them delivered in a tone-setting, hair-on-fire first period.

Charlie McAvoy dumped Connor McDavid on his keister twice with vigour. McDavid streaked in for one of the prettiest backhand roof jobs Connor Hellebuyck will ever surrender. And Miller swung an uppercut so hard at Parayko, he punched his own helmet off.

Even though Canada lost — thus thrusting a final berth in doubt — coach Jon Cooper believes the first minute of Saturday's game exceeded the electricity of the first minute of Wednesday's win over Sweden, when Canada's power-] play clicked in a flash.

"You know why it topped it? Because it wasn't planned. That wasn't two coaches throwing guys over saying, 'This is happening.' None of that. That was as organic as it gets," Cooper said.

"It's probably 10 years of no international hockey exhaled a minute and a half."

Added U.S. coach Mike Sullivan: "I just think it's very indicative of what this means to the players. There's two teams out there that are very competitive, that have a ton of pride for their respective

teams and countries. For me, when you have an investment in trying to win like the way that it occurred, I think (the fights) an indication of it. What an incredible hockey game.”

The ridiculous absence of country-versus-country competition for this era of NHLer (a shame both the league and players must own) helped shake the Coke bottle.

So, too, did the dual response to the pre-fight anthems, which, fittingly were sung after Georges St-Pierre introduced the home team and riled the masses.

“The Star-Spangled Banner” was booed lustily tip to tail by Canadians fed up with President Donald Trump’s threats to annex.

“O Canada” was blared at full throat by the 21,105 lucky enough to catch some fights before a hockey game broke out.

Did the anthem booing trigger the Tkachuks to chuck knucks?

“No. No,” Matthew said. “That’s called me, Brady and Millsy in a group chat during the day.”

When it was all over, the Americans were blaring Aerosmith’s “Dream On” in the visitors’ room, and Canada’s fell into a quiet resolve.

But all-stars on both sides described the event as one of the best and most intense games they ever played in.

As powerful as playing in a Stanley Cup Final?

“It’s close, if not right there with it,” McDavid said. “The emotions, the fans, obviously the energy in the building, the rivalry. It was special to be a part of. Fun night.”

Confirmed.

That goes for the tension erupting with excellent hockey, and for a few face punches.

Cooper was asked if fighting belongs in an international showcase like this?

“I didn’t see anybody running for the exits,” he replied.

Canada must now run to the drawing board, with a must-win versus Finland looming in 36 hours in Boston.

Lines should be tweaked. A goalie might get swapped. And health will be hoped for.

The strategic portion, Cooper assures, will be taken care of by the coaches.

“It doesn’t work unless you have a team that cares — and that test we passed. We have a team that cares. The result is unfortune, but I don’t think anybody can leave that building and say that didn’t that team didn’t stick up for each other, care for each other, and play with passion. And when you do have that, the ceiling is limitless,” Cooper said.

“This is our Game 7.”

### **Fox’s Fast Five**

- Cale Makar — Canada’s best defenceman ad top minute-muncher — was close to playing Saturday.

“Those decisions are made for the benefit of the player,” Cooper said. “Trust me, he’s the one that wants to do it the most.”

Canada is hopeful Makar can go Monday in Boston.

Considering the difficult circumstances — flying away from vacation and not even skating with Team Canada until warmups — emergency recall Thomas Harley didn't look out of place at all.

"That's tough, right in the middle of the tournament, whole new group of guys, didn't (practise) the system work," Parayko said. "So unreal game by him. Just incredible."

Did you expect the start like that? "I expected an intense start, for sure, an emotional one, or however you want to put it. But, I mean, I don't know if you really expect three fights or whatever. But yeah, you definitely expect an intense start."

- Cooper refused to blame Jordan Binnington (.909) — who was outdueled by a zoned-in Connor Hellebuyck (.962) — for the loss. But he didn't give his goalie a ringing endorsement either.

Binnington wants both goals he allowed back.

A compelling decision awaits Canada's crease.

Binnington has warmed to the pace of the tournament.

If Canada goes with backup Adin Hill for the must-win, the Vegas Golden Knights goalie will have waited 11 days between starts.

- A banged-up Matthew Tkachuk was limited to just 11 minutes and 10 seconds of action and told the trainers in the third period he was too hurt to play.

Post-game, however, he said there is "no concern at all" over his lower-body injury — despite needed further evaluation from doctors.

"Other than Game 7 last year, this has been the highlight of my hockey career," Tkachuk said. "I'm just going to enjoy it with the guys. We have such a fun group in there, and it's going to be a fun plane ride tonight. Lots of laughs. We're having a lot of fun."

- Drew Doughty was Canada's most improved player.

Only McDavid and Josh Morrissey saw more ice than the veteran (21:15), who pitched in on both special teams and sprung McDavid for his goal-scoring break with a perfect stretch pass.

- Game-winning goal scorer Dylan Larkin says he'll tell his grandkids about this night. He's 28.

"That was one of the best experiences of my life," Larkin says. "Just an unbelievable hockey game. I hope you guys feel the same way."

## [Sportsnet.ca / Canada Player Ratings: Hagel, Bennett shine with superstars held at bay](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva – February 16, 2025

It started with fireworks, a flurry of fists, helmets and gloves strewn all over the ice. Six minutes into this one, it seemed to have the makings of a Canadian classic — three brawls and a Connor McDavid beauty, in front of a spirited Montreal crowd, to set up a win for the ages.

And then it all fell apart.

The Americans' own high-flyers potted a pair, the U.S. blue-liners methodically nullified an all-world attack led by McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Sidney Crosby, and the hosts finished the night staring down what's now a must-win game against Finland.

There are sure to be changes to Canada's lineup, with forward combinations primed for some shuffling and the return of defender Cale Makar desperately needed. But before we get there, here's a look at how each member of the red-and-white fared in Saturday night's stumble.

### **Nathan MacKinnon: 6 / 10**

Across the board, Canada's best were largely stymied by the Americans' stiff defence. MacKinnon had his moments, galloping through the neutral zone with speed in the manner we've so often seen precede highlight-reel finishes. But the final piece of the sequence wasn't there on this night. He finished the game with a single shot on net, and few legitimately dangerous chances generated, leaving head coach Jon Cooper with the task of finding the right linemates to let No. 29 fully get to his game.

### **Sidney Crosby: 6 / 10**

From the opening puck drop, the Americans went hard at the Canadian captain. No stranger to playing through heavy contact, Crosby did manage to link plays together here and there, and create some looks for his linemates — overall, though, it was a quiet night for No. 87, with Team USA's stingy defence able to shut down every promising look the captain tried to set in motion. A hooking penalty that sent the Americans to a power play soon after they'd tied it up — albeit to disrupt an odd-man rush — didn't help his night either.

### **Mark Stone: 6 / 10**

Given the complexion of the trio he's a part of, Stone's game figures to go much the way Crosby and MacKinnon's does. With those two playmaking engines held at bay by the Americans' clinical defence, the Vegas Golden Knights veteran was stymied, too. He did have some looks, tying for the team lead in shots with three on the night, but similarly wasn't able to cause Connor Hellebuyck too much trouble.

### **Sam Reinhart: 5 / 10**

The highest Canadian goal-scorer this season — on this roster, at least — Reinhart's had a quiet tournament to this point. The Florida Panthers sniper was especially quiet in this one, finishing as one of three Canadian forwards without a shot on net despite skating alongside the squad's best facilitators all game. He also wound up on the wrong side of the Americans' first goal, covering defensively for an out-of-position Devon Toews and ultimately watching Jake Guentzel walk by him and fire one past Jordan Binnington. A move down the lineup may be coming next time out.

### **Connor McDavid: 8 / 10**

The quick-footed phenom earned Canada's only goal of the game on a fantastic play early in the first period, collecting the puck in the neutral zone and coming up with a trademark sprint into the offensive zone, dancing past a defender, before faking a cut inside and roofing it off his backhand. It seemed an important tally at the time, with the tension incredibly high to start the tilt and the crowd exploding when McDavid fluttered the twine. But like the Canadians' other superstars, No. 97 was held at bay from that point on, able to generate little for the rest of the evening, even as he weaved through traffic and around defenders in the offensive zone. He had his looks, and was the only one in a red jersey to come up with a goal Saturday night, but some shuffling may be needed to find the linemates who allow him to be at his best.

**Mitch Marner: 6 / 10**

Canada's overtime hero logged the second-most ice of any forward for the red-and-white in this one, and overall looked fine. There were some quality shifts in the offensive zone, a good look of his own here and there, some good defensive play. But overall, like the rest of the top six, the Toronto Maple Leafs winger was unable to break through and come up with the moment of magic his side desperately needed on this night.

**Brandon Hagel: 8 / 10**

Starting the night by answering the bell against Matthew Tkachuk — who has an easy 20 pounds on his Florida rival — Hagel was one of the few constants for Canada all game long. The Lightning winger forechecked hard, won races, dug in and battled hard along the boards, and did what he could to cause chaos in the Americans' zone. The majority of Canada's best offensive-zone shifts seemed to be from its all-Lightning line, and Hagel's straightforward approach was key to that minor success.

**Anthony Cirelli: 7 / 10**

Like his Bolts counterparts, Cirelli did a good job of trying to help Canada build some momentum in the offensive zone, particularly as the game wore on and that space to generate got even harder to find. He came up with a number of solid defensive plays too, helping to keep the Americans off the board on their one man-advantage opportunity. And perhaps most importantly, he answered the Americans' physicality by throwing his body around, finishing with a team-high five hits on the night.

**Brayden Point: 6 / 10**

Much of the success of Canada's Bolts line falls on Point's shoulders, and the crafty centreman showed his skill at multiple points in this one, at times seeming to be the only one in a red jersey who could break through the U.S.'s blue-line wall. His cerebral play earned him a spell with MacKinnon and Crosby late in the game, and there may be something to moving Point up in the lineup next time out.

**Brad Marchand: 6 / 10**

The veteran Boston Bruins captain finished the game with the second-fewest minutes of any Canadian forward, earning fewer than nine in this one. Even so, he put together a few good rushes and created a few chances out of nothing by finding open space and throwing pucks on net in pursuit of rebound chaos. On a night like this one, where a late tying goal seemed like it needed to be pulled out of the mud, some more minutes for No. 63 could've benefited the home side.

**Sam Bennett: 8 / 10**

It didn't take long for Bennett to make clear why exactly he was thrown into the lineup for this Saturday night battle. Fresh off Hagel dropping the gloves with Matthew Tkachuk, Bennett stepped up to take on brother Brady in a bout featuring an even greater weight-class disparity — 32 pounds in favour of the

American. After holding his own there, Bennett kept stepping up all night long, coming up with more than a few momentum-salvaging hits in the offensive-zone. He managed to tie for the team lead with three shots to go along with that physicality, and came up with some key plays on the backcheck to disrupt American chances, too — all in seven-and-a-half minutes of ice.

#### **Seth Jarvis: 6 / 10**

The young Carolina Hurricanes talent didn't get much opportunity to show his level in this one, similarly finishing among the least-used forwards on the night. Even so, he managed a few nice sequences, taking contact and digging in along the boards more than a few times to create space for linemates hunting an offensive spark.

#### **Devon Toews: 6 / 10**

Forced to play without his usual blue-line partner — with Makar forced out of the lineup by illness — Toews was largely steady on the night. That said, the veteran did have a rough start, and came up with a couple costly errors early. He got caught pinching on the Americans' first goal of the game, forcing Reinhart back into a defensive position easily exploited by Jack Eichel and Jake Guentzel en route to the first U.S. tally, and another ill-timed pinch wound up in a two-on-one that ended with Crosby in the box for hooking. Overall, a forgettable one for the Colorado Avalanche stalwart.

#### **Travis Sanheim: 6 / 10**

Thrown into the mix as a replacement for the injured Shea Theodore, it was always going to be a tall task for Sanheim, stepping into this team for a game as tense and hard-fought as this. He took a straightforward approach for the most part, and did well in getting acclimated to his new blue-line partner. Sanheim did get beat on the eventual game winner from the Americans, but was left out to dry by a bad change that gifted Dylan Larkin and J.T. Miller a two-on-one finished off by the Detroit Red Wings captain.

#### **Josh Morrissey: 7 / 10**

With Makar sidelined, much was placed on Morrissey's shoulders, and the talented Winnipeg Jets blue-liner largely did a good job of carrying that offensive load for Canada's defence corps. He had his moments on both ends of the sheet, making smart reads throughout the night, and he showed his quality with a dash up ice that drew a tripping call and sent Canada's star-studded power play over the boards. Morrissey did what he could to quarterback that man-advantage unit and facilitate for Canada's big dogs too, but in the end was similarly held at bay by the stiff U.S. defence.

#### **Colton Parayko: 6 / 10**

The big-bodied blue-liner was the third Canadian participant in the wildest start to an international game in recent memory, dropping the gloves with Miller early and getting the crowd on its feet once again. He had some good moments in both ends of the rink throughout the night as well — but he also stumbled repeatedly in crunch time, coming up with a number of risky defensive-zone plays in the third period, forcing Binnington into some timely saves when the game was still up for grabs.

#### **Thomas Harley: 6 / 10**

Even more so than Sanheim, Harley was all but thrown into the fire in this one, added to the lineup last minute due to Makar's absence, without so much as a full practice with this squad. He showed glimpses of quality throughout the night, particularly on the offensive side, as he found himself at the netfront fighting for rebounds on more than one occasion. That said, on the other side, Harley factored into both goals the Americans scored on Binnington — namely the eventual game winner, which saw Harley coast



to the bench as the Americans set off towards Canada's net, leaving Sanheim to deal with the odd-man rush.

**Drew Doughty: 8 / 10**

The veteran has turned back the clock with his return to the national side, and was solid for the red-and-white once again Saturday night, despite the final result. Doughty's most consequential moment came early, when he hit McDavid with a perfect pass through the neutral zone that sprung the Edmonton Oilers pivot on to snag Canada's only goal. Aside from the setup, the veteran looked solid throughout the night, though, and wound up a much-needed steady presence for a defence corps that's had to be massively revamped on the fly.

**Jordan Binnington: 6 / 10**

Binnington's night went much the same way his performance against Sweden did. The first goal was one he'd likely want back. And after that, the St. Louis Blues netminder seemed to respond and raise his level — the Larkin goal was a tougher one to handle, and his blue-liners did little to help him out on that occasion. He was hardly exceptional, but Binnington seemed to give his club enough of a chance to pull level over the latter half of the night, when it was still a one-goal game. Canada's loss here seems more a matter of failing to generate offensively than looking porous on the other end of the sheet.

## [Sportsnet.ca / U.S. Player Ratings: Slavin delivers defensive masterclass](#)

By Emily Sadler – February 16, 2025

Three fights within the first nine seconds of the matchup probably wasn't what U.S. head coach Mike Sullivan meant when he called for "controlled emotion" during his pre-game address, but clearly his players had a message of their own to send in the early seconds of this long-awaited battle against Canada.

Matthew Tkachuk said earlier this week he'd waited nine years for this hotly contested best-on-best contest between cross-border foes, and he wasn't going to wait a second longer to re-ignite the rivalry. His tone-setting scrap off the opening faceoff hard launched us all into another edition of Canada vs. USA, with brother Brady and teammate J.T. Miller following suit with bouts of their own before the actual hockey began.

Once the game truly got underway, fans were treated to a hard-checking, defence-heavy battle that saw the Americans come out on top 3-1, thanks to a masterful performance in their own zone and opportunistic scoring. Connor McDavid was the lone goal-scorer for Canada, while Jake Guentzel, who opened and closed the scoring, and Dylan Larkin, whose second-period snipe served as the eventual game-winner, played hero for the U.S.

This game was worth the wait, and for Team USA, the victory will be savoured — not just because the nation has waited more than a decade to best their neighbours to the north at this level but because it guarantees the Americans a spot in next week's championship game.

Here's a closer look at Team USA's winning performance over Canada, and how each player fared in the victory.

### **Jack Eichel: 8/10**

His elite playmaking on full display once again, the Golden Knights centreman served up a perfect pass on a silver platter for Jake Guentzel to get Team USA on the board in the first frame and tie up the game 1-1. His chemistry with the Tkachuk brothers is really fun to watch.

### **Matthew Tkachuk: 8/10**

As if this game needed any more emotion injected into it, the top-line winger challenged Canada's Brandon Hagel to a tone-setting scrap off the opening faceoff, igniting the crowd and sparking the wildest game-opening sequence we've ever seen in this rivalry. Unfortunately, Tkachuk's campaign was cut short in the third period with an undisclosed injury — but he made it clear post-game he wasn't concerned about it going forward.

### **Brady Tkachuk: 9/10**

Mike Sullivan called the Tkachuk-Eichel-Tkachuk line "a catalyst for our team," and that couldn't have been more accurate, considering how this matchup started. Seeing Matthew open up the sin bin door for his little brother after Brady exchanged blows with Sam Bennett seconds after his own brawl was pure cinema, and Brady's unique combination of wrecking-ball-meets-finesse-forward was on full display against Canada with his team-leading six hits and trio of scoring chances.

### **Jake Guentzel: 9/10**

Few coaches know Guentzel's skillset better than Sullivan, who said post-game he's not surprised to see the former Penguins forward thrive on the biggest stage. After getting the Americans on the board in

the opening frame to tie things up 1-1 in the first period, Guentzel — who's playing in his first international tournament at any level — doubled down on his goal-scoring with an empty-netter that secured the Americans the victory Saturday night and guaranteed the team's entry in next week's championship game. In addition to his pair of goals, he also led the team in shots, with five.

**Auston Matthews: 7/10**

After seeing his quick chemistry with linemate Jack Hughes against the Finns, it felt like Saturday might be Matthews' moment to shine. But while the boos were loud, the production was quiet — albeit, he didn't exactly have an easy assignment, lining up against Canada's top combos. He was held without a single shot in this one, but his sound defensive efforts and heavy minutes against top tough competition (Matthews led all forward in ice time) should earn him some praise.

**Jack Hughes: 6/10**

Held without a point on a pair of shots, Hughes didn't have much room to generate offence against Canada, and the physical game plan doesn't exactly jive with his style. It'll be interesting to see if he can jumpstart a little offence against the Swedes on Monday night.

**J.T. Miller: 8/10**

For the second straight game, Miller found himself starting up a net-front scuffle following USA's first trip to the offensive zone (a creature of habit, and havoc, it seems), but we all know he's much more than an agitator. His lockdown penalty killing came up clutch a few times — on one occasion, he took away Brayden Point's stick to keep him from capitalizing on a juicy rebound — and his strong play earned him a promotion to the top line in the third period after Matthew Tkachuk was sidelined.

**Dylan Larkin: 9/10**

After playing just 11:14 as a fourth-line winger against the Finns, Larkin centred Team USA's third line on Saturday night and brought a spark — not to mention, some net-front grit we're not used to seeing from the Red Wings captain. In addition to muddying up Binnington's kitchen early and often in an attempt to throw the Canadian netminder off his game, Larkin scored what turned out to be the game-winning goal on a perfect snap shot after speeding down the wing. He also dished up a well-placed pass to Jake Guentzel, who put one in the back of Canada's empty net late in the third.

**Matthew Boldy: 7.5/10**

Boldy's having himself a great tournament so far. He pounced on the turnover that led to Larkin's game-winner in the second period, on which he earned an assist.

**Kyle Connor: 6.5/10**

Connor was demoted from the first line in USA's tournament-opening game to the fourth in their second, and he didn't see much ice time in this one. He played a team-low 8:32 with just 12 shifts, but still made an impact with four hits — second in the category among all USA forwards.

**Vincent Trocheck: 7/10**

With just over 10 minutes of ice time Saturday night, Trocheck's game didn't have a lot of time to shine, but his strong defensive skills came up big in this one. Canada was given very little space, and that tight-checking, high-forecheck game plan is one Trocheck has owned well.

**Brock Nelson: 7/10**

On a star-studded roster with so much offensive skill, Nelson's game gets overshadowed, considering his role. But he plays it really effectively, unafraid to get into puck battles and grind it out along the boards — and one of these times, it feels like he'll capitalize on an offensive-zone steal.

**Zach Werenski: 8/10**

Werenski had a helper on Guentzel's first-period goal, but while his offensive prowess was what stood out most against the Finns Thursday night, Saturday showcased his smooth skating and shutdown ability. Werenski gave his opponents no space to play, foiling some of the game's best scorers.

**Charlie McAvoy: 9/10**

McAvoy couldn't take the puck off McDavid's stick as No. 97 came barreling into the U.S. zone and fired the puck past Hellebuyck to open the scoring early in the first period, but he put on a masterclass when it came to taking the player off the puck. The Bruin showcased his physicality in this one with five hits, headlined by an early clobbering of Crosby in the opening minutes and a textbook takeout of McDavid later in the frame, which sparked Guentzel's goal on the ensuing rush.

**Jacob Slavin: 10/10**

When the success of your game is measured in how many plays don't happen, it can be hard to recognize and appreciate just how great a performance Slavin had. But give Slavin his flowers, because he was outstanding in this one. He played a whopping 25:36 — a team-high — and gave up very few opportunities, locking down the defensive zone and boxing out some of the game's best goal-scorers all night. A masterclass.

**Brock Faber: 9/10**

Paired with Slavin — and playing just as many minutes as his D-partner — was an opportunity Faber deserved after his strong play Thursday night, and he more than rose to the opportunity. His shutdown abilities were on full display, particularly in penalty-kill situations. His clutch zone-clearing late in the third helped tee up Guentzel's empty-netter.

**Adam Fox: 7/10**

Fox played the fewest minutes of all U.S. rearguards Saturday night, and generally hasn't stood out — for better or for worse — in this tournament so far. We're used to seeing Fox contribute a little more offensively, but he understood his role and played accordingly as part of a defensive unit that emphasized shutdowns over breakouts.

**Noah Hanifin: 9/10**

Hanifin wasn't his best Thursday night, and made up for it in a big way on Saturday's big stage. He was extremely effective at clogging up and locking down the U.S. zone, his best play coming when he busted up a two-on-one against McDavid and Sam Reinhart.

**Connor Hellebuyck: 9/10**

Put another digit in the win column for Hellebuyck, whose international record now reads 11-1-0, with an incredible 1.50 goals-against average and .942 save percentage overall. His second straight game giving up just a single goal, Hellebuyck was not only a steady presence behind an elite group of defenders but a momentum-swinger, too — he made a flurry of three saves before Larkin broke free on an odd-man rush to go up 2-1 in the second period. Hellebuyck made sure that lead was locked in.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Finland Player Ratings: Granlund plays overtime hero, Laine steps up](#)

By Kristina Rutherford – February 16, 2025

The underdog Finns are still alive in the best-on-best 4 Nations Face-Off after securing a massive overtime win over their rivals on Saturday in Montreal.

Mikael Granlund scored the winner 1:49 into extra time to give the smallest country competing a 4-3 victory over Sweden, and a pair of valuable points in the standings.

Patrik Laine shone on his new line, Kaapo Kakko proved he belongs in the lineup — on the first line, no less — and Kevin Lankinen made big saves when Finland needed them most.

This Nordic rivalry sure delivered, too. The game featured four lead changes. One goalie change, when Sweden pulled Filip Gustavsson after the first period (he gave up two goals on four shots) and in came Linus Ullmark. And nearly two minutes of back-and-forth 3-on-3 overtime.

These teams hadn't met since 2016. Before the game, Swedish defender Victor Hedman told reporters it was like "big brother versus little brother." Well, little brother (Finland's population is a little more than half of Sweden's) came out on top.

Up next for Finland is Canada on Monday, a must-win for the Finns if they want to get to the final since they dropped their opener 6-1 to the U.S. That's a tall order, indeed.

**But first things first:** Here's a look at how Finland performed in Game 2 to get win No. 1 on this stage.

### **Aleksander Barkov, 8/10**

The captain made a costly turnover in the first period that led to Sweden's first goal — he couldn't clear the puck, then fired it at Olli Maatta in front of Finland's net, and the Swedes pounced. But Barkov is the leader of this team, and he got that one back with a couple of minutes to go in the second to tie this game up, when Maatta hit him with a beautiful pass through the Swedish crease, which he deflected in from the doorstep. He nearly played the hero in the third, too, coming out of the penalty box and corralling a pass with his backhand, but Barkov sent his partial breakaway shot high and wide. Barkov logged nearly 20 minutes of ice time.

### **Mikko Rantanen, 8/10**

His goal to put Finland up 2-1 late in the first period came on the power play, and he scored it at a bad angle with a shot that clocked just 33 mph because he barely got a piece of the puck. But how it went in doesn't matter one bit. It was encouraging for a star player who didn't register a single shot in Finland's opener against the U.S. Rantanen also made a beauty spin move in the Swedish zone that led to Finland's third goal, and he was far more visible than in Game 1.

### **Kaapo Kakko, 9/10**

The winger didn't play Finland's opener, but Kakko played so well in Game 2 that in the second period, he got moved from the fourth line up to the first to play alongside Rantanen and Barkov. Kakko figured in huge on Finland's third goal to tie things up, drawing an assist on the play — it was a double deflection, and he provided the first. His line was buzzing, and he, Barkov and Rantanen generated a bunch of chances, especially late in the third period.

### **Artturi Lehkonen, 6/10**

He had a good chance in close in the second period, but couldn't convert. Lehtonen had two shots on net in this game and was moved off the first line in favour of Kakko. He saw just 11:31 of ice time and finished minus-2.

### **Sebastian Aho, 7/10**

Aho assisted the game-winning goal on Saturday, and he led forwards with 20:30 of ice time. Held without a shot in Game 1 against the Americans, he managed to register one against Sweden while streaking down the right wing. Aho has starred for Finland on the international stage in the past but hasn't seemed to find magic with his linemates, Hintz and Granlund. Contributing to the overtime winner may be the spark he needs to shine like he can on this stage.

### **Roope Hintz, 6/10**

Hintz had a few good chances on net, including one late in the third, but he ripped it high and wide. He played well on the penalty kill on Saturday, breaking up a couple of intended Swedish passes and getting the puck out in key moments.

### **Mikael Granlund, 10/10**

The overtime hero got it done while tearing down the wing on a 2-on-1, and Granlund's eyes weren't on the net as he fired the puck through Ullmark's legs and then dropped into a low fist-pump. Just before that, Granlund made a great defensive play at the other end to kick-start the winning rush. Heroic stuff.

### **Anton Lundell, 9/10**

Lundell got Finland on the board, one-timing a beauty saucer pass through Gustavsson's legs to tie the game up in the first period. Lundell has been one of Finland's best players on both ends, generating chances and figuring in key defensively, including on the PK.

### **Patrik Laine, 9/10**

Laine was sensational for Finland on Saturday, far more dangerous than in Game 1, and he made a pair of beautiful passes that led to both of Finland's first-period goals. The second came on the power play when Laine looked to be taking a shot before he sent a hard cross-ice pass to Rantanen, who one-timed it home. Laine was moved to the third line with Lundell and Luostarinen for Game 2, and the change really paid off. He carried the puck more confidently and almost generated a breakaway after walking through a pair of Swedish defenders.

### **Eetu Luostarinen, 7/10**

He authored the pass — a beautiful saucer over a Swedish stick — that led to Finland's first goal. Luostarinen was also key on the penalty kill, and made a big block.

### **Teuvo Teräväinen, 5/10**

He saw the least amount of ice of all Finnish forwards, just 6:23, and finished minus-1.

### **Erik Haula, 6/10**

Haula also saw very little ice time, 8:21, including some time on the PK, and finished with a minus-1 rating.

### **Niko Mikkola, 9/10**

His heavy point shot was on display and he forced Gustavsson to make a big pad save early on. Mikkola played a lot of tough minutes, including on the penalty kill. He did a great job keeping offensive stars like

William Nylander to the outside and limiting Sweden's chances and shots on net. He's been essential on this blueline given the missing pieces due to injury.

#### **Esa Lindell, 9/10**

Lindell started in overtime, and his 28:20 of ice led Finland. He's incredibly steady back there, and very effective at breaking the puck out while under pressure. He managed a shot on net, and lost a skate blade when he blocked a shot, so he had to hop off the ice. In the absence of star Finnish defenders, Lindell is stepping up and playing big minutes.

#### **Nikolas Matinpalo, 8/10**

The young defender is gaining valuable experience here, and despite the fact Matinpalo has played just 22 NHL games, he's playing with confidence for Finland. He wired a few shots from the point — one found the net — and saw 13:16 of ice time.

#### **Urho Vaakanainen, 7/10**

The Rangers defender was added to Finland's roster earlier this month due to injury (Rasmus Ristolainen, Miro Heiskanen, and Jani Hakanpaa are all out.) He played 14:20 in game two.

#### **Henri Jokiharju, 7/10**

He had a shot in Game 2. The goal-scorer in Finland's 6-1 loss to the US, Jokiharju logged 16:01 of ice time.

#### **Olli Maatta, 9/10**

He was in a tough position on that first Swedish goal, trying to coral a puck Barkov fired his way that led to Sweden's first goal — Mika Zibanejad's shot went through Maatta's legs first, and then through Lankinen's. But Maatta played great overall. He made one of the best passes of the game when he found Barkov in front on the doorstep for the tap-in to tie things up at the end of the second period. He was solid defensively, and one of the reasons Sweden was limited to 24 shots.

#### **Kevin Lankinen**

The Canucks netminder got his first start of the tournament after Juuse Saros gave up six goals to Team USA in Game 1, and Lankinen stepped up in the biggest moments. He made key saves early in the game — in close on Adrian Kempe, and off a Filip Forsberg deflection. And in overtime, in the first few seconds, Lankinen shut the door with a big pad save on Zibanejad and then later on a driving Kempe, who powered himself to the net to earn a good chance in close. Lankinen's save on Kempe led to the puck going the other way, and eventually in the back of Sweden's net.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Sweden Player Ratings: Leaders leave much to be desired](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva – February 16, 2025

As they have so many times before, the underdog Finns took the glory on Saturday afternoon, outplaying the doubt that's been heaped upon them over the course of this tournament. And on the other side, Sweden finds themselves picking up the pieces as the only team in this tournament without a win to their name.

The historic rivalry between the two nations was simmering heading into Saturday's meeting, the Swedes talking of sending a message to their "little brother," the Finns looking to show the depth of their distaste for the nickname.

After he and his countrymen did just that with a statement overtime victory, Patrik Laine made that sentiment clear in a post-game interview with Emily Kaplan — "We're the big brother now," the Finnish winger said with a grin.

**Here's a closer look at how each member of the Swedish squad fared on Saturday:**

### **William Nylander: 6 / 10**

The Toronto Maple Leafs winger came up with an excellent play to set up Sweden's third goal of the night — a signature rush up ice before dishing to Erik Karlsson for the snipe — and he factored into Sweden's first, too, digging in the offensive zone to help win the puck back before Mika Zibanejad tallied one early. Still, aside from those two plays and a few other sequences, Nylander still seemed to lack the poise and creativity he usually displays out on the sheet.

### **Mika Zibanejad: 8 / 10**

It was a much-improved night for Zibanejad after a quiet performance in Sweden's opening tilt. The New York Rangers pivot looked more like the offensive force he's shown himself to be during his time in Manhattan, putting a team-leading six shots on net over the course of the tilt. His finest moment came eight minutes in, when he snapped a quick shot by Kevin Lankinen, starting his side off on the right foot before it all went off the rails.

### **Adrian Kempe: 7 / 10**

After leading the way for Sweden last time out, Kempe had a quieter night this time around, but the Los Angeles Kings talent still made his presence known, continuing to forecheck hard and throw his body around, coming up with some promising offensive sequences, and getting a few good looks on net. The approach earned him a promotion to Sweden's top line before the night was through.

### **Elias Pettersson: 5 / 10**

Pettersson didn't offer much for the Swedes in this one. Outside of a few moments with the puck on his stick in the offensive zone, he was a background character for this Swedish performance, and among the least-used forwards on the squad by the game's end.

### **Filip Forsberg: 7 / 10**

Like Zibanejad, Forsberg entered this game fresh off a disappointing tournament-opener, and looked much more the talent we've come to know in a Nashville Predators sweater. The veteran came up with a moment of quality on Sweden's tying goal early in the second period — a bump play to get the puck to Lucas Raymond and keep play alive, before the goal sequence seconds later — and had a couple



dangerous chances throughout. With his skill-set, there still seems to be more to give, but he finished the night with the second-most shots on the team, the most hits and the most blocks.

**Rickard Rakell: 4 / 10**

The Pittsburgh Penguins winger had a few good moments here and there, but overall had a forgettable performance. A messy scramble in the first period led to a trip to the penalty box for Rakell, and he was eventually replaced on the top line by Kempe.

**Jesper Bratt: 7 / 10**

Dotted among a number of bigger names, Bratt continues to quietly be one of Sweden's best. As was the case last time out, the New Jersey Devils winger looked calm, collected and dangerous every time he had the puck on his stick. His best sequence came on Sweden's tying goal — after his countrymen had been hemmed in their own zone by the Finns, Bratt took hold of the puck, carried it to safety and helped set up a quality o-zone shift, keeping the play alive with flashes of skill at multiple points, before his linemates set up the eventual goal.

**Joel Eriksson Ek: 7 / 10**

Along with Bratt, Eriksson Ek has been consistently solid through two games. He forechecks hard in the offensive zone, makes simple, smart plays in his own zone, and continues to funnel the puck north whenever he's out there. The Minnesota Wild pivot was crucial on the tying goal mentioned above, going hard to the net and sweeping the puck with one hand over to Rasmus Dahlin, who eventually potted the goal.

**Lucas Raymond: 7 / 10**

The third member of the team's most consistently solid line, the young Detroit Red Wings talent has largely looked at home on this best-on-best stage, showing more poise with the puck on his stick than plenty of the veterans around him. He came up with some dangerous chances throughout, including a quality look in overtime before the Finns ended it, and earned an assist on Dahlin's goal, with his shot from the point spurring the netfront battle that led to the tally.

**Gustav Nyquist: 5 / 10**

He was the least-used Swedish forward for the second straight game. While he forechecked hard throughout, it was Nyquist's line who got bested on Finland's third goal of the night, which tied it up and opened the door for an eventual overtime win.

**Elias Lindholm: 5 / 10**

As was the case in his side's first game of the tournament, Lindholm came up with some nice physicality in his limited minutes, forechecking hard and finishing checks, and was given some shifts higher up in the lineup late in the game. He finished tied for the team lead in hits, but didn't offer much else.

**Viktor Arvidsson: 5 / 10**

Arvidsson was more noticeable in this one than his two linemates, despite earning the second-fewest minutes of any Swedish forward. He had his looks, and the door was open to show more offensively, but the majority of his chances wound up missing the cage.

**Victor Hedman: 6 / 10**

For much of the night, the captain was the same steady blue-line presence that he usually is, and his battle along the boards in his own zone helped spur Nylander's rush up ice on Sweden's third goal of the evening. That said, Hedman did make things difficult for his club in the final moments of the first period,

earning a late tripping call and giving the Finns a timely power play — they cashed in on the opportunity, taking a 2-1 lead and putting Sweden on the back foot going into the middle frame.

**Jonas Brodin: 5 / 10**

He had some moments of quality to disrupt the Finns' attack here and there over the course of the night. Most notably, though, he was among the two defenders bested at the netfront by Kaapo Kakko and Aleksander Barkov on the tying goal that brought Finland back to level ground, before they went on to take the win.

**Mattias Ekholm: 6 / 10**

Ekholm was the other defender on the wrong side of that crucial netfront battle with Kakko and Barkov. But he had his moments defensively throughout the game as well, most notably on a key stop in the third period, when he pushed Sebastian Aho to the outside and disrupted what looked set to be a grade-A chance to bury a game-winner.

**Erik Karlsson: 7 / 10**

He was among Sweden's best players to start the tournament, and Karlsson certainly had an impact offensively again, putting pucks on net, setting up teammates for decent looks, and skating the puck out of trouble on more than one occasion. He finished off a great play from Nylander for Sweden's third goal of the night, joining the rush and showing some all-world poise as he sniped one past Lankinen. Of course, the glory was undone in overtime as Karlsson was the lone man back on the two-on-one that led to Finland's game-winning goal — the Pittsburgh Penguins defender bit as Mikael Granlund sold the pass, before easily sniping home the winner.

**Rasmus Dahlin: 7 / 10**

After saving a goal last time out by pulling a puck off the line, the young Buffalo Sabres defender cashed in on the other side of the sheet this time around, finishing off a solid Raymond-Eriksson Ek sequence at the netfront to pull Sweden level early in the second period. On the other side, he got caught pinching early in the game, leaving his blue-line partner exposed on a two-on-one that allowed Finland to tie it up just a few minutes after Zibanejad's opening goal.

**Gustav Forsling: 5 / 10**

Like Hedman, the veteran Forsling — who finished as Sweden's second-most-used defender — was largely a steady presence on the back end, aside from a few costly moments. The Florida Panthers blue-liner was beaten on each of Finland's first two goals, though neither were particularly favourable conditions, the first coming on a two-on-one, the second on a Finnish power play.

**Filip Gustavsson: Incomplete**

Sweden's coach, Sam Hallam, made a point to say post-game that Gustavsson was battling illness Saturday, and was pulled after one period of play because he's under the weather, rather than because of his performance. The netminder certainly seemed to be struggling early, giving up two goals on four shots in the opening period of the game — though, again, the goals came off a two-on-one and a power-play knuckler. Given the illness factor, and the mostly solid performance he offered last game, it's tough to hang much of the blame on Gustavsson's shoulders.

**Linus Ullmark: 5 / 10**

Ullmark was largely steady after taking over the cage in the second period, and came up with a few timely saves to keep his team in it. That said, he didn't look exceptional on Finland's tying goal, and certainly left much to be desired on the overtime winner, biting hard on Granlund's deception and

leaving a hefty five-hole target for the Finnish vet to exploit. If both goalies find themselves healthy and available to play next time out, the Ottawa Senators veteran didn't exactly plant his flag as the clear-cut No. 1 option.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Why Canada was unable to crack USA defence despite controlling play](#)

By Justin Bourne – February 17, 2025

Pride is not always a sin, not this kind of pride.

Certainly, there were lapses into its more unfortunate forms, but a day removed and I've been surprised to find myself borderline emotional about the Canada-U.S. game that was played on Saturday night, and I've pinned that feeling down to being proud.

As someone who's put their life into the game of hockey, I'm proud to see what the game can look like at the very highest tier of talent on the planet, when both sides care to rare degree. I'm proud that fringe hockey fans found that game and loved its unusual mix of venom and grace. I'm proud that both the U.S. and Canadian teams did things that are hard to get yourself to do - yes, I am talking about the fights and hits - for their own versions of a greater good. In a backwards way, there's a wholesomeness to what manifested as violence.

The short story for the first Canada-U.S. game in damn near a decade was much more simply: That. Was. Awesome.

Below are my Canadian point-of-view takeaways from what was one of the most memorable hockey games, well, ever.

### **The fights**

**Kevin Bieksa said it best on the panel:** That was the best start to a game in the history of hockey.

I remember other puck drop brawls too, but those were more watered-down NHL teams, mid-season, based on some previously perceived slight. They weren't the best players in the world, literal all-stars, fighting in what in the name of what may be dramatically phrased, "the name of their country." There's never been anything like that.

First, I give the Tkachuk boys credit, man. That is a massive stage to put your reputation on the line. The swing of getting knocked out there or winning that fight was bound to be career-defining stuff either way. The thought of that coming moment must've been incessant throughout the day.

But more than that, I give the Canadian players credit, no more than Brandon Hagel, my god. Matthew Tkachuk said he and Brady and JT Miller had a group chat going that brought that start-up. They were at least mentally prepared for what was to come. Hagel gives up well over 20 pounds to the much thicker challenger, and on the spot, he didn't back down from that massive stage (and he did great, I'd give him the decision).

Colton Parayko is 31, has played about 800 NHL games, and has been in one single fight in his NHL career prior to assenting to the request of J.T. Miller. That he took the offer from that player, who's been in about 35 NHL fights according to my count, was meaningful.

And Sam Bennett swinging with Brady Tkachuk, what a show.

Jon Cooper said it best with "It's probably 10 years of no international hockey exhaled into a minute and a half."

I could still run through a wall thinking about it.

But on to the other 59 minutes and 51 seconds.

## **Overview**

The Canadian team carried the bulk of the play, and that wasn't particularly close by possession time. The puck was in the U.S. zone for about 26 minutes of the game, as opposed to the 19:25 it spent in the Canadian end. Offensive zone possession time (where the teams actually have the puck on offence in the O-zone), saw the Canadians with three more minutes than the U.S. team, which is typically the showing of a more dominant team. A few things about that.

## **U.S. defence**

It's tempting to compare the Canadian offence being greatly slowed to the Toronto Maple Leafs in playoffs, who've typically had their dynamic offence dry up in big spots. This wasn't that.

This was a U.S. team defending exceptionally well, and I truly believe it's one of the best-executed systems games from a team that's never all played under the same systems.

When the U.S. defence pinched a step, forwards fell back, everyone collapsed to the house then defended from the inside out, there was just nowhere to go. Jaccob Slavin was exceptional, and personified the steady, frustrating defending that never wavered.

I'm often a dissenter when coaches give offensive advice like "Just get shots and traffic and hope" but there's a level of quality defence where there's simply no open ice inside, and you have to create breakdowns through chaos and pucks to the net, boring though it may be. It's the equivalent of running the ball in the NFL. It's boring and hard and unsexy, but if you do it well, long enough with enough vigour, other big plays will open themselves up.

## **Score effects, because of the goaltending**

I mentioned the possession numbers above, and at least some of Canada's dominance there comes from the U.S. having the lead and being able to drop back and shut it down defensively. Canada was pushing, while they were content to let the clock run.

And how did the U.S. get the lead, well that started with Jordan Binnington letting them back in it.

I'm torn on where the Canadians go from here in net. Binnington seems to make some exceptional saves along the way, but at the same time, those don't have much value if he can't give you the easier saves along with them. Dylan Larkin's shot isn't a "must-have" - it's a rush shot from a dangerous spot - but the best goalies make that save, and the Guentzel one is no good.

You have to beat Finland, and Adin Hill hasn't played yet. And you've also got to be prepared that if you do start Hill and win, you're likely going with Hill in the Final against the US. too, which makes it a bigger decision.

One thing I said going into this event was that you probably don't have time to let guys "work through" stretches of bad play, you just need to move on to the next guy. I'll stick to my guns on that, and say it's time for Hill to get his shot.

## **Smaller things**

- Thomas Harley was put in a tough spot, and performed better than could have been expected. He should be proud of the game he played, as he was one of the more noticeable Canadian defenders, making plays with the puck, getting up ice, and periodically laying the body. Canada would be happy with his minutes. That said, there were errors, and one of them (a bad line change) results in the game-winning goal against. I have to imagine Cale Makar plays on Monday, which takes Harely out, which is too bad. I'd play him over Travis Sanheim (who was totally fine, if not good!) were they able to make that choice.

- I feel for Jon Cooper's challenge, as getting all these guys into the game has to be such a battle, while simultaneously getting the best guys out there the most. But Nathan MacKinnon is a massive difference-maker who played just 18:30, and he can handle far more. It also feels like Cooper is cognizant of being too deferential to his Lightning guys, but Brayden Point might be next in line for me after McDavid and MacKinnon as guys I want out there, and he needs more than 16:30. Meanwhile, Brandon Hagel was noticeable every second of his 13:52. Those two guys might need to play higher up in the rotation.

- The Americans put a lickin' on Connor McDavid, in exactly the way you should be hard on the opposing team's best players. Charlie MacAvoy twice put him on his ass, and the whole group took every chance they could to put the body on him. He just kept working, to his credit. That's just big game hockey, and it falls on his teammates to take advantage of guys running out of position to lay those hits.

- Of the bottom six, Sam Bennett was far and away the most impactful player. In his team-low 7:41 of ice time, he had a fight, a team-leading three shots (tied with McDavid), and was second on the team in hits with four (to Cirelli's five). And those were hits. Seth Jarvis failed to make an impact in his 11:07, which might be Travis Konecny's open door to get back in.

- As a standalone event, the political backdrop to Saturday — anthem booing and all — was less of a black cloud and more of a shot of nitrous. I hope it served as a general reminder to Canadians and Americans alike that we have far more in common than we are divided. We all loved that, we're hockey fans. Everyone stood up proud of themselves, and after the rough stuff, they played a great, fair, fast game. As a fan it was just a really cool night.

- And finally, a big game is coming up on Monday afternoon! The Finns will pack the house defensively and play hard, too, so it's not one to take lightly. This tournament has ended up being far better than I'm sure the NHL and NHLPA ever thought it could be.

## Sportsnet.ca / Scout's Analysis: Observations from 4 Nations Face-Off Montreal games

By Jason Bukala – February 17, 2025

Every major league sport around the world has a city and venue that reeks of history and unwavering fan support. Soccer has teams like Manchester United and Real Madrid. Baseball has New York and the Yankees. The NFL has the Green Bay Packers and legendary Lambeau Field.

We are fortunate to have some rabid fan bases and outstanding arenas in Canada, but the pageantry and enthusiasm the city of Montreal provides when hosting an international event like the 4 Nations Face-Off is second to none. The tournament now moves to another Original Six city. Boston is on the clock to attempt to carry on the enthusiastic atmosphere the teams were fortunate to play in front of in Montreal.

**Here are some of my observations from the first set of games in Montreal:**

### **GOALTENDING**

- Canada has made the decision, so far, to ride Jordan Binnington as the starter. He's made some spectacular stops in the first two games versus Sweden and USA but allowing at least one bad goal in each game isn't a recipe for success. I appreciate how he has battled to make saves after allowing a goal like Jake Guentzel's Saturday night, but the margins are thin in a tournament like this and he was outplayed by his counterpart in Team USA goaltender Connor Hellebuyck. Binnington has allowed five goals on 48 shots so far.
- Finland turned to Vancouver Canucks goaltender Kevin Lankinen for their rivalry game versus Sweden after Juuse Saros struggled in the Finns' opening game versus USA. Lankinen provided just enough stability for the Finns in their overtime victory. He will, no doubt, be the starter versus Canada on Monday.
- Lankinen is one of the feel-good stories of the NHL season. He was signed as a free agent late in the summer by the Canucks and has provided Vancouver with generally solid results. He's closing in on career high in games played at the NHL level and posted a 19-8-7 record, 2.53 GAA and .905 save percentage. He won't be an easy out for Canada on Monday.
- Hellebuyck started the tournament by allowing a routine shot from the flank, off the stick of Finnish defenceman Henri Jokiharju, who beat him under his blocker arm. It was an auspicious start to the tournament for Hellebuyck, but he shut the door the rest of the way versus the Finns and only allowed one goal versus Canada. Hellebuyck has stopped 40 of the last 41 shots he has faced. He's dialled in, which isn't great news for whoever ends up playing the Americans in the championship game next Thursday.

### **THRUST INTO ACTION**

- Both Thomas Harley (Dallas Stars) and Travis Sanheim (Philadelphia Flyers) made their tournament debuts versus Team USA and generally held their own.
- Harley impressed me with his overall approach. He didn't shy away from playing the game the same way he does in Dallas. He was active up ice, pinched down to extend plays, walked the offensive blue line to open up shooting and passing lanes and engaged defensively. He skated 25 shifts for a total of

18:17 TOI and was credited with two shots on goal and three shot blocks. Harley had no issues keeping up with the pace of the game and used his stature and long reach to his advantage.

- Sanheim clocked in for 15:01 TOI, including 1:34 on the PK. He was generally efficient with the puck on his stick, moving pucks quickly and accurately without taking too much risk. His size (six-foot-four, 222 pounds) and skating ability were on full display. He kept up with the play and defended from his crease to the corners, and back, on time. He was, unfortunately, on the ice attempting to defend the two-on-one that led to Dylan Larkin's goal in the second period, but he took away the pass effectively. Larkin gets credit for ripping the puck inside the far post to beat Binnington.
- With Cale Makar likely to return to the lineup Monday, it means Harley will be pushed to the side again and Sanheim will remain in Canada's lineup. The Canadian coaching staff don't actually have a choice — Sanheim was named to the team ahead of Harley. Even if they wanted to dress Harley ahead of Sanheim, they aren't allowed to under the rules of the event.

### **NEED MORE**

- Canada's Sam Reinhart has, through two games, skated over 33 minutes. He registered three shots on goal versus Sweden but didn't direct a puck on net versus the Americans. Canada needs him to find pucks and get more involved offensively. I had a hard time finding him in the game versus the USA.
- Conversely, Brad Marchand played only 8:23 versus Team USA, but he still managed to direct two shots on goal and was much more visible in a limited role.
- Sam Bennett played even less than Marchand. Bennett rolled over the boards for only 7:41, but he had a spirited fight versus Brady Tkachuk, directed three shots on goal and was credited with four hits.

It might be time for Canada to shuffle the deck a bit for Monday's game against the Finns. They had a very difficult time getting to the inside against Team USA. Perhaps more muscle on the wings of Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon will open up more space to operate offensively.

### **WILY VET**

Drew Doughty clocked in for 21:15 TOI versus the Americans and was deployed in all situations. He isn't as fleet a foot as the majority of the players in the tournament, but he makes up for it with his hockey sense.

Doughty made adjustments to his game after Canada's first outing versus Sweden. He managed the puck very well and was responsible for the primary assist on McDavid's goal. He gapped up in the neutral zone to force the Americans to dump the puck deep. Once he had it on his stick, he hit McDavid in stride through the neutral zone. It's a small sequence but a timely one that involved more than just the pass itself.

### **COMPLETE PLAYER**

Team USA defenceman Brock Faber is a player I have been fond of for several years, dating back to his time at USA's USNTDP in Plymouth, Mich. He doesn't jump out all the time, but he's a complete player who's deployed in all situations.

Faber is only 22 years young, but he averages 25 minutes per game playing for the Minnesota Wild and has carried over the same level of responsibility with Team USA at the 4 Nations. Saturday night against Canada, he logged his usual amount of ice time, was tasked with shutting down Canada's top forwards and was on the ice when Canada had the goalie out attempting to tie the game late.

Faber has already signed a long-term extension with the Wild. He's in the final year of his entry-level contract. His new contract begins next season and doesn't expire until 2033. His \$8.5-million cap hit will



age nicely for the Wild and likely end up being a bargain, especially with the cap rising aggressively in the coming years.

## The Athletic / USA suddenly banged up heading into 4 Nations title showdown with Canada

By Michael Russo – February 18, 2025

BOSTON — Brady Tkachuk has spent his life following his older brother's lead.

He has taken that to the extreme in this 4 Nations Face-Off.

Matthew Tkachuk scored two goals in the tournament opener against Finland, so Brady scored two of his own. Matthew fought off the opening draw in the second game against Canada, so Brady dropped the gloves following the ensuing faceoff. And eerily, after Matthew missed the final 12:36 of the Canada game, Brady got hurt with 12:23 left in the first period Monday night in a 2-1 loss to Sweden after losing an edge and colliding with the goal post.

Brady spent the next seven minutes in the United States dressing room before returning. But he played only one more shift totaling 14 seconds, spent the rest of the first period opening and closing the bench door for his teammates and didn't return to the game at the start of the second period.

Since the game was meaningless with the U.S. already destined to face Canada, which beat Finland earlier in the day, in Thursday's final, coach Mike Sullivan said the decision to hold out Brady Tkachuk was out of precaution and he doesn't anticipate Tkachuk missing Thursday's title clash against the rival from the North.

Brother Matthew also missed Monday's game out of precaution with the lower-body injury sustained in the third period against Canada two nights earlier. It would seem unimaginable that either Tkachuk would allow himself to miss Thursday's game after how much they've invested in leading the United States in this tournament.

But the worry heading into the big game is how banged up the United States actually is.

Defenseman Charlie McAvoy missed Monday's game with an upper-body injury. Jake Sanderson replaced him in the lineup. The Boston Globe reported that McAvoy was admitted to the hospital Monday night.

And when Auston Matthews was unable to play with an upper-body injury, the United States had to play a forward short with no other healthy players on the roster with extra Chris Kreider already being inserted for Matthew Tkachuk.

"We start the game with 11 forwards, and then you lose another guy and a key player on our team," center Jack Eichel said. "It's never easy. You don't want to see anyone go out. I give the guys credit. We put a lot on (the) 10 forwards, and it's tough. Sully's trying to find combinations. We had chances, but we just weren't able to bury."

The good news is the United States will have two days to rest some of these banged-up bodies before Thursday's rematch with Canada.

"It's nice, especially when down a handful of guys," forward J.T. Miller said. "We need the extra time. Everybody's going to be itching to get back in Thursday."

Sullivan anticipates getting "some of these guys back," but the United States may have to make contingency plans Tuesday by putting a player or two who did not make the initial American roster on call in case they need an emergency addition for Thursday.

NHL teams resume practicing Thursday, so general manager Bill Guerin won't need to summon a player away from Cabo the way Canada did earlier this tournament with Thomas Harley. Harley changed his in-season vacation when Shea Theodore was lost for the tournament with an upper-body injury and was thrust into action Saturday night when Canada needed a defenseman with Cale Makar sick.

Harley didn't play against Finland on Monday because Makar was healthy enough to return.

"I would anticipate we would (get players back Thursday)," Sullivan said. "We'll have to wait and see how things play out here over the next day or so, but obviously there will be contingency planning in the event that we need people."

Sullivan didn't have much of an update on either McAvoy or Matthews. He said he expects he'll have more information on both ailments Tuesday.

But without Matthews, McAvoy and Matthew Tkachuk, the loss of Brady Tkachuk on Monday made things more difficult for the United States, which had oodles of scoring chances but couldn't beat Sam Ersson more than an early Kreider goal for a 1-0 lead.

Ersson, who made 32 saves, got the call for Sweden with Linus Ullmark and Filip Gustavsson both under the weather.

"It sucks (losing Brady)," said goalie Jake Oettinger, who got the start so Connor Hellebuyck could rest for Thursday. "He's been like the heartbeat of this team pretty much. So I know he'll be good to go for Thursday. He's such a big piece for this whole thing."

To Oettinger's point, in a meaningless game, it was obvious Tkachuk came to play against Sweden. In just 1 minute, 55 seconds of ice time and an average shift length of 23 seconds, Tkachuk had three shots, another attempted and three hits.

"It's not easy," Sullivan said. "We lose a guy that early in the game. We're already down one. We tried to spread the minutes around a little bit so nobody got an extensive workload. But when you're down two guys that early in the game, it is what it is. I thought the guys competed hard."

Oettinger made 21 saves but couldn't get any goal support. The former Boston University goalie had a dozen family members travel to Boston for the start and was so proud to wear a Team USA jersey in front of them.

"I think I've never been more nervous for a game than I was today, like I wanted to win this game so bad," Oettinger said.

Even if the Tkachuks and Matthews can play Thursday, Kreider may have earned another game. After being scratched for the first two games of the tournament, the former Boston College star and Boxford, Mass., native scored 35 seconds into his debut and was solid throughout.

"He's a big, strong kid that can play a physical game, and I would anticipate that it will be a physical game (against Canada)," Sullivan said. "Both teams play a similar style, both north-south teams that play with a ton of speed and a ton of physicality. I think Kreids, his game, without a doubt suits that."

## [The Athletic / Team USA drops 4 Nations round-robin finale to Sweden as injuries pile up](#)

By Arpon Basu – February 18, 2025

BOSTON — There was some question as to how much Team USA and Team Sweden would care in what was a meaningless final game of the round-robin portion of the 4 Nations Face-Off on Monday.

Canada had eliminated Sweden earlier in the day when it beat Finland 5-3, and with Team USA having locked up their spot in Thursday's final when it beat Canada in Montreal on Saturday, there were no consequences to the game Monday night.

Well, except for the fact they were keeping score, and except for the fact there was a Tkachuk involved.

With Matthew Tkachuk sidelined as a precaution after he couldn't finish the game against Canada with a lower-body injury, Brady Tkachuk did not take long to show this game mattered to him. Poor Leo Carlsson, playing his first game of the tournament. And poor Mattias Ekholm after that.

That intensity, however, ultimately cost Tkachuk.

Driving the puck hard to the Sweden net in the first period, Tkachuk lost his balance and slid into Sweden goalie Samuel Ersson's right pad.

Tkachuk got off the ice slowly and went to the bench. He eventually went back to the USA dressing room, but returned before the period was over, testing out whatever was hurting him during a brief twirl around the ice during a television timeout, stretching out his left leg a few times. He played one shift that lasted 14 seconds after that, and did not come out for the second period.

Team USA coach Mike Sullivan called the decision "precautionary" and said the issue was not likely to be serious.

"I haven't got an update to this point after the game yet, so we'll see how he responds," he said. "But I don't anticipate it being an issue."

### **Tkachuk set a tone the game picked up on**

Competitiveness is a hell of a drug.

After a timid start to the game from both sides, the intensity picked up considerably as the game went on. For example, early in the second period, Team USA center Jack Eichel threw a lazy pass into the middle of the ice in his own zone that got picked off by Sweden, a play he absolutely would not have made had this game mattered. By the end of the period, Eichel was backchecking hard and was visibly upset with himself when a one-timer on the power play late in the second was stopped by Ersson, a shot that would have tied the game. He had a backcheck and a stick lift midway through the third period that nullified what looked to be a sure short-handed goal for Jesper Bratt.

The game got progressively more physical as the players seemingly realized if they had to play this meaningless game, might as well win it. The two teams combined for 10 hits in the first period and 16 in the second, and Eichel caught Carlsson with an open ice hit that sent Carlsson's helmet flying just before the midway point of the third.

These were not the actions of a man who considered the game meaningless.

“For a game that, for all intents and purposes, didn’t have significance with respect to the tournament,” Sullivan said, “I thought there was a lot of professionalism from both sides with how hard the groups played.”

### **A bug provides opportunity for Ersson**

Some sort of sickness meant Filip Gustavsson did not finish the game Saturday against Finland, and on Monday some sort of illness also claimed goaltender Linus Ullmark and forwards Mika Zibanejad and Rickard Rakell, as all three were surprise scratches.

That gave Ersson a chance in goal, making Sweden the only team in the tournament to use all three of its goaltenders, and he was excellent, most notably stopping a Brock Nelson breakaway with a little over six minutes left to maintain Sweden’s one-goal lead.

Ersson said he found out after the morning skate that he would be in later that night.

“It’s kind of nice, actually, finding out a little bit later so you don’t really have time to get nervous. But you see it for what it is, it’s just another game, obviously against a very good team.”

Ersson gave his teammates credit for playing well in front of him, but the reality is the United States had a nearly two-to-one edge in expected goals on Sweden, according to Money puck, and Ersson flipped that edge around.

“Their goalie played awesome,” U.S. forward Matt Boldy said. “We had chances, he made saves.”

“We just didn’t have an answer for Ersson,” forward Dylan Larkin added.

Ersson was only on the team because of an injury to Jacob Markström, and frankly, his play with the Philadelphia Flyers this season would not have warranted his inclusion. But on this one night, Ersson shined in front of a national audience, and in front of his head coach with the Flyers, John Tortorella, who must have been standing behind the Team USA bench wondering where this version of Ersson has been.

### **An audition for the final?**

Team USA missing Matthew Tkachuk and Auston Matthews gave Chris Kreider an opportunity to not get in the lineup but start the game. He grew up about a half hour away and played at Boston College.

That would have been a nice moment on its own, but then Kreider made it even more meaningful when he scored the lone U.S. goal on the game’s opening shift.

Kreider had a solid game from that point on.

“I thought Kreids played really well,” Sullivan said. “Obviously he scores the goal, but he did more than score goals. He can really skate, he’s got good size, he can kill penalties, he played on the power play. We played him with Jack Eichel and I thought he was a good fit there.”

With so many health-related question marks floating around the U.S. roster, perhaps Kreider did enough to be considered for inclusion in the 4 Nations final against Canada on Thursday. Sullivan did not dismiss the possibility, and felt Kreider would fit in well to the style of game that promises to be.

“He’s a big, strong kid that can play a physical game — I would anticipate that it will be a physical game,” Sullivan said. “Both teams play a similar style, both north-south teams that play with a ton of speed and a ton of physicality. I think Kreids, his game, without a doubt suits that.”

## The Athletic / Still-improving Canada rises to meet 4 Nations pressure: 'Let's go make the country proud'

By Chris Johnston – February 18, 2025

Falling short of the 4 Nations Face-Off final simply was not an option for Team Canada. That's the standard 38 million Canadians hold them to. Even more importantly, that's the expectation they place on themselves.

"As Canadians, the players feel the same way as the fans," Drew Doughty said at the outset of a tournament that will culminate with a Canada-U.S. final on Thursday night.

"We expect to win and we're not going to be satisfied with anything but a championship. I think a lot of the guys in here, we feel that pressure obviously, but that's what we thrive under. It doesn't affect our game."

Canada dug deep and delivered its most complete performance yet, beating Finland 5-3 on Monday afternoon. The game was a must-win, and the Canadians took meaningful strides in all aspects of their play after opening the tournament with a 4-3 overtime win over the Swedes and a 3-1 loss to the Americans.

Nathan MacKinnon scored twice after enduring a frustrating night in Saturday's loss. Connor McDavid set the tone with another game-opening goal and looked dangerous with Brayden Point moved up to his wing. Jordan Binnington received his coach's confidence with a third straight start and responded with a 23-save outing. And Cale Makar was a puck-moving machine who logged nearly 24 minutes in his return to the lineup after being forced out by illness over the weekend.

Talk about a palate-cleansing performance to wash away the sour taste of losing to the Americans.

What stood out was how energetic and connected the Canadian attack looked, even though the players had their sleep patterns disrupted while traveling between Montreal and Boston. They didn't arrive until about 6 a.m. Sunday after flying through a blizzard, and then played their first afternoon game of the tournament, needing a regulation victory to advance to the final.

Still, the Canadians shook off those circumstances and took a meaningful step forward as a group, scoring goals off the rush and the forecheck to chase Kevin Lankinen from the Finnish goal while making very few mistakes and avoiding major breakdowns in front of Binnington.

They also showed much more of a shooting mentality after overpassing at times during the loss to Team USA, especially early, registering a tournament-high 11 shots in the first period against the Finns.

"We have to play the game like how we played a tied game with five minutes left; that's how we have to play the entire game," Canada coach Jon Cooper said. "Just stay disciplined and in our process. We don't need to manufacture something out of nothing because we've got the guys who have been able to make plays when it comes down to it."

Organizers will be doing cartwheels about a must-see U.S.-Canada rematch in the 4 Nations final. The Americans initiated three fights in the opening nine seconds of Saturday's game in an effort to, as Brady Tkachuk told reporters, signal to the hockey world: "It's our time now."

But Canada still finds itself one win away from extending a run of best-on-best men's dominance to four straight events after previously taking gold at the 2010 and 2014 Olympics, plus the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

Not to be overlooked in the significance of reaching the 4 Nations final is that it buys the Canadian players and staff another 72 hours together. They'll get two more days of meetings and practices, and top it off with the experience of playing a huge game in a hostile TD Garden against an incredibly deep opponent.

Given it's been nearly nine years since the last event of its kind, plus the fact we're only one year out from the return of NHL players to the 2026 Olympics in Milan, that additional time together is critical.

While the players are obviously focused on the here and now, senior Hockey Canada officials have been looking at the big picture throughout 4 Nations. That's included watching back game tape to critique the individual performances of players with the 2026 Games in mind. And it's even seen Doug Armstrong, who is managing this Canadian team and the Olympic team, dig into how well things are functioning with the equipment and training staffs.

"We've been clear — the two (events) are separate," Hockey Canada senior vice president of high performance Scott Salmond told The Athletic. "We're not here to learn, we're here to win. And we'll learn through that process. I talked to Jon Cooper, and he's so excited, and he said, 'Can you imagine if we didn't have this and today was Game 1 of the Olympics?' We showed up and had two practices. He's like, 'It's crazy.' But now he's going to have all of this under his belt. He's going to have relationships.

"We're going to have a continuity amongst our staff and our process. And we're just going to feel so much more comfortable when we get to Milan because it's the same thing. It happens so fast."

The mantra that has carried Canada to so much success in short-term tournaments is taking positive strides every day. They can certainly make that claim so far at 4 Nations, although the coaching staff will surely be addressing the two five-on-six goals they surrendered to Finland late, turning an easy win into a needless nail-biter.

Or, as Binnington termed it: "A great 50-something minutes or so and then it got a little scrambly."

However, hockey at this level is not a game of perfect.

Any Canadian will tell you it's about getting results.

When Cooper delivered his pregame speech Monday inside the visitor's dressing room at TD Garden, he punctuated it with one final thought: "Let's go make the country proud, OK boys!"

They'll need one more win to truly meet that objective.

When playing for Canada, that's just a fact of life.

## [The Athletic / LeBrun: A Canada-U.S. 4 Nations rematch had to happen. Now here's what's at stake](#)

By Pierre LeBrun – February 18, 2025

It is the dream rematch the 4 Nations Face-Off needed.

“This is great for the game, no matter what country you are from,” Team USA general manager Bill Guerin told The Athletic on Monday after the championship matchup against Canada was set. “This has the makings for another incredible game.”

And we’re going to go out on a limb here and suggest we won’t see a Hanson Brothers redo at the start of the game Thursday night, at what should be a rocking TD Garden in Boston.

No, expect a tight-checking affair in which open ice will be hard to come by. Neither team will want to play too risky. Too much is on the line to open it up. Too much riding to lack discipline.

### **What’s at stake?**

Team USA has a chance to finish the job this time, unlike at the Vancouver Olympics 15 years ago, when the Americans beat Canada in round-robin play but lost the game that mattered — for gold.

Former Team Canada mainstay Chris Pronger had an interesting comment last week when I asked him which of his Olympic gold-medal wins meant the most.

“Probably 2010, because they beat us in the round robin and there was a lot of maybe swelled heads on their side, thinking that they were going to run roughshod over us as we found our solid footing and figured out how we needed to play and come together as a unit,” said the Hockey Hall of Fame defenseman, also an Olympic champion in 2002 at Salt Lake City. “I thought, for the most part, we dominated that gold-medal game and had the better of the chances.”

There was a lot of exuberance among Team USA players Saturday night when they talked to reporters after beating Canada. There was a real sense of achievement in ending Canada’s 17-game win streak in best-on-best matchups, which dated 15 years. That is understandable. You can’t blame this generation of U.S. stars for feeling like what happened Saturday night was significant. Matthew Tkachuk called it the biggest moment in his career next to last June’s Game 7 win in the Stanley Cup Final.

All good. But the American players need to park it now.

If Team USA doesn’t win Thursday night in front of a home crowd, the only thing we’ll remember of that Feb. 15 round-robin matchup years from now will be the three fights in nine seconds. Because the final word will be, “Yeah, but Canada came back to win the big one. Again.” That’s what is truly at stake on Thursday night.

Canada captain Sidney Crosby has a chance to continue his remarkable era of dominance with a fourth best-on-best title (2010 Olympics, 2014 Olympics, 2016 World Cup of Hockey, 4 Nations), not to mention the fact that No. 87 can add to his already legendary reputation by having played this event with one good arm.

Just as importantly, a win for Canada would go a long way toward calming a religiously intense hockey country whose national pride has been dented with back-to-back quarterfinal losses in the World Junior Championship.



Not to mention current world events and political tensions between the U.S. and Canada. A win on Thursday night would be mighty sweet for many Canadians on a number of levels.

On the flip side, after winning back-to-back World Juniors titles for the first time in its history, USA Hockey can make quite a statement Thursday night with a win and announce itself as the king of the hockey hill 12 months before the Olympics in Italy.

The Miracle on Ice in 1980 is unmatched as a moment, and the 1996 World Cup of Hockey upset win was a landmark accomplishment, and both of those events obviously will remain bigger than whatever happens this week. But a win Thursday night to claim the best-on-best 4 Nations, given the Americans' recent junior dominance, arguably would make this feel like the first time in the history of hockey that the United States is truly No. 1 in the men's sport.

No question, the Olympics will be more important in that narrative, but until then, Team USA would carry some well-deserved swagger as the best in the world.

The other winners, regardless of Thursday night's result, are the NHL and hockey itself. There were a lot of people who mocked the 4 Nations when it was announced. As colleague Chris Johnston wrote on Sunday, the event is already a home run, which probably has a lot to do with finally having best-on-best for the first time in eight-and-a-half years. But it's also because of the players' buy-in.

Never mind that many hockey fans have craved best-on-best — the current generation of NHL stars were begging for it.

"It's one of those things that's kind of escaped me throughout my career," Team USA star goalie Connor Hellebuyck said last week. "I had a couple of world championships, but the NHL didn't go to the last Olympics so we missed that opportunity. And then you never know; are you going to get another shot? You've got to stay in your prime for when that opportunity comes.

"Being able to put that jersey on now, it's one of those things that almost felt like it would never happen. Now that it has, it's pretty surreal."

He speaks for every single player in the 4 Nations. They wanted this so badly.

Now a championship game awaits. Two intense rivals giving us one more best-on-best title fight.

Cannot wait.

## The Athletic / 4 Nations takeaways: How Canada beat Finland to reach the final vs. USA

By Michael Russo – February 18, 2025

BOSTON — Canada's big boys made a statement on Monday afternoon: They want a rematch with the United States.

That will come on Thursday night, after Canada — despite a late scare — beat Finland 5-3 at TD Garden to punch its ticket to the 4 Nations Face-Off final against the rival Team USA.

Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon each had two points, with both stars scoring on consecutive shots 46 seconds apart within the game's first five minutes.

MacKinnon also scored in the second period to give Canada a 4-0 lead, giving him three goals in the tournament. Brayden Point also scored for Canada, with Sam Reinhart assisting on three goals. Things got tight late, as Finland pulled to within 4-3 in the final minute before Sidney Crosby scored an empty net goal (Crosby also had an assist).

Canada goalie Jordan Binnington had a shutout until Esa Lindell scored with 6:41 left. Mikael Granlund then scored twice, 23 seconds apart, with an extra attacker on to give Canada the scare of a lifetime before Crosby ended any thoughts of a miraculous Finland comeback.

"The last thing we wanted to do was go home," MacKinnon said. "We plan on playing a little better Thursday."

The win by Canada made Monday night's USA-Sweden game meaningless — other than the Americans just hoping to escape without injuries.

Matthew Tkachuk, who didn't play the final 12 1/2 minutes Saturday night against Canada, did not play and hopes to rest up for Thursday's showdown against Canada, with former Boston College standout Chris Kreider taking his spot against the Swedes. Former Boston University goalie Jake Oettinger, with his entire family in town from Minnesota, will give Connor Hellebuyck a respite and play against Sweden.

But after Monday night's game, Sweden's tournament is over, meaning players from both Sweden and Finland can return to their NHL teams. Practices throughout the NHL are allowed to resume on Tuesday afternoon.

### **McDavid and MacKinnon don't waste time**

The Finns got off to a decent start, but Canada scored on two of its first three scoring chances — and on two in a row.

McDavid curled away from Nikolas Matinpalo and then fired through traffic to surprise goalie Kevin Lankinen, then a shift later, Reinhart chipped a puck past Lindell for MacKinnon to catch up to. MacKinnon quickly scored the first of his two goals.

MacKinnon, who has scored six goals in four career games against Lankinen, ended the Vancouver goalie's night when he buried Crosby's pass five minutes into the second period. Juuse Saros, who gave up six goals in Finland's opener against the U.S., replaced him.

### **Crosby redeems himself**

There's no doubt Crosby beat himself up after Saturday night's 3-1 loss to the United States. It was his pass right onto Matt Boldy's stick that led to Dylan Larkin's game winner.

So it wasn't a shock that Sid the former Kid, the tournament's oldest player at 37, redeemed himself against Finland.

He was a threat skating with MacKinnon and Reinhart and set up his Nova Scotia pal, MacKinnon, in the second with a sensational pass from behind the net on what turned out to be the winning goal.

Crosby is tied with the U.S.'s Zach Werenski for the tournament lead with four assists — all primary — and also clinched the game with the empty netter.

### **Cooper finds Point more ice time**

Canada coach Jon Cooper said after Saturday's loss to the U.S. that he needed to give his Tampa Bay Lightning star, Point, more ice time. He bumped him up to McDavid's wing, and voila, more ice time and a goal.

Point, who had a breakaway turned away by Lankinen 2:19 into the game, buried Travis Sanheim's rebound to cap Canada's three-goal third period. McDavid also assisted on Point's goal.

It was Point's first goal of the tournament and he logged 16:01 of ice time.

### **Sticking with Binnington**

So much has been made of Canada's goaltending before and during the tournament, especially because of the perceived snub of Vezina Trophy contender Logan Thompson.

So it wasn't a shock that there had been some mutterings in the press the past few days asking if Canada should turn to Adin Hill in lieu of Binnington on Monday afternoon.

Instead, Cooper stuck with Binnington and he repaid the faith with a solid outing — at least until the final 6:41 of the game when he allowed three goals. He finished with 23 saves.

"Listen, the kid's played great for us," Cooper said before the game. "He's given us a chance to win and ultimately, in the NHL, if you can limit an opponent to two goals or less in a game it should give you a chance to win, and he's done that for us. He did that for us the other night. It was lack of goal scoring that hurt us.

"I think the one thing that's underappreciated about Jordan is his gamesmanship and his ability to play the puck. And if you look at him in all of our clean breakouts and exits the other night (against the U.S.), he was the one that started it. Hence why he had a point in the game, because he's the one that starts the McDavid breakaway. And so there's so many more aspects to the game. But he gives us a chance to win. He gave us a chance to win the last two games and unfortunately it didn't happen (against the U.S.). But we've got to give him a little run support."

### **Makar returns, leads Canada in ice time**

After missing the U.S. game due to illness, Cale Makar returned against Finland and showed no signs of still being under the weather.

He had four shots, attempted three others, blocked four shots and led Canada in 23:57 of ice time.

Thomas Harley was inserted into Saturday's lineup to replace Makar and he played a terrific game, especially considering the circumstances. Harley warmed up Monday but was scratched even though the NHL and NHLPA, which changed the rules on the fly to deal with Canada being short-handed since losing Shea Theodore against Sweden, informed Canada it would be permitted to play Makar and Harley in the same lineup.

In the end, Cooper opted to go with Sanheim, who made the initial roster in December.

## **Finland's big weapons didn't fire**

Finland was the most offensively limited team in the tournament, but still had some very talented forwards. They desperately needed all of them to produce. Almost none of them did.

Aleksander Barkov had one goal. Same with Mikko Rantanen. Sebastian Aho, Roope Hintz and Patrik Laine had none.

Finland was always going to bank on playing a patient, defensively responsible, counterattacking game, but when you go down 2-0 in the first five minutes of an elimination game, you need to open things up a bit and hope your offensive leaders can get you back in it. And that never happened, both from a tactical standpoint and from those offensive leaders.

## **What they're saying**

"I thought we played extremely well tonight. The way we managed the puck, you've got the best players in the world doing things they're probably not accustomed to, and all for the benefit of our team winning hockey games. It was a 200-foot game. You've got McDavid, MacKinnon, Crosby and all these guys dumping pucks and going and getting them. And it was the way we had to play to win this game, and we did it." – Cooper

"I don't care who's favored, who's not. We come in here to win this. I'm really looking forward to (Thursday's game). This is why we came here. Regardless if other people out there are saying we're the underdogs, I mean, everybody in that room thinks we have a good chance to win." – Cooper

"We got off to a great start, some big goals early. We were playing on our toes and to get those I thought was huge. We played pretty solid throughout. We were probably guilty of sitting back there late and they capitalized, but give them credit. They didn't give up. They kept pushing. Tough team to play against, so it was important to get the lead." – Crosby

"You want an opportunity again, so today that's what we gave ourselves a chance to do." – Reinhart on the rematch against the Americans

"When you put the puck in his hands and he gets a little gallop going, he's always gonna find a player or hopefully drive it to the net. He's a very incredible player and obviously he showed it tonight." – Makar on MacKinnon

"I did everything I possibly could to play in (Saturday's) game, and obviously we get another crack at them now. Feeling a lot better now." – Makar

"It's going to be exciting. The fans here love the game. They're going to be very excited, very energized, bringing tons of emotion. It's going to be a lot of fun." – Brad Marchand, on playing in his home Bruins rink on Thursday night

"Just like everyone else here in this tournament, we wanted to get to the final. We wanted to win the tournament. Obviously, today wasn't our day. We didn't play well enough to win. And Canada is a great team. They showed us why they're really good and obviously capitalized on our mistakes and played really well." – Barkov, Finland's captain

## The Athletic / Weekend NHL rankings, 4 Nations Face-Off edition: A Saturday night for the ages

By Sean McIndoe – February 18, 2025

**Here are this week's NHL power rankings:** The same as last week's.

That's it. That's the list. As you may have noticed, there haven't been any NHL games played over the last week, which means there's no reason to shift any of the rankings. We haven't even had any trades, meaning the only team that's seen its outlook change at all is the Vegas Golden Knights, who lost a key defenseman to injury. They haven't been in the top five for a few weeks already, so it's status quo.

So yeah, if you're here for the NHL rankings, thanks for the click and we'll see you next week. But there's also an international tournament playing out, so let's turn an abbreviated version of the rankings into a chance to talk about that instead.

### **How about that Saturday night?**

Look, you don't have to like fighting in hockey, and in a lot of cases I'm right there with you, but that was awesome. Connor McDavid's highlight-reel goal and Jake Guentzel's quick reply seemed to set the stage for an all-timer.

The one downside to Saturday's cinema wasn't so much that the two teams eventually settled down to play hockey, but that the hockey they played defaulted to the usual defense-first slog rather than the two star-studded teams going back and forth. The last 50 minutes keep this game from being a true classic, but it's probably still in the top 10 just based on the start, which is all anyone will remember.

More importantly, it means Team USA is locked into Thursday's final. Their opponent will be the winner of this afternoon's Canada-Finland game, if that win comes in regulation. If Canada and Finland go to overtime, the winner temporarily stays alive but could see their spot stolen by Sweden if they beat the Americans in regulation tonight. Given that the U.S. has nothing to play for, well ... let's just say Canada and Finland are going to want to take care of business rather than open themselves up to needing help from an American team that might not be eager to offer it.

No bonus five this week, but we'll borrow the general weekend rankings format to break down what's worked and what hasn't in 4 Nations so far.

### **4 Nations Face-Off: The good**

The bright spotlight of an international best-on-best is a great time to change perceptions. Halfway through this one, these players and concepts are already looking better than they did coming in.

**5. Sidney Crosby** — You wouldn't have thought a guy who's on pace to finish his career as a consensus top-five player ever would have much room left for tire-pumping, but here we are. Crosby came into this tournament looking like a guy who's been desperate to get back to international hockey — or, given the state of things in Pittsburgh, maybe just any high-stakes hockey at all. He's looked great during the games, and fans have eaten up his "aw shucks" persona that has him picking up pucks before practices. Now it feels like he may be the key to Canada's fading chances.

And he deserves it, because Sidney Crosby rules. Do you realize how good you have to be to set up Mitch Marner in the clutch?

(We kid. But while we're at it, congrats to Marner on shutting up at least a few of his critics with the biggest goal of his career.)

**4. Ten-minute overtime and the 3-2-1-0 points system** — Both options are vastly superior to what the NHL uses for its regular season today, and we've already seen it play out. Marner's OT winner doesn't happen without the extended overtime, delivering an electric moment instead of an anti-climactic shootout. Who wouldn't want that? OK, maybe Nathan MacKinnon, who spent the OT double-shifting while going end to end and taking every shot, then complained that 10 minutes of sudden death was too tiring. And sure, if coaches never use their bottom six, they risk wearing down their top guys. But at this point, extended overtime feels inevitable, so keep the cots ready.

Moving to a 3-2-1-0 system would be a bigger change, but anything that discourages teams from playing for overtime is a good thing. Today's Canada-Finland game, and its impact on Sweden's chances of staying alive, will hinge on whether or not the winner can finish in regulation. That adds an extra element of drama, and means the third period of a close game could be a must-watch instead of a holding pattern.

I wish I was as optimistic as some of you who think this is the NHL's way of soft-launching a better system; I think they're being used here because of the limitations of a short tournament. But anything that helps normalize these upgrades for eventual adaptation is a good thing.

**3. Sweden vs. Finland** — Let's face it, while this is an international tournament, the focus is on the North American teams. They're the main characters, not to mention the home teams. But if that meant you skipped Saturday afternoon's showdown between the tournament's two European entries, you missed a heck of a game.

Both teams are still alive heading into today's action, and you know that both would love to play spoiler and take the title away from the two favorites. They just might do it.

**2. Connor Hellebuyck** — We already knew Team USA had the best goalie in the tournament, and he's looked the part so far. The twist here is that the only bruise on Hellebuyck's otherwise stellar resume has been some disappointing postseasons, especially last year's. A so-so showing in the 4 Nations would have led to all sorts of resurrected narratives about whether Hellebuyck is a big-game goalie. Instead, he seems to be following the same path as guys like Roberto Luongo and Carey Price, legends without Cup rings whose international success dulled any dumb "not a real winner" criticisms.

**1. The Montreal crowds** — Absolute A+ performance. No notes.

Tonight is a reminder of the one advantage that NHL-controlled best-on-best has over the Olympics: the ability to handpick the locations of the games, and put them in rabid hockey markets in front of fans who can push the intensity to another level.

And yes, that includes the booing. Anthems are a sensitive topic for many, and that's fine. I gave my thoughts on the issue in this thread a few days ago, but here's the summary: Given the circumstances, the threats being launched Canada's way from its one-time ally, and the palpable (and completely justified) anger all that has created up here, the Montreal fans were extraordinarily reasonable in just booing a song.

And yes, American fans will give it back today, and even more so if we get a Canada-USA rematch in the final. That's fine, too. You shove someone, they're allowed to shove back. Just don't forget who started the fight.

**Not ranked:** The Tkachuk brothers, who drove the offense in Game 1, were front and center in Saturday's wild start, and have become the stars of the show so far. Erik Karlsson, who's at least occasionally looked like his old self for Sweden. Dylan Larkin, who finally got his signature big-game

moment. And the dark-on-dark uniform color schemes we saw when Canada took on both Sweden and the U.S. and will get again in tonight's game.

#### **4 Nations Face-Off: The not-so-good**

The flip side of the last section, these are the perceptions that have taken a beating over the last week.

**5. Shea Theodore** — We've seen significant injuries to star players in best-on-best tournaments before, including Islanders captain John Tavares in 2014 and Ottawa's Dominik Hasek in 2006. The occasional injury is unavoidable in a tournament where the intensity is this high, but that doesn't make the outcome any less brutal for Theodore and the Golden Knights.

**4. The rules about replacing players** — Did you enjoy the days-long debate about the minutia of the roster rules for this tournament that's only existed for a few months?

Let's summarize. Theodore got hurt in the opener and was quickly ruled out for the tournament, a terrible break both for the player and team. Canada, like every team in 4 Nations, came in with just one spare each at forward, at defense and in goal, meaning Theodore's injury left them with the minimum of six blueliners. But the rules said they couldn't bring in a replacement until they dropped below 18 skaters, raising the possibility that they could even end up playing a 13-5 split if another defenseman got hurt.

That's a bit of a mess, but it's apparently the rules everyone agreed on. But then we got 24 hours of debate on what exactly it meant to have a spare. Canada couldn't put somebody on the roster, but could they contact someone? Could that player fly into town to be ready if needed? Could they practice with the team? Eventually, the level of micro-details we were reaching started to blend into parody. Then the whole thing took on even more urgency when Cale Makar missed a practice due to illness.

Eventually, we found out Thomas Harley was the team's pick for a replacement, and the NHL and NHLPA agreed to change the rules so that he was allowed to be at practice with the team on Saturday, although he wasn't allowed on the ice unless Makar left. Makar did miss the game, which meant Harley was finally allowed to pull on the maple leaf. The whole thing was honestly exhausting. Lord help us if somebody gets hurt today and we have to do it all over again by sending the Air Force to air-lift Jacob Bryson off a beach in the Caribbean somewhere.

**3. Juuse Saros** — It's been a miserable season for Saros, who's been posting career-worst numbers for a Predators team that ranks as the league's biggest disappointment. Not great for a guy whose eight-year extension hasn't even kicked in yet. But heading into 4 Nations, you could have seen a path to redemption for the struggling netminder, and even a scenario in which he led an underdog Team Finland to an upset or two, rebuilding his reputation as a big-game goalie.

Nope. Saros was a mildly surprising pick to start for Finland against Team USA ahead of Kevin Lankinen, a far less-seasoned goalie who's having the better NHL season. Saros started off fine, but was shelled in the third period of a 6-1 loss. Team Finland coach Antti Pennanen quickly named Lankinen the starter for Saturday's game against Sweden.

Given their overall talent level and (especially) run of injuries on the blue line, Finland was always going to need a miracle goaltending run to contend for the title. Saros seemed like a decent bet to deliver it while providing the Predators a reminder of the goalie they hope they're locked into for almost a decade to come. Instead, a rough season got even rougher.

**2. Elias Pettersson** — Like Hellebuyck, Pettersson came into this tournament with some recent big-game disappointment and a chance to shed some of that reputation. Unlike Hellebuyck, he hasn't done so ... yet. Sweden's tournament might be over before they step on the ice tonight, but it could also be a win-

and-in scenario where a few points from Pettersson would flip his script. But so far, he's point-less through two games with only two shots and has barely made an impact.

**1. Everyone who said this tournament wouldn't work** — A glorified All-Star Game, you say? Whoops.

Sure, I had my doubts too. And it's still possible this all ends with Finland beating Team USA 8-1 in the final while fans in Boston sit on their hands, and the first and presumably only 4 Nations Face-Off gets mothballed away with the Young Gunz and the Unified Team as a weird artifact of international history. We're not in the end zone yet, so don't spike the football and all that.

But so far, this tournament has rocked. The intensity that some were worried about has been there, and then some. The crowds have been fantastic. The play has been strong, with plenty of highlight-worthy moments that should linger beyond the tournament itself.

I'm not sure what more you could want. And it's all left anyone who didn't expect best-on-best hockey to be great looking pretty silly. That includes the NHL (and NHLPA), who inexcusably let nearly a decade go by between tournaments. That was dumb, but what's done is done. With NHL players heading back to the Olympics next year, and a true return of the World Cup now on the schedule for 2028, all is right with the hockey world again.

**Not ranked:** Jordan Binnington, who hasn't been awful but has given up a dicey goal in both games and certainly hasn't quieted the concerns about the lack of Canadian goaltending. Auston Matthews doesn't have a goal yet and has only managed two shots. Filip Gustavsson's numbers are ugly, although illness may be playing a role there.



## ESPN / 4 Nations Face-Off final: Who wins U.S.-Canada Round 2?

By Ryan S. Clark, Kristen Shilton – February 18, 2025

The 4 Nations Face-Off final is set. A 5-3 win for Canada in Monday's game against Finland has pushed it through to the championship game, where it will face the United States. The U.S. clinched its spot in the final with a 3-1 win over Canada on Saturday.

If the return match between the two North American rivals is anything like the first one, hockey fans are in for another treat. That game -- which featured three fights in the first nine seconds of play -- was heralded by many players as one of the most intense games in which they'd played in their careers.

With the teams set for the final game of the inaugural 4 Nations Face-Off, let's explore the players who have been most important to each squad, the X factors for Thursday's game, and just how confident each nation should be in its goaltender.

### **United States**

#### **What we've learned so far**

All the conversations about what this version of Team USA could achieve has manifested itself in a few ways. Against Finland, the U.S. looked the part of a team that was comfortable playing in a tight-checking game -- only to provide the sort of offensive surge with three goals on its first four shots to start the third period.

The performance against Canada further amplified how the squad could rely on its collective talent, capitalizing on mistakes while having the flexibility to withstand a late push.

#### **Team MVP through round robin**

Jacob Slavin. Saying "a Tkachuk" would have made sense, considering Brady and Matthew combined to score four of nine goals for the U.S. through its first two games. And while the brothers' exploits have received quite a bit of attention, there's an argument to be made for the role Slavin has played in the success of the team -- particularly as Matthew missed the game against Sweden due to injury, and Brady left after the first period.

Sweden defenseman Victor Hedman is the only skater who is averaging more ice time than Slavin during the tournament. Slavin is averaging more than 23 minutes per game, while anchoring a penalty kill that has been perfect through two games, which also speaks to what has allowed the U.S. to succeed within its defensive structure.

#### **X factor: Special teams**

Entering the third day of the tournament, there have been only four power-play goals. The U.S. was responsible for scoring two of those goals on five chances. And that's being done without one of the NHL's premier power-play quarterbacks in Vancouver Canucks star captain Quinn Hughes, who sat out the tournament because of injury.

The ability to capitalize on the power play has been balanced by a penalty kill that went 4-for-4 through two games because of a structure that not only moves with the puck but works to disrupt passing lanes at all times.

**Goalie confidence: (9.5/10)**

You might have heard: Connor Hellebuyck is another Vezina Trophy away from being the only American to win three. That would put him in a category with Martin Brodeur, Dominik Hasek and Patrick Roy, among others.

His strong performance in the regular season has carried over to the 4 Nations so far, with Hellebuyck allowing just two goals total in two games. But even with those two goals allowed, Hellebuyck made a number of saves that either made Finland look listless in its opening game, and leaving Canada frustrated in its inability to consistently take advantage of its high-danger chances in a 3-1 loss.

## **Canada**

### **What we've learned so far**

Canada has taken its time finding a rhythm. It was frequently its own worst enemy in the round robin, and those mistakes often proved costly. Canada showed a different confidence in its last game against Finland, which seemed driven by their star players setting a tone.

But Canada can't just rely on the likes of Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon to find twine against the U.S. There are strong role players in Canada's bottom six who can -- and should -- have an impact, whether it's Sam Bennett adding some punch (literally) or the threat of a Mitch Marner-Anthony Cirelli connection.

And when it comes to Canada's blue line, it's not the same without Cale Makar -- that was obvious within minutes of him stepping back into the lineup for Monday's game after sitting out the first game against the U.S. on Saturday because of illness. Jordan Binnington also proved in Monday's clash why coach Jon Cooper keeps going back to him -- Binnington can come through for Canada when it counts.

### **Team MVP through round robin**

Connor McDavid. Now, this is tough, because Sidney Crosby is Canada's points leader (with five) and Cooper essentially (or actually?) called him a god in Monday's postgame news conference. And MacKinnon also has been excellent.

But it's tough to discount what McDavid has done. He scored the opening goal in their last two games (including the lone marker on Connor Hellebuyck in the first matchup against the Americans), and the way he dominated offensively in Monday's game with Finland was pure magic.

There's no one who can flip a switch quite like McDavid. If he's hitting that stride now, that's everything Canada needs to feel confident ahead of the final.

### **X factor: Scoring depth**

Does Canada have enough of it? They're about to find out. The U.S. relied on its role players such as Dylan Larkin to win Saturday.

Canada's scoring to date has come primarily from its top two lines, and that's important -- critical, even. But Canada can't be one-dimensional in its attack. There's enough talent on each line that, when showcased early, can make the U.S. nervous. Canada has to tap into that mentality more than it has in recent games.

If the top lines are nullified by the U.S. -- and vice versa -- then victory could come down to which team gets the most out of its third and fourth units. And the way Cooper chooses to dole out ice time from puck drop also will be telling, and will show what he learned about how the teams matched up in the previous meeting.

### **Goalie confidence: (7.5/10)**

Jordan Binnington is a polarizing figure. Cooper's determination to stick with him as Canada's starter throughout this tournament has been met with criticism, confusion and countless questions. His stats at the event also have been underwhelming (.892 save percentage, 2.60 goals-against average).

But Cooper hasn't wavered, and Binnington was the best he has been so far in Canada's game against Finland.

Now it comes down to whether the Stanley Cup-winning St. Louis Blues backstop can carry that performance over into the final -- at least the one he turned in for 55 minutes (giving up two 6-on-5 goals to the Finns in three minutes was a tough look). Timely stops -- that's what Hellebuyck has provided the U.S., and it's what Binnington has increasingly shown he can give to Canada.

Granted, Binnington didn't get much help offensively from his teammates in that first outing against the Americans, but regardless if that's the case again Thursday, Binnington must save his most complete effort for this final bout.

## ESPN / Grades, top players from Canada's victory over Finland

By Kristen Shilton – February 18, 2025

### Reactions

With a berth in the 4 Nations Face-Off championship game on the line, Canada started off hot with two quick goals from Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon en route to a 5-3 win over Finland.

There was late drama, as the Finns scored three goals in the third period to pull within a goal, before Canada's captain Sidney Crosby scored an empty-net goal to seal the deal.

The win pushes Canada's round-robin point total to five, putting them out of reach of Sweden:

Here are grades for Canada and Finland, including the biggest takeaways, the key player to watch in the next game for Canada and lingering questions for both countries.

### Grading the teams

#### Canada: A-

This was the Canada we expected to see at 4 Nations. The Canadians were immediately engaged on both sides of the puck and finally got their star-studded offense rolling with three first period goals from Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Brayden Point.

Having Cale Makar back in the lineup -- after he missed Saturday's matchup against the U.S. with an illness -- gave the Canadians' defense a noted boost, as he and Colorado teammate Devon Toews were excellent anchoring the team's blue line.

Coach Jon Cooper put Jordan Binnington back in net for this one, and Binnington rewarded his coach's confidence with a solid showing between the pipes. And Cooper's changes to his forward groups -- particularly creating a top line of McDavid, Point and Mark Stone -- paid off with a more balanced attack.

The key, though, was that Canada (mostly) didn't make the sort of costly mistakes (i.e. turnovers) they did against Sweden and the U.S. Canada was solid in every aspect and appeared to be at their most dangerous heading into a final clash with the Americans.

#### Finland: C+

The Finns looked deflated when McDavid scored Canada's opening goal early in the first period, and they could never quite reignite the swagger that carried them past Sweden. At least not until the game's final minutes, when they scored a pair of 6-on-5 goals to cut the Canadian lead to 4-3.

But the surge -- driven by Mikael Granlund, scoring twice in the final three minutes -- was too late for Finland. By the time Kevin Lankinen had allowed four goals (and was replaced by Juuse Saros) in the second period, Finland was in an hole against an overwhelming amount of talent on the other side.

The Finns' smothering forecheck had been their calling card throughout 4 Nations play, but Canada also countered with their best defense showing of the tournament, taking away opportunities for Finland to establish extensive zone time. What pockets of pressure Finland did generate around Binnington produced nothing on the scoresheet. Even Finland's power play in the second period that might have sparked some momentum came up empty.

In the end, Canada made the most of its opportunities when Finland simply could not.

### What we learned

## **Canada finds chemistry -- and balance**

Canada managed just one goal against the U.S. despite a star-studded lineup of offensive firepower. So, coach Jon Cooper made adjustments against Finland to start maximizing more of the team's talent, and it worked -- Canada's new top line of Connor McDavid, Mark Stone and Braydon Point produced two of the the game's first three goals (courtesy of McDavid and Point), and MacKinnon added two goals from the second line.

That sort of scoring explosion is exactly what Canada needed to create confidence and take control from the get-go. In a short event like this, it's not always obvious how players will catch on with one another. Even if it took a few games, tapping into the correct combinations now is everything Canada needed to feel confident going into the final.

## **The Canadian way on display**

Cooper spoke about his team's identity before Monday's game and emphasized that his team shouldn't try to manufacture something from nothing -- which has come back to hurt them in previous games. Canada showed against Finland how much difference discipline and patience can make.

Throughout much of the game, Canada wasn't forcing plays and turning pucks over. There was a clear commitment to highlighting their two-way game, back-checking and breaking the puck out well in transition. The details Canada had skimmed over before were their strength against Finland, and it was how the team prevented the furious Finnish forecheck from becoming a problem.

Now, Canada did get away from those intricacies in the final minutes when Finland pushed back with a pair of goals. But there was also an urgency in Canada's overall performance in this elimination game that bodes well for what's to come against the U.S. There was no saving it for the third period; Canada was ready to play from the start and injected each shift with that energy.

## **Player to watch for the final**

### **Jordan Binnington**

#### **G, Canada**

Canada's goaltending was under heavy scrutiny well before the tournament started. And Binnington saved his best performance -- so far -- for Canada's first elimination game. He was excellent when it counted most against Finland -- particularly at the end of the second period -- and what Canada needs is for Binnington to hit copy/paste on that come Thursday night.

Cooper has said repeatedly that Binnington has gotten the call because he gives Canada a chance to win. But it's not just how many saves Binnington makes against the Americans; it's about making the timely stops when they matter most.

And yes, Binnington did give up two 6-on-5 goals late to Finland, but that was also a product of the players in front of him. Bend, don't break. Binnington has improved game-over-game at 4 Nations so far. Canada must hope he has saved the best for last -- especially if Connor Hellebuyck turns up in Vezina Trophy-worthy form at the other end.

## **Lingering questions**

### **Can Canada crack Connor Hellebuyck?**

Canada put its offensive prowess on display early against Finland to take a 4-0 lead, but then didn't score again until Sidney Crosby's empty-net goal in the game's final seconds. Did Canada start preserving

its lead too soon when they should have kept pressing for more? It's possible. And that's not the way to beat Team USA.

Hellebuyck looked strong as ever in the first meeting between these teams, and after McDavid registered the game's first goal Saturday night, there was nothing getting past the USA's netminder.

It's imperative that Canada's big boys make Hellebuyck uncomfortable from the start and capitalize on their opportunities; there don't project to be many.

Plus, Canada's role players need to step up like the U.S.'s Dylan Larkin did on Saturday. It's a whole team effort up front that will put Canada over the top. Can they provide it and take some pressure off Binnington?

### **What difference will a healthy defense make for Finland at the Olympics?**

The Finns' blue line took several hits as Miro Heiskanen, Rasmus Ristolainen and Jani Hakanpaa were ruled out prior to the tournament with injuries. Heiskanen was an especially tough loss for Finland, but if he's available for 2026 international play, that's a massive advantage (in the same way Canada having Makar back on Monday was for them).

Because it's that side of the puck where Finland shines brightest -- they can put on defensive clinics that stifle some of the world's best skaters (we saw that in full force in their first period against the U.S. last week).

Finland can only wonder "what if" now about their showing at 4 Nations. The results could be quite different for them in a year's time with better luck on the injury front.

## [Sportsnet.ca / 'We want them again': Canada fired up for USA revenge final](#)

By Luke Fox – February 18, 2025

BOSTON — “We want them again.”

Late Saturday night in Montreal, Sam Bennett — only minutes removed from punching one Tkachuk and losing to a couple of them — was already making a date with revenge for Thursday.

“I expect more of the same,” said Team Canada’s wrecking ball of the 4 Nations firecracker rematch we all wanted. “It’s the greatest rivalry in hockey.”

To the league and its players, the fans and the North American rightsholders, the swelling pool of hockey-related revenue and those who boo anthems and root for chaos (and to Mr. Bennett, specifically): Breathe relief. We got what we wanted.

The perfectly scripted final between the dominant hockey country and the fiercest threat to the throne goes 8 p.m. Thursday in Boston, and the cheapest ticket is going for \$1,821.09 (Canadian).

“We’re obviously really excited about having another crack at these guys,” said Brad Marchand, after he and the Canadians survived the round robin with a 5-3 nail-biter over a spunky Team Finland. “It’s the matchup everybody wanted. So, it’s going to be an extremely intense game, one we’re all going to be looking forward to.”

Anticipation for this dream championship has been swelling like border tensions and nasty weather, spiking with Saturday’s visceral mayhem in Montreal.

“That first game, it put everybody on notice that this wasn’t just a walk-in-the-park tournament, that this is something the players wanted and are taking very seriously.” U.S. captain Auston Matthews said.

“The last thing we wanted to do was go home today,” said Nathan MacKinnon, after a two-goal, plus-3 effort in Monday’s must-win. “We’d love to play them again. We feel like we could beat those guys.”

Devon Toews, MacKinnon’s teammate twice over, goes a step further: “We expect to win.”

To that end, adjustments are necessary on Canada’s part, and those began to take shape in a victory over Finland that flipped from blowout to barely.

Power plays have been tough to come by here, and coach Jon Cooper wasn’t getting enough offence from Canada’s star-studded top six.

Cup winners Brayden Point (a natural centre) and Mark Stone (a smart passer and willing digger) were promoted to top centre Connor McDavid’s wings — a move that paid off almost instantly, as McDavid slung a puck bar-and-in to open Monday’s scoring. The plucky Point also scored.

This dropped Sam Reinhart to MacKinnon’s second unit, and the Florida Panther rewarded the Lightning coach with a three-assist show.

It also pushed Mitch Marner — who began on McDavid’s line and was Game 1’s OT hero — all the way down to 12:46 in ice time, his tournament low.

Maybe a McDavid-Marner combo looked attractive on Cooper’s bar napkin, but both playmakers prefer to control pace with the puck on their blades. It was a miss.

This is pressure-cooked trial-and-error with scant room for the latter.

“You see which guys are going and which are not,” Cooper explained. “I thought Pointer would be a good fit with (McDavid and Stone), and he was.”

Yet despite the insta-chemistry of Cooper’s rejigged top six — which drummed up a 4-0 lead by the 25:03 mark and would generate all of Canada’s goals — three unanswered goals by the Finns in the final seven minutes gave the favourites a fright with their second goalie yanked.

“It got tense there,” Point said.

“It was ugly,” McDavid upped. “Ugly way to win the game, for sure. Closer than we would’ve liked.”

“If anything, we got great video if we play five-on-six Thursday,” Cooper quipped.

And a great look at a leader saying enough is enough.

With Finland pressing hard for a miracle OT, Sidney Crosby crushed Mikael Granlund with a hit at centre ice before burying a 100-footer into an empty net.

“You want to meet your hero, and you want them to be your hero. Honestly, a lot of times, it doesn’t happen,” Cooper said. “Well, the light that you look at Sidney Crosby is still the same light when you meet him.

“In our country, he walks on water.”

So, we gaze across the North End’s frozen causeway to Thursday, which will be hard-checking and claustrophobic.

Canada must solve a locked-in Connor Hellebuyck, manage the puck better through the neutral zone, and sustain pressure with a fiercer forecheck.

Mistakes will get amplified. Heroes will be born. Knuckles and sphincters will be clenched.

“Everybody’s going to be really fired up for it and excited,” Cale Makar said. “And there’s probably not a better city in the U.S. to have this game in.”

This place will be loud and angry and there’s nowhere else a hockey lover would rather be.

“We came here for this purpose,” Cooper said. “And now it’s win one more game. It just happens to be against the team that beat us after the fireworks that went off on Saturday night. Should be a pretty good made-for-TV event.”

### **Fox’s Fast Five**

- Makar went from ill to ill.

The Canadians are now 2-0 with their No. 1 defenceman in the lineup, and his newfound health — which should only improve with another two days to recuperate — should be the top reason for belief that Team Canada can reverse the result in the rematch.

“We get another crack at them now,” Makar grins. “You dream of that as a kid playing in Canada against the U.S.”

Makar clocked a team-high 23:57 Monday, controlled play as usual, ripped four shots on goal, and slotted his fellow defencemen into more appropriate roles.

“He’s a star,” Cooper says. “He can play half the game, and he’s a one-man breakout. He just glides out there on the ice. But his reads are phenomenal. I mean, it’s a luxury, let’s be honest. I was so glad to have him back.”



- For better or worse, the loyalty to Jordan Binnington is only growing.

With Jake Oettinger getting Monday's nod for the Americans, Binnington survives as the tournament's only goalie to hold sole possession of his nation's net for all three games.

His save percentage isn't sparkling (.892), but he's made some big saves and helped eliminate Scandinavia.

Turning to Adin Hill now — after the Golden Knight will have gone two full weeks between starts — is not an option.

- Canada started the Finland game with the ultimate All-Jerk\* Line of Marchand, Bennett, and Travis Konecny. (\*On the ice only. Lovely men to chat with.)

Cooper on Marchand: "His heart's the shape of a maple leaf."

- With Finland acting as Monday's "home" team and taking over the Boston Bruins dressing room, it is bizarre seeing Marchand and Canada GM Don Sweeney being restricted to the cramped visitors' quarters.

"Different being on the other side of it," Marchand says.

- Bummer that fans who bought tickets to Monday's USA-Sweden contest will be watching an exhibition that means nothing more than pride. Hope they also bought a pair for Thursday.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Injury concerns grow for Team USA after loss to Sweden at 4 Nations Face-Off](#)

By Eric Engels – February 18, 2025

BOSTON — A meaningless affair turned out to be a costly one for Team USA, with its best player through their first two contests of this 4 Nations Face-Off finishing Game 3 in the infirmary instead of on the ice.

That the Americans lost 2-1 to previously winless Sweden on Monday should be a back-pocket concern to losing Brady Tkachuk, the net-crashing king of this tournament who went full force into the post midway through the first period and only returned to the game for a 14-second shift before it was announced his night was over.

USA coach Mike Sullivan said afterwards Tkachuk's departure due to a lower-body injury was precautionary and that all signs were pointing towards him playing in Thursday's final against Canada, but there's no denying he could be one of several Americans going into that game feeling less than 100 per cent.

Brother Matthew is another.

He missed most of the third period of Saturday's final-clinching 3-1 win over Canada Saturday with a lower-body injury and was kept out of Monday's game.

But in an appearance on TNT during play, Matthew Tkachuk told broadcasters Kenny Albert and Ed Olczyk: "I'm expecting the best environment I've ever played in on Thursday night and I'm so excited."

Whether USA captain Auston Matthews will be available for that one is up in the air after missing Monday's game with some upper-body discomfort. It's also unclear if Charlie McAvoy will be healed from his upper-body injury in time to play.

The Boston Globe reported Monday that McAvoy was admitted to hospital.

"We'll probably have more information (Tuesday) with those guys," said Sullivan.

He added contingency plans would be discussed then and said, "We're hopeful we're going to get some of these guys back."

It left the door open to the possibility that at least one of them might not play Thursday.

That might have been the case even before Brady Tkachuk left Monday's game. And he wasn't the only one to head down USA's tunnel during play.

Vincent Trochek was seen shaking off a hand injury before briefly leaving during the first period. He played just 1:53 in the third period and only 10:48 on the night, which belonged to the Swedes.

They got goals from Gustav Nyquist and Jesper Bratt — and 31 saves from third-stringer Samuel Ersson, who was sensational in place of Linus Ullmark and Filip Gustavsson, who were both too sick to start — and carried play for pockets of the game.

USA was hoping to use this one as a tune-up for Thursday's rematch with Canada but ultimately came out of it with things — and bodies — to work on.

"I think we had a couple bad plays on those goals, but we had our looks," said Jack Hughes. "We had a lot of looks and we just didn't put them in. We can definitely build on that, but we just have to look forward to Thursday."

He'll have to hope his game comes to life against Canada in Boston.

The 23-year-old New Jersey Devils star has 24 goals and 65 points in 57 games this season but came into this third game of the tournament with just one assist and came out of it with zero goals and points despite getting on the ice for 21:21.

Meanwhile, Chris Kreider made his tournament debut on Monday, scored USA's only goal 35 seconds in, and showed over his 17:01 he can be an option regardless of whether the team has all its forwards available to it.

"I thought Kreids played really well," said Sullivan. "Obviously, he scores the goal, but he did more than score goals. He can really skate, he's got good size, he can kill penalties, he played on the power play. We played him with Jack Eichel and I thought he was a good fit there. He goes to the net, he's good in the puck pursuit game, he can really skate, his north-south speed is a challenge for any opponent..."

When asked specifically if Kreider's game fits in the style of game it'll be between USA and Canada on Thursday, Sullivan said, "Sure it does."

"He's a big, strong kid that can play a physical game," he added. "I would anticipate that it will be a physical game. Both teams play a similar style, both north-south teams that play with a ton of speed and a ton of physicality. I think Kreids, his game, without a doubt suits that."

What is in doubt is USA's ability to bring the same smash and bash intensity that secured the team's place in the final before Monday's games were played.

The Tkachuks and McAvoy were at the heart of that, with the brothers starting the mayhem of Saturday's win over Canada with fights and with McAvoy fueling it with two of his five hits upending Connor McDavid.

Brady had a team-leading six hits in that game. He started the tournament with eight in a 6-1 over Finland, in which he also contributed two goals. And he caught Leo Carlsson and Mattias Ekholm on Monday with successive blows before jamming his left hip into Ersson's net.

To see that knock him out of the game with nothing but pride on the line was, at best, mildly concerning for Team USA.

"I don't anticipate it being an issue," said Sullivan.

Perhaps two days off between Monday's game in the final will make it less of one.

Canada isn't coming in worry-free, but it appears relatively healthy. Shea Theodore was ruled out early in the tournament, but Cale Makar, who was too sick to play in the loss to USA, came back for the 5-3 win over Finland on Monday.

"We get another crack at them now," Makar said after playing close to 24 minutes. "You dream of that as a kid: playing in Canada against the U.S."

Hughes, Eichel and Matthew Boldy all said they couldn't wait for Round 2.

Dylan Larkin knows there are things for USA to take from Round 1 that must help them regardless of how healthy they are.

"The buy-in and the compete level, we weren't perfect, but it was unbelievable," he said. "We had breakdowns, but our sticks were so good, we clogged up the middle of the ice, and we took away their speed. And those guys are gonna look at the video like we do and try and have answers to that, but we're gonna need that. When it comes down to it, the puck's in the corner, it's who comes out with it,

and I thought our sticks that night were so good, and all of our defensemen played so well containing their big guys. So, we're going to need that.”

They didn't get much else out of Monday's game.

## [Sportsnet.ca / 'Biggest game of my life': What Team USA is saying about Canada rematch](#)

By Luke Fox – February 18, 2025

BOSTON — We're so greedy, we wanted a second helping.

Turns out, the players did too.

On Thursday, we all dine like kings.

In the aftermath of Team USA's mostly meaningless — but nonetheless entertaining — 2-1 loss to Sweden in the 4 Nations Face-Off's penultimate game, we gathered the Americans' initial reaction to learning that, yes, they will be facing a vengeful Team Canada for a championship.

### **Here's what they're saying south of the border...**

Dylan Larkin, who scored the game-winner Saturday versus Canada and hasn't appeared in the playoffs since he was a rookie, 10 years ago: "I was thinking about that, talking to my wife today. It's been a long time since I've won something. There's some guys in here that are in the same boat.

"I woke up from my nap and saw (Canada beat Finland) and wasn't surprised, to be honest with you. They're a heck of a hockey team, and it was such a great game Saturday, and we're gonna have to match that competitive level and be ready for those guys. They're gonna be extremely hungry. And they don't want to lose two to us, and they want to win as well. It's going to be a competitive hockey game. I think there'll be some nerves, but I hope it's that level that it was in Montreal."

Jack Hughes, who owns a silver medal from the 2019 world juniors: "Canada's probably one of the better teams here, so I don't think there was too much of a shock. I think they're obviously a great team, and I know they're chomping at the bit to get us again. We're really excited we get them, and that's kind of what we were looking for.

"That game in Montreal is pretty special. And to get the chance to do that again, that'll be pretty cool. Something everyone in this room will look back on and say, 'We're glad to be a part of that game.'"

Jack Eichel, Stanley Cup champion: "It means the world. You're representing your country. This is huge. It's the biggest game I've played in quite some time. Maybe ever. I'm really looking forward to it. I think everyone in the room is looking forward to it. That's what we wanted, right?"

Matt Boldy, whose 2021 team defeated Canada for world junior gold: "It's gonna be awesome. Being from Massachusetts and knowing what the fans are like here, I'm excited to see the energy they're going to bring to this place. It was awesome in Montreal, and I know they're going to be just as good — if not better. It's the dream scenario. It's the biggest game that I ever played in, I think, in my whole life. So, it's exciting. But that's the matchup you want for us. For them. I'm sure for TV. For everything. It's the most exciting game."

Mike Sullivan, Team USA head coach: "It's great for hockey that there's an opportunity for these two teams to meet again. Both teams have star power all around the lineup. It was a very competitive hockey game, the first game. I would anticipate the next one will be every bit as competitive, if not more.

"The way that game was played, with the emotional investment on both sides, it's just such an indication of how much these guys care and what this means to them. There's a lot of pride at stake, and it will be a hard-fought battle.

"It's a great celebration of hockey. It really is. I mean, there's some generational talents on both sides. It's so awesome, from my standpoint. I feel like I get the best seat in the house, being behind the bench and being up close to it. To watch what these guys do on the ice, at the pace that they're able to do it, sometimes we just marvel at what goes on out there with some of these guys."

Matthew Tkachuk, on the TNT broadcast: "Stanley Cup, maybe Game 7 aside, this is probably the biggest game we've all played up until this point."

"We have 23 guys in there that will do absolutely everything they can for this game on Thursday. We are so excited for this opportunity and very thankful for this chance at home."

"I'm expecting the best environment I've ever played in Thursday night."

### **Fox's Fast Five**

- The U.S. scratched its three captains — Matthew Tkachuk, Auston Matthews, and Charlie McAvoy — plus its No. 1 goaltender, Connor Hellebuyck, granting them four full days' rest between Canada matches.

Earlier in the day, Brady Tkachuk had assured that big brother Matthew (lower body) was good to play.

Brady left Monday's game with a lower-body injury of his own after a collision into Samuel Ersson's net and was held out as a precautionary measure:

Matthews sat due to upper-body soreness, and McAvoy (upper body) was one of the most physical elements of Saturday's showdown.

(In the two games he played, Matthews registered two shots on goal and notched one assist. He was a dominant 62.9 per cent in the dot.)

We bet that all the banged-up American forwards will be ready for the final.

We're hearing that McAvoy is the bigger question mark.

"Our biggest strength has been sacrifice and how close we've become as a team," Matthew Tkachuk said. "That has been our secret weapon."

- Chris Kreider, 33, was scratched for the first two games. He needed all of 35 seconds to crash the net and score. He finished with three shots, complemented top centre Jack Eichel well, and pitched in on both special teams.

Has the speedy veteran given Sullivan something to think about when filling out Thursday's lineup?

Well, Kreider's style, the coach says, matches the occasion.

"He's a big, strong kid that can play a physical game," Sullivan says. "Both teams play a similar style. They're north-south teams that play with a ton of speed and a ton of physicality. So, I think Kreids, his game, without a doubt, suits that."

- Could USA use Quinn Hughes? No doubt.

But Zach Werenski has been phenomenal driving the Americans' offence. The Blue Jackets defenceman leads the 4 Nations with five assists, topped all skaters in Monday's double-header with six shots, and is deservedly getting his overdue shine.

"He had a big night for us tonight, just creating from the back end," Jack Hughes says. "I think everyone on this team realizes how good he is at moving the puck up the ice and creating offence."

- Sidney Crosby, 37, is the oldest player at the 4 Nations Face-Off. He arrived hurt.

As the dust settles on round-robin action, Crosby is the tournament's co-leader in scoring (1-4-5).

- William Nylander, Monday morning, on whether he'd be tuning into Canada-Finland, knowing the matinee would need overtime to give Sweden a chance: "Oh, I'll take a nap. See what happens when I wake up."

Never change, Willy.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Canada Player Ratings: Redrawn forward lines get best out of stars](#)

By Ryan Dixon – February 18, 2025

On a holiday Monday afternoon where a 60-minute victory over Finland would put Canada in the 4 Nations Face-Off final, the Canadians dominated their opponent for about 58 minutes and did just enough in the final two to accomplish their goal.

The Canadians got the three points required to control their own destiny — rather than, potentially, having to wait on the result of a Monday night game between Sweden and the U.S. — by jumping on the Finns early and keeping their foot to the floor.

Even if Finland's empty-net tallies with 1:40 and 1:17 to go made things incredibly tense, Canada was able to exhale when Sidney Crosby scored an ENG for the ages to make it a 5-3 final in the first 4 Nations contest played in Boston.

The frantic finish notwithstanding, Canada — with defenceman Cale Makar back in the lineup after missing Saturday's loss to the U.S. due to an illness — found all kinds of chemistry thanks to coach Jon Cooper's redrawn forward lines.

Whether you're talking about bright lights shining at the top of the lineup — Connor McDavid opened the scoring and Nathan MacKinnon bagged a brace — or a newly constructed trio of Sam Bennett between Brad Marchand and Travis Konency smothering the Finns, the Canadians' third contest of the event was their most cohesive.

Now, having defeated a Finnish team down several key blue-liners, Canada must be great from start to finish against a top-flight American club in Thursday's final. Before we get there, though, here are our grades for each Canadian player against Finland.

**Connor McDavid 9/10** For the second straight outing, McDavid opened the scoring for Canada. Two days ago, it was a crazy dash against the Americans; this time No. 97 picked off a brutal pass by Roope Hintz and eventually wired one by Kevin Lankinen to get the Canadians rolling.

**Brayden Point 8.5/10** The new line combos saw Point start the contest on McDavid's wing and the Tampa Bay Lightning forward delivered with the goal that put Canada up 3-0 in the first period. Point made a smart play to stick around the net and find the loose puck after Travis Sanheim's initial shot on a look from in close was stopped. Point could have a massive role on Thursday next to the world's best player.

**Mark Stone 7.5/10** It's pretty clear Stone is viewed as a top-six steady hand by the Canadian staff. He played his usual, heady game beside Point and McDavid.

**Nathan MacKinnon 9/10** Forty-six seconds after McDavid scored Canada's first goal, MacKinnon got a quick break and made no mistake, beating Lankinen to the stick side. MacKinnon's second tally of the game — and third of the tourney — was a one-timer from the slot 5:03 into the second period, giving his club a 4-0 advantage and prompting the Finns to swap Juuse Saros in for Lankinen.

**Sidney Crosby 9/10** OK, it wasn't quite the golden goal, but everybody in Canada likely leapt off their couch when Crosby — with his team suddenly defending a one-goal lead against the surging Finns — crunched Mikael Granlund right at centre ice, picked himself back up after the collision and swatted a 95-footer into the open cage to restore calm for Canada. After the game, McDavid called it "as good an



empty-netter as you're going to get." Crosby, playing with MacKinnon and Sam Reinhart, also made a great play on MacKinnon's goal to help turn the puck over below the Finnish line before he zinged a feed to MacKinnon in the slot.

**Sam Reinhart 8.5/10** Reinhart wound up with three assists on the night, leading Canada with three points. He made a nifty little feed to MacKinnon to send him in alone on the latter's first tally and led all Canadian forwards with 16:17 of ice.

**Brad Marchand 7.5/10** Skating in the rink where he's spent his entire NHL career, the Bruins captain played just over 14 minutes and formed good chemistry with Sam Bennett and Travis Konecny on a trio that pestered Finland all over the ice.

**Sam Bennett 7.5/10** Scratched in the tournament-opener versus Sweden, Bennett played his second straight contest, won half of the 10 draws he took and recorded a team-high four hits.

**Travis Konecny 6.5/10** Drawing back into the lineup after watching on Saturday, Konecny played less (12:11) than any other Canadian skater.

**Brandon Hagel 8/10** Hagel earned himself an assist by creating a turnover at centre ice on the play that eventually led to Canada's second goal of the game. He had seven shot attempts in the game, the most of any Canadian forward.

**Anthony Cirelli 5.5/10** Cirelli struggled at the dot, winning just three of his 10 face-offs.

**Mitch Marner 6/10** Marner's role was reduced from the first two games of the event. He played just 12:46 — less than every Canadian, save Konecny — but still recorded two of the three blocked shots Canadian forwards were credited with.

**Cale Makar 8.5/10** Makar didn't register a point in the win, but he sure looked like his dangerous self all afternoon long. He led Canada with 23:57 of ice time and tied Hagel for the team lead with seven shot attempts.

**Devon Toews 8/10** Toews is a great player, but he definitely brings the most value being the perfect complement to Makar, his usual playing partner in Colorado. Toews' 22:59 of ice was three minutes more than every other Canadian player, save Makar.

**Josh Morrissey 5.5/10** Morrissey had a tough outing by the advanced stats, recording a team-low expected goals percentage of 14.5 per cent.

**Colton Parayko 5.5/10** As with his playing partner, Morrissey, Parayko had a poor expected goals percentage (25.6 per cent) and saw less ice time than the other five Canadian D-men.

**Travis Sanheim 7/10** Sanheim was the only Canadian defenceman to register a point, as he jumped up to take a feed from McDavid and ultimately saw his rebound deposited by Point.

**Drew Doughty 6.5/10** Doughty was tabbed with two defensive zone giveaways by Money puck and the veteran D-man, unsurprisingly, played fewer minutes than he did versus the Americans with Makar back in the lineup.

**Jordan Binnington, 8/10** Don't let the final, frenetic six-on-five minutes muddy the picture; this was Binnington's best game of the event. He made a solid positioning save off Mikael Granlund early on before anybody had found the scoresheet. Finland could have climbed back in the game earlier if not for some strong work from the Canadian goalie, especially in the first minute of the second period when Aleksander Barkov was banging at a rebound on the lip of the crease. When all is said and done, Binnington will start every game for Canada in this tournament and will surely have a lot to say about how the decisive contest plays out.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Finland Player Ratings: Granlund propels near-historic comeback](#)

By Kristina Rutherford – February 18, 2025

Finland nearly pulled off a comeback upset for the ages.

Down three goals with five minutes to go against Canada, Finland's Mikael Granlund scored twice in 23 seconds to pull his team within one before Canadian captain Sidney Crosby potted the empty-netter, giving his team a 5-3 win and punching Canada's ticket to a highly anticipated 4 Nations Face-Off final against the Americans.

But Finland isn't out without an incredibly admirable fight. They were down 4-0 until 6:41 to go in the third, when defender Esa Lindell put his team on the board, banging one off the post and in. Finnish goalie Juuse Saros was pulled with more than five minutes on the clock to give Finland the extra attacker and spur the comeback effort.

Canada got goals from household names like Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon (he got two), forced a goalie change in the second, and looked to have this in the bag until Finland came alive offensively late in the third. The Finns trailed 4-3 with 1:17 to go and didn't give up until the final buzzer sounded on Monday afternoon in front of a sold-out crowd in Boston.

While Finland may be officially out, the team gets extra marks for being the smallest country here by far (home to just 5.5 million) and still ensuring their last game was meaningful, while causing some major panic among Canadians.

Here's how Finland looked in their finale, which they made mighty exciting in the last few minutes.

### **Mikael Granlund, 10/10**

He scored twice in the dying minutes, his second goal coming when he ripped a wrist shot from the slot — top shelf, blocker side — to bring Finland within one. The best part? As he celebrated with teammates, Granlund looked up at the clock to see how much time was left (1:17) for Finland to try to even this thing up. It was Granlund who scored the OT winner for his country in their win over Sweden on Saturday, too. Heroic efforts again from No. 64.

### **Aleksander Barkov, 9/10**

The captain assisted Granlund's second goal, and all game long he was strong at both ends of the ice, getting his chances while also managing to limit Canada's top scorers. Barkov was usually out there when Finland looked exciting offensively. He fed linemate Artturi Lehkonen with a beauty pass in front in the first period, but Lehkonen couldn't connect. Binnington made a big pad save on Barkov in the second after Barkov won the faceoff back and then jumped on the rebound. He blocked a MacKinnon shot on the open net late in the third period, too. Barkov led all Finnish forwards with 24:37 of ice time.

### **Mikko Rantanen, 6/10**

He was quiet during this tournament overall considering his usually flashy skill, with just one power-play goal in Game 2 against Sweden. Rantanen did step up on Monday and fired a team-leading five shots on net. He had a good look on a power play in the second period, but his one-timer went just wide.

### **Artturi Lehkonen, 6/10**

He sat the third period of Game 2 and was moved off the first line, but Lehkonen was back with Line 1 on Monday, and he, Barkov and Rantanen generated some good scoring chances. Lehkonen knocked the

net off trying to one-time a Barkov pass. He had a briefly wide-open net late in the second but couldn't corral the bouncing puck.

#### **Sebastian Aho, 6/10**

Aho made a beautiful pass to Granlund in the slot on Granlund's second goal of the afternoon. But like Rantanen, Aho was quieter than expected offensively in this tournament. His line was big in limiting chances from Canada's top lines, but couldn't get much cooking in the offensive zone. Aho has been dominant for Finland on the world stage in the past, with 36 points in 28 games in World Championship play.

#### **Roope Hintz, 6/10**

Hintz finished minus-1, but his hard work was on display. He blocked a shot, and was on his knees digging for the puck in the second period on the power play, while Finland was down 4-0.

#### **Anton Lundell, 7/10**

One of the game's best at both ends, Lundell had a tough assignment in keeping tabs on Canada's offensive stars in this one and finished the game minus-2. He led some breakouts out of the defensive zone, and his best chance came when he streaked down the left wing in the third period, but Binnington made the pad save.

#### **Patrik Laine, 7/10**

After figuring big with two assists in Finland's win against Sweden, Laine was pretty quiet offensively against Canada until late in the third, when he one-timed a couple shots from the wing on the power play while Finland had the empty net and extra attacker. One of Laine's powerful shots led to a rebound that then led to Granlund's first goal. For much of the game, Laine's line with Aho and Eetu Luostarinen was up against guys like McDavid and MacKinnon.

#### **Eetu Luostarinen, 5/10**

He finished the game minus-2, and no Finn saw less ice time than his 10:20.

#### **Kaapo Kakko 6/10**

His fourth line was out there against MacKinnon's line on the second shift of the game and stood no chance. Kakko, who figured big in Finland's win against Sweden while playing with Barkov and Rantanen, managed to create some offence on Monday against Canada, and he had a good chance in close after an expired Finnish power play. He had three shots.

#### **Joel Armia, 6/10**

He played Game 1 but wasn't in the lineup against Sweden, then got slotted in on the fourth line against Canada in favour of Teuvo Teravainen. Armia was noticeably quick out there early in the game, and on one backcheck he turned the puck over and brought it the other way. But his line was exposed against Canada's top scorers.

#### **Erik Haula, 6/10**

His line was out there against MacKinnon's early on and it didn't end well. Haula had one of Finland's best chances in the second period after getting a pass in tight from Armia, which led to a Finnish powerplay, though they didn't manage to convert.

#### **Esa Lindell, 10/10**

He scored Finland's first goal to tee up an eventual near comeback. Lindell came off the boards at the hash marks, then fired a rocket of a wrist shot off the far post and in. And now he deserves a good, long rest. Lindell paced Finnish defenders in every game, and Monday was no different, with 27:21 of ice time.

**Niko Mikkola, 8/10**

He fired a few rockets from the point, and even when Finland was down 4-0, Mikkola was driving offence from the Finnish blueline, and he finished the game plus-1. He managed to clear the puck during some potentially dangerous moments in the game and used his big frame to win battles and keep Canada's scorers to the outside.

**Nikolas Matinpalo, 6/10**

On Canada's third goal, he was out against McDavid's line and did what he could, sliding to try to block a shot. He also blocked one in the second period that prevented a Canadian goal, just after Finland made a goalie change. Matinpalo led his team with five hits but finished the game minus-3.

**Urho Vaakanainen, 6/10**

The Rangers defender also finished the game minus-3, and had some tough assignments on Monday.

**Henri Jokiharju, 6/10**

He did an admirable job trying to keep sightlines open for his goaltenders. He also blocked a pair of shots.

**Olli Maatta, 7/10**

He moved the puck well to lead to some sustained pressure for the Finns in the second period, and kept potent Canadian scorers to the outside.

**Kevin Lankinen, 6/10**

He allowed four goals on 13 shots and was pulled after MacKinnon scored his second of the game to put Canada up 4-0. But Lankinen stood little chance out there. McDavid's first-period goal, the first of the game, came through traffic and rang off the post and in. It didn't go much better from there.

**Juuse Saros, 10/10**

Saros took over with about 15 minutes to go in the second period with his team down 4-0, and he shut down Canada for the rest of the game, making 14 saves (Crosby's goal came on the empty net). He made a big early save on Crosby, on No. 87's first shot of the tournament. He stopped a Cale Makar rocket, too. Saros came in cold, played incredibly well and gave his team a chance at a comeback.

## [Sportsnet.ca / Sweden Player Ratings: Nyquist, Arvidsson put pride in crest on display](#)

By Sonny Sachdeva – February 18, 2025

It was simply too little, too late for the Swedes.

The Tre Kronor will leave the 4 Nations Face-Off with one win to their name. The final standings will show them finishing third among the four squads, their five points tied with the Canadian team set to play in the championship game Thursday. But the details tell a different story.

While the Americans, Canadians, and Finns each had their moments of glory, the Swedes finish with only a consolation win against the U.S. on Monday, a 2-1 victory that still took all they had, against an American side mostly hoping to simply avoid injury before their real finale a couple days from now.

Still, while it might have been a meaningless game in the context of how this tournament will finish, there's something to be said for what was showed by Sweden on Monday — a hard-fought performance, with only pride and love of country on the line.

**With their tournament coming to an end, here's a look at how each member of the Swedish squad fared against the Americans:**

### **Jesper Bratt: 9 / 10**

Perhaps Sweden's best player at this tournament, the smooth-skating New Jersey Devils winger showed his quality again in this one. His creativity and poise with the puck on his stick have been noticeable in each of Sweden's games, and the same was true here. He earned some good looks, came up with some key defensive plays late in the game, too, and most importantly, sniped home the game-winner to give his nation some last-minute joy before the tournament's end.

### **Leo Carlsson: 7 / 10**

The youngest player to participate in the tourney, Sweden's 20-year-old phenom didn't look at all out of place alongside the vets in his first taste of 4 Nations action. The Anaheim Ducks pivot didn't get on the board, but he showed glimpses of his elite skillset over the course of the night, dancing past USA defenders more than a few times.

### **William Nylander: 8 / 10**

Nylander's final game of this tournament went much the same way his 4 Nations experience did as a whole — largely quiet, but with a few brief moments that showed his true level. The Toronto Maple Leafs winger started Monday's tilt slowly, but he came up with a brilliant play late in the first period, jumping up to intercept an American pass at his own blue line, weaving into the offensive zone, stopping up, and finding Bratt for the game-winner. Still, it was one of only a handful of moments all tournament where No. 88 looked like the player Maple Leafs fans see on a weekly basis.

### **Adrian Kempe: 7 / 10**

It was another quiet night for Kempe after his sterling start to the tournament in Sweden's opener against Canada. But the Los Angeles Kings talent still made his presence known with a couple of marquee chances on net, and some hard-nosed forechecking.

### **Joel Eriksson Ek: 7 / 10**

With Mika Zibanejad sidelined — and after two strong performances from Eriksson Ek leading into this finale — the Minnesota Wild pivot was given a chance to take the reins in this one. Leading all Swedish forwards in ice time on Monday, he was quietly key once again, making smart reads all over the sheet.

**Lucas Raymond: 6 / 10**

The young Detroit Red Wings talisman left much to be desired on the Americans' lone goal, with a half-hearted backcheck that left Chris Kreider open to bury the game's first tally 35 seconds into the game. But aside from that early stumble, he came up with some quality moments, once again looking calm and collected with the puck on his stick. He finishes the tournament as Sweden's highest-scoring forward, with three points through three games.

**Filip Forsberg: 6 / 10**

It was a wobbly start for the Nashville Predators veteran. But Forsberg found his game as the night wore on, working through a rough first period and coming up with a few promising sequences. That said, he finishes the tournament pointless through three games — a disappointing run for one of the squad's most talented playmakers.

**Elias Lindholm: 5 / 10**

Lindholm was the other forward, alongside Raymond, who got beat at the netfront on the Americans' early goal. He nearly allowed the U.S. to double their lead soon after as well, needlessly firing the puck over the boards later in the first period to earn a trip to the box.

**Elias Pettersson: 5 / 10**

Vancouver Canucks fans may have hoped the 4 Nations experience would be a confidence booster for Pettersson, but the pivot leaves the tournament empty-handed. Another quiet night Monday did little to change that — aside from a couple of promising sequences, No. 40 had little impact on the game, finishing as the least-used forward in the lineup (seeing fewer than 10 minutes of ice in this one, down from 16 and 14 minutes through the first two games). He finishes as one of only three Swedish forwards to play all three games and leave without a point.

**Gustav Nyquist: 10 / 10**

In a game that had no bearing on Thursday's championship matchup, a tilt that was played for pride alone, Nyquist was Sweden's emotional compass. The Nashville Predators veteran was as relentless as he's been in each of his nation's three games, forechecking hard, throwing his body around, and hounding opponents to come out on the right side of seemingly every puck battle. Nyquist was rewarded for that approach this time, deflecting home a goal in the first period to erase the Americans' early lead — and he finished his night blocking a third-period shot to preserve Sweden's lead.

**Viktor Arvidsson: 10 / 10**

Alongside Nyquist, Arvidsson had another quality performance himself, similarly leading his countrymen with a heart-and-soul effort for the crest on his sweater. It was his solid work in the offensive zone that helped set up the shot Nyquist deflected home for Sweden's first goal, and Arvidsson's blue-collar approach continued until the final whistle — a key reason his nation leaves with at least one win in this tournament.

**Victor Hedman: 8 / 10**

The Tre Kronor captain was key for his countrymen once again, coming up with plenty of quality defensive sequences to disrupt American scoring chances, and sacrificing at the netfront late in the game to preserve his squad's lead and secure the win. As was the case with Nyquist and Arvidsson, if

there was any question about whether the Swedes cared about beating the Americans on their home soil to finish the tournament, No. 77 provided the answer.

**Jonas Brodin: 6 / 10**

The Minnesota Wild veteran didn't have a significant impact in one direction or another. He had a few looks, came up with a few key plays to break up chances from the opposition, and also found himself on the wrong side of a couple of nearly costly giveaways.

**Gustav Forsling: 5 / 10**

It was a tough night for Forsling, and it started early, as the minute-munching rearguard was the lone defender back on Kreider's quick-trigger goal half a minute into the tilt. While he got little help from his teammates on that one, Forsling let Zach Werenski walk right by him to set up the tally — and the same happened with Kyle Connor and Jack Eichel at different points later in the game, with Forsling bailed out only by Samuel Ersson and his post.

**Erik Karlsson: 7 / 10**

As has been the case for all three of Sweden's games, No. 65 giveth and No. 65 taketh away. Karlsson's ill-timed pinch factored into the U.S. scoring before fans had even settled into their seats — and his shot from the wall in the offensive zone was the one deflected past Jake Oettinger to tie it back up 13 minutes later. Overall, the Pittsburgh Penguins vet was a key weapon for the Swedes in this game, and in this tournament. He finishes his portion of the tourney tied for the points lead among his countrymen, and as the second-highest-scoring defender in all, with three points through three games.

**Rasmus Dahlin: 7 / 10**

Over the course of Sweden's three tilts, Dahlin showed once again why he's the future blue-line anchor for the Tre Kronor. He was solid once again Monday, earning a few quality looks and showing some bite against an American side that's no stranger to extracurriculars. After some solid play through Sweden's first two tilts, he finished Monday's game as one of the squad's most-used defenders.

**Rasmus Andersson: 8 / 10**

It wasn't exactly a dream assignment here for Andersson, drawing into his first game of the tournament when a chance at the trophy was already lost. Still, with about as limited of an opportunity as could be offered, the Calgary Flames rearguard made his presence known, wiring a few point-shot blasts on net, and coming up with a team-leading five blocks to help hold the Americans at bay — he was particularly key late in the game, with the U.S. pressing and his countrymen fighting to hold onto their lead.

**Mattias Ekholm: 7 / 10**

It was a wild Monday for the veteran Edmonton Oiler. Initially slated to sit Sweden's final game out, Ekholm wound up taking morning skate as his squad's fourth-line centre, drawing back into the lineup for puck-drop, and chipping in with nine-and-a-half minutes as an extra defender to help his nation leave with at least one win. All that considered, he did all that was asked of him, putting in some good work on the penalty kill and coming up with a well-timed stick to stymie American attacks more than a few times.

**Samuel Ersson: 9 / 10**

Like the other pair of countrymen who drew into the lineup for the first time in Sweden's finale, Ersson had a tough assignment sent his way Monday. But his was undoubtedly the toughest of the bunch — starting in net not only for the first time in this tournament, and behind a team already eliminated from trophy contention, but against an American squad that's steamrolled its way through the tourney so far.

And on their home soil, no less. But the young Philadelphia Flyers netminder stepped up to the task. He got burned early, and he surely wasn't facing the best the U.S. had to offer, but Ersson did well in handling the hand he was dealt, turning aside every shot after the Americans' first, to finish the night with 32 saves and a W.



## [TSN.CA / Three reasons Team USA is in the driver's seat at 4 Nations](#)

By Travis Yost – February 18, 2025

Team USA is officially in the driver's seat at the 4 Nations Face-Off. But before breaking down what's given America the early advantage in the tournament, let's talk about the event itself.

It has been absolutely incredible. Full stop. You must give credit to the players, who have put considerable effort into winning, treating each round-robin matchup like a Game 7 in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Combine effort —always the lead indicator as to whether you're going to watch a compelling sporting event versus a glorified training event — with overwhelming skill and parity across the four countries, and you have the recipe for a brilliantly captivating sporting event.

I never want to see another NHL All-Star Game again. And I don't mind if the interval of these games can't be every single year. Figure out a way to preserve this, because for the first time in a while, hockey's brain trust has found something that works. And because it works, I get to discuss these games in a meaningful way.

As TSN.ca's resident Yankee, I want to talk about this American team, which has clinched a spot in Thursday's final after outscoring Finland and Canada at an aggregate score of 9-2 (+7). How are they winning these games? **I've got three key reasons as we head into Monday's slate:**

### **1. The goaltending advantage**

Some pieces I write are timed better than others.

Last week, we discussed the brilliance of Winnipeg Jets (and starting American) goaltender Connor Hellebuyck, who seems primed to win his third Vezina Trophy in six years. I believe he has a real shot at the Hart Trophy, too.

There are many quality puck-stoppers in today's NHL, but no goalie can erase goals off the scoreboard as persistently and reliably as Hellebuyck. The only knock left on a goaltender who is already on the short list of best goalies of this millennium is he hasn't always done it in the high-leverage moments; his postseason numbers for the Jets haven't always sparkled.

These high-energy best-on-best games against the world's best shooters have brought a tall order for Hellebuyck and every other goalie who has played so far. These are extremely small samples, but they reinforce a key point as to why the U.S. was favoured going into the tournament — there's Hellebuyck, and then there is everyone else:

Save percentage measures much more than goaltending contribution (to some degree it is a function of the defensive play and structure in front), but this is a considerable gap. Sweden and Finland have conceded goals left and right; Canada's stop rates are still short of the NHL league average.

You do wonder if Canada is kicking themselves a bit over their goaltending selections. Jordan Binnington, Adin Hill, and Sam Montembeault are strong players, but it feels like they pale demonstrably to the likes of Hellebuyck. Would Logan Thompson or Darcy Kuemper have leveled the playing field in net? A question to ponder, especially after a game where Canada's elite forwards struggled to break through against Hellebuyck.

### **2. Jake Guentzel - Auston Matthews - Jack Hughes**

I think it's safe to say this has been the most dominant line of the tournament so far. Whenever you can unite three skaters who have eclipsed the single-season 40-goal mark nine times in their young careers, you are dealing with tremendous offensive firepower.

And while Canada may be armed with the best forward group in this tournament, the States are not far behind. They outshot Finland in their opener 18-7 (+11, even strength) as a trio, with one of those shots leading to a Jake Guentzel goal. They followed it up by outclassing Canada's elite forwards, with two more goals from the stick of Guentzel (one the empty netter to ice the game):

You never know what the chemistry of a line will look like, even when uniting elite players like this. Matthews and Hughes are such dangerous scorers and playmakers in their own right; their magnetic effect to the puck alone creates more opportunities for a Swiss Army knife like Guentzel, and they keep taking advantage of it.

The U.S. had less of the puck as a team than they probably would like against Canada, but this line was in full control.

### **3. The Zach Werenski effect**

If Hellebuyck and Guentzel have been the two biggest contributors so far, Columbus Blue Jackets defenceman Zach Werenski must be third on that list. And that might be selling him short.

Werenski, in the midst of a Norris Trophy-calibre season, has been one-half of America's best defensive pairing with Charlie McAvoy.

Absent one supernova Connor McDavid moment (torching McAvoy in the process), they have been lights out as a tandem – the States outshot Finland and Canada by a combined 43-to-21 (+22) with Werenski and McAvoy deployed, minutes ripe with scoring chances and some very physical hockey.

Running this degree of advantage play against formidable opponents, in predominantly leading minutes where score effects always have an adverse effect, is remarkable. But uniting two of the most well-polished two-way defensive players — just as capable as defending off puck as they are igniting an attack from the defensive third — has produced great results for head coach Mike Sullivan.

These are three of the biggest reasons America's in the driver's seat, for now.

But count out Canada, Sweden, or Finland at your own peril as this tournament shifts to the city of Boston. The overall talent disparity between these countries remains razor thin, and whichever team draws the States on Thursday night will have a real shot to win it all.

And seriously: rest in peace, NHL All-Star Weekend.