



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • February 19, 2026



## For gold and God's glory, Canes' Slavin reps USA in Winter Games

By: Anna Laible, UNC-CH

He's been a National Hockey League all-star. He's also a two-time winner of the Lady Byng Trophy. Now Carolina Hurricanes 6'3" defenseman Jaccob Slavin is adding Team USA Olympian to his resume.

Jaccob Slavin: Life, career and the chance for Olympic gold

He's been a National Hockey League all-star. He's also a two-time winner of the Lady Byng Trophy — given every season to the NHL player voted to have the best combination of sportsmanship, gentlemanly conduct and ability.

Now Carolina Hurricanes 6'3" defenseman Jaccob Slavin is adding Team USA Olympian to his resume.

The Carolina Hurricanes will be well-represented on the ice in Milan, Italy, as five players will suit up to represent their home nations. Sebastian Aho (Finland), Nikolaj Ehlers (Denmark), Frederik Andersen (Denmark), and late addition Seth Jarvis (Canada) join Slavin as Hurricanes Olympians.

It's been a long journey for Slavin to make it to this week.

Slavin grew up in Colorado as one of five siblings and was selected in the fourth round (No. 120) of the 2012 NHL Draft by the Hurricanes. But before starting his time as a pro, he played two years for Colorado College. He's the ninth former Colorado College Tiger to compete in the Olympics. He debuted for the Hurricanes on Nov. 18, 2015, finishing his rookie season with 20 points (two goals, 18 assists) in 63 games.

Outside of playing, Slavin is a husband, father to two and a strong Christian. He's very outspoken about his faith on social media and how it has impacted how he has raised his family.

"Our faith is the most important thing to us in our life," Slavin said. "It's just the lens I see everything through. So whether that's playing the game of hockey or being a husband or father, it's all for the glory of God."

He hasn't played as much this season so far, due to injuries. However, his ice time has steadily increased, and he seems ready for Milan. He remains the Hurricanes franchise record

holder among defensemen in points, assists and shorthanded points (18).

In the 2024-25 season, he made the United States roster for the 4 Nations Face-Off. While nothing is quite like the Olympic Games, this experience prepared him for what international competition looks like.

"I go back to last year with the Four Nations and just how awesome the hockey was playing against Canada, Sweden, and Finland," Slavin said. "Those games were just intense. It was unbelievable hockey."

Now a childhood dream of Slavin's is becoming a reality. He'll have his parents and wife supporting him in Milan, as he aims to help Team USA capture a gold medal. It won't be an easy feat for the Americans, as they have managed to win gold only twice (1960 and 1980), with Canada dominating with nine golds.

"I think for the most part it was just excitement," he said after learning he had made the Olympic roster. "Maybe a little bit of nerves for my wife having to fly overseas for the first time. My parents were there [when I found out] and it was something that they were excited for because obviously they've been there for my whole journey. They were probably more excited for me than I was for myself."

The Hurricanes athletes will be competitors rather than teammates for the Olympics and some will face off against one another when Denmark takes on Team USA on Saturday. Before they came to Italy, Slavin talked about how all of the Hurricane Olympians would share logistics info with one another.

But Slavin isn't focused on playing against friendly faces. He's just keeping his focus simple.

"I think when it comes to playing against each other, once the puck drops, it's just going to be a hockey game.

If he does get some downtime, he's hoping to see figure skating with his daughter and go to Lake Como. But his big goal remains the same.

"We're there to win gold."



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## The Hockey News

### Trio of Hurricanes Set To Take The Stage In Olympic Quarterfinals

By: Ryan Henkel

Three Carolina Hurricanes stars battle for Olympic gold, showcasing their elite skills as the tournament narrows to its thrilling final stages.

We're down to the final eight teams in the men's ice hockey tournament at the 2026 Milan Olympics and the Carolina Hurricanes have three players still in contention for gold.

Seth Jarvis, Jaccob Slavin and Sebastian Aho all could be in line to play important roles for their nations as the games get tighter and all three are proven performers on the big stage.

Jarvis has played a fourth line role for the tournament's top team, Canada, and while he hasn't had the chance to prove himself too much, he's generated a few quality chances and has made the most of his minutes.

Slavin is in a bit of a similar boat to Jarvis, as he hasn't really been entrusted with a lot of minutes by Team USA. However, his defensive ability is second to none and I'm sure the Americans will dial him up in the matchups facing actual NHL talent.

Aho has started to find his game more as the tournament has gone on and now with two goals and three points under his belt, perhaps he can help lead the Finns to a medal.

Here's the schedule for the upcoming games:

Quarterfinals - Wednesday, Feb. 18

Slovakia (3) vs. Germany (6) - 6:10 a.m. EST

Canada (1) vs. Czechia (8) - 10:40 a.m. EST

Finland (4) vs. Switzerland (5) - 12:10 p.m. EST

Playwire House Ad

USA (2) vs. Sweden (7) - 3:10 p.m.

Semifinals - Friday, Feb. 20

Game 1 (Team's TBD; bracket will be reseeded following QFs) - 10:40 a.m.

Game 2 - 3:10 p.m.

Bronze Medal Match - Saturday, Feb. 21

Puck drop will be at 2:40 p.m. EST

Gold Medal Match - Sunday, Feb. 22

Puck drop will be at 8:10 a.m. EST

#### LINKS

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## SportScan

Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1379708 Websites

The Athletic / How Quinn Hughes came to play the hero for Team USA in overtime: 'A massive goal'

By Michael Russo

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN – Bill Guerin played in three Olympics, so he says the only thing that stinks about being in management now with USA Hockey is that you can't do anything to really help once you pick the team.

"People ask if I stress out during games," the United States' men's hockey team's GM said on the eve of the Olympics. "I'm like, 'Well, what am I going to do? The best job in the world is being out there.'"

Well, Wednesday night, after Mika Zibanejad scored an extra attacker goal to send the Sweden-U.S. quarterfinal into overtime, a very stressed-out Guerin looked pale and like he was going to hurl when cameras caught him in his suite, slumped in his leather seat and sweating bullets.

Suddenly, the team he compiled to win gold in these Winter Olympics — a team that didn't include three-on-three specialist Cole Caufield — was one Sweden OT goal from going home early from Italy before even getting a chance to medal.

That's when Quinn Hughes, the superstar defenseman acquired by Guerin in his day job as the Minnesota Wild GM in a shocking December blockbuster, reminded all of us exactly what the United States was missing against Canada in last year's 4 Nations Face-Off.

In a switch in the offensive zone, Hughes took his Wild teammate Matt Boldy's pass, centered himself, found a lane between defenders and ripped a forehand shot off the post and in for a semifinals-advancing OT winner that caused Guerin to leap so high out of his chair that it's amazing he didn't hit the ceiling.

"We needed that one," a relieved Guerin said in a text to The Athletic early Thursday morning.

Same for Matthew Tkachuk on the American bench.

"It was definitely the highest I've jumped since my surgery," Tkachuk said, laughing, after a 2-1 win resulted in a date with Slovakia on Friday night. "I'll have to hit the foam roll."

In a tight-checking game that resembled a playoff atmosphere where there was zero room to make plays, this game needed the open ice of a three-on-three to allow for a winner.

That's when Quinn Hughes, one of the most elusive skaters in the world, can really thrive.

The Americans will play for an Olympic medal after Quinn Hughes played the hero in overtime on Wednesday night in Milan.

"He's got to be one of the hardest guys in the world to cover three-on-three the way he's able to move laterally and get a shot off quick," Tkachuk said. "I mean, he does it five-on-five. He does it on the power play. We had a lot of looks like right in that middle area. I don't know if he was the third or fourth one. Went glove side, post-and-in and live to fight another day. It's just most incredible feeling."

"That's a massive goal, massive moment," Quinn's young brother, Jack Hughes, said. "One of our best players taking over there and winning that game for us."

Last winter, if the decision had been left up to Hughes, he would have joined his brother in the 4 Nations Face-Off. And when Charlie McAvoy suddenly wound up hospitalized in the middle of the tournament, coach Mike Sullivan even went as far as to tell a room full of reporters that "Quinn Hughes is coming."

Apparently, when McAvoy was unavailable, Team USA called Hughes and asked if he wanted to join the team even though it had already replaced him with Jake Sanderson after he was hurt. He said yes, so it was announced to real-time tweeting reporters that Hughes was en route.

But that was either news to the Vancouver Canucks or they hadn't yet given the green light. It created a chaotic day that finally ended with the Canucks forbidding their captain from playing in the tournament because of an oblique injury.

"I felt like I was playing great hockey at the time and wasn't able to be there," Hughes said. "It sucks, but you're moving on. I'm here this time. I'm just really enjoying it."

On Wednesday, Hughes showed what kind of offensive weapon the U.S. was missing and how much this year's gold-medal game could be different against Canada if the U.S. can get past Slovakia and Canada gets past Finland. This was a U.S. team that lost 2-1 to Sweden in the final round-robin game of last year's tournament and ultimately in overtime against Canada in the 4 Nations.

Hughes can bring the magic the Americans lacked offensively.

"The guy always shows up at the big moment," Brady Tkachuk said. "He stepped up massive. We missed him bad in the 4 Nations and it's just the boost he brings as a person, as a player, and the leadership that he brings that gives us a lot of confidence in this tournament. It takes a truly special player to show up in those moments and that's Quinn."

Hughes became the first defenseman to score an overtime goal in a knockout game at an Olympics with NHL players. He now has a goal and five assists in four games in the Olympics with only two defensemen posting more points in a single Olympics with NHL players (Erik Karlsson, eight points in 2014 for Sweden, and Brian Rafalski, eight points in 2010 with the United States).

This is the same guy who has single-handedly turned the Wild into an offensive juggernaut since his mid-December arrival. They have the second-most points in the NHL and he has 31 assists and 34 points in just 26 games.



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And when that puck sailed past Jacob Markstrom, Hughes said he felt "just relief."

"Really enjoying wearing the crest and playing with the superstars that we have on our team. Getting to know these guys," he said. "The village. All of it. You just want to extend it as long as you can."

That was the exact shot Hughes wanted to get off, and he put it exactly where he wanted it.

"We're definitely a better team with him. I mean, there's no question about that," Matthew Tkachuk said. "He's playing big minutes. He's a threat in the offensive zone. Every time, defensively, he's able to skate pucks and be kind of like that one-man breakout. Him and Charlie (McAvoy) have formed an unbelievable pair for us. Charlie, I thought also was incredible tonight. That was one of those games where it's 40 of some of the best players in the world fighting at both ends of the ice. Not a lot of room both sides, not a lot of heavy chances on either side. You put two really good teams together, and you think that it's gonna be this high flying offense, but it's actually quite the opposite.

"And it took one guy to make a play at the end, and that was Quinn."

Brady Tkachuk played and lived with Hughes for two years at the U.S. National Team Development Program, and he said that's exactly the player he remembered playing with.

"I've seen that move before. I've seen that play before. What a player," Tkachuk said. "It's been a blast living in the village with him. We got a good thing going the night before a game. We're usually just chopping it up and hanging out, just chatting. So glad that's going to continue."

Dylan Larkin, who scored the lone goal in regulation for the Americans, skates with Hughes in the summertime. He says he has seen Hughes set that play up thousands of times.

"Sets the feet. You could tell he was setting up the triangle," Larkin said. "I don't know who he shot it through, but the pull and unbelievable moment for our country and for USA Hockey. For him to do it, it gives me chills. Unbelievable performance out of him."

Larkin, who made a tremendous play in overtime picking Filip Forsberg's pocket, says that OT was the most nervous he has ever been in a hockey game. Just because anything can happen — a turnover, a bad bounce, a fall — to knock the Americans out.

"But I calmed down a lot when I saw Quinnie get it for the first time," Larkin said. "Was like, we got that guy."

Added McAvoy: "I think you saw in overtime we got some really elite high-end skill from a lot of our guys. So you rolled them over the boards, and any combination of guys is gonna get great looks. And tonight it was Quinnie. What a play by him."

And what relief from Guerin, who built a team he truly believes can deliver the United States its first men's hockey gold medal in 46 years.

So, of course, it was the star he brought to Minnesota who kept the United States alive for at least one more game.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379709 Websites

The Athletic / Sweden's biggest regret after losing in Olympic quarterfinals? Victor Hedman sitting out

By Pierre LeBrun

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — Victor Hedman was one of the most outspoken stars over the past decade in hoping the NHL would come back to the Olympics.

His passion for the subject was deep. So to see him sitting on the bench Wednesday, unable to play after pulling a groin in warmup, was a brutal sight. His one and only Olympics ended in heart-crushing fashion.

Losing 2-1 in overtime to Team USA to end their Olympics was crushing enough. To see the 35-year-old Hedman have to pull himself out and end his Olympic dream that way? The look on his Swedish teammates' faces Wednesday night said it all.

He is beloved in that dressing room. One of their great leaders. And they were in agony for him.

"Talk about a heartbreaker," Gabriel Landeskog, the captain, said after the game. "We knew there was no place he'd rather be than on the ice to compete with us. To have to sit out, that's, that's ... I was hurting for him. I really was. And I still am. I know how long he'd been working towards this and looking forward toward this, that sucks."

Hedman himself wasn't brought to the media after the game. The Tampa Bay Lightning captain is not one to ever duck the media, but in this circumstance, one can certainly understand why he wasn't available.

"It was a tough blow for us," veteran defenseman Erik Karlsson said of Hedman. "It also speaks to his character to be able to make that decision on his own. That he couldn't perform at the level that he felt that he needed to, to be an improvement on our team. A really tough one. It sucks that we couldn't do more to give him a chance to play another game."

The pained faces of every Swedish player spoke volumes. The silver medalists from Sochi in 2014 had high hopes here in Milan. They pushed hard in the third period against Team USA on Wednesday, and it paid off when Mika Zibanejad tied it late with goalie Jacob Markström pulled for the extra attacker.

The Swedes were feeling it right then and there. They thought they were destined.

The Americans will play for an Olympic medal after Quinn Hughes played the hero in overtime on Wednesday night in Milan.

"Just empty," Zibanejad said after the game. "It's tough. I thought we pushed. We pushed through the whole third and, obviously, get the tying goal. Get ourselves to overtime. To see the puck go in for them and you know it's over, it's tough."

The Swedes went from the high of tying it late to having their hearts ripped out in overtime.

"Heartbreaking, really," Landeskog said. "It felt like we were in control, like we were going to tie it up. It was just a matter of time, and eventually we do. And after having been on the gas for the majority of the third period, it felt like we had the momentum. But also knowing it's three-on-three and could go either way. It didn't go our way, simple as that.

"I try a one-timer in the O-zone and miss it, they get possession of it and one of the best defensemen in the world with the puck, I give him a little too much space, and he puts the perfect shot behind Marky. Marky had been great all night. He didn't give them anything. It was going to have to be a perfect shot to beat him tonight. ... But yeah, it's a heart-breaker. It's hard to sum it up like this right after."

A loss to Finland in the group stage and a goal-difference tiebreaker sent Sweden into a gold-medal-level quarterfinal matchup with Team USA after beating Latvia in the qualifying round. Someone was going to go home way too early between two powerhouse teams.



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"It sucks," Karlsson said. "Our memories from the last time (in Sochi), the guys that played there, were very fond. Very good memories, and we brought that into this tournament. We had very high hopes for our group in this tournament. Unfortunately, we didn't reach that potential. That's just the hard truth and the reality. But at the same time, I think we should consider ourselves to be amongst the best. This time we didn't deliver."

Karlsson wasn't ready to blame the format. They came here to beat top teams like the U.S. and didn't get it done.

"The group stage can be a little fluky sometimes, and obviously we didn't play our best hockey there and put ourselves in this position," he said. "But at the end of the day, we lost when it mattered the most, whether it was the quarterfinal or further along the way. We came here to play against teams like the USA, and we gave ourselves a chance today, but it wasn't our day."

For Karlsson and Landeskog, who knows what the future holds as far as playing in another Olympics in four years? Team Sweden will look different in four years on some level.

That is part of what hurt so much for the veteran core on this night.

"Who knows what the future holds?" said Landeskog. "Who knows when we'll get this opportunity again — and if? But at the end of the day, I've talked all along about staying present, being right here, right now. I'm not going to run away from the bitterness and the heartache of this. I'm going to sit in it for a little bit and accept it for what it is. And the sun will rise tomorrow again."

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The Athletic / Team USA knocks out Sweden in overtime to reach Olympic men's hockey semifinals

By Michael Russo and Mark Lazerus

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — This was hardly the first time these players had victory so rudely and suddenly snatched out of their grasp, so close to the finish line only to blow a tire and skid off into a ditch.

It happens all the time in hockey. Six-on-five goals are deflating, sure, but this is nothing new. Wins become ties, then the game starts anew with the drop of the puck in overtime. That ability to bounce back is hard-wired into a professional athlete's brain, entwined in their DNA. Short memories. Sharp focus. Move on.

"If you dwell on it, it's not going to be good," Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Jacob Slavin said. "We've played in the NHL a long time now, and everyone knows you have to focus on the next shift. If you start dwelling on the past, the past can mess with your game, mess with your confidence. It's just, move on, keep chugging along."

But this isn't some mid-February NHL game, a regular-season affair where two standings points just became one.

This is the Olympic Games. The quarterfinals. Do or die. After 12 agonizing years away, the United States was 91 seconds away from playing for an Olympic medal. Then, in a flash of Mika Zibanejad's stick, they weren't. They were tied. They had lost momentum. To Sweden, no less, one of the three hockey superpowers.

How do you mentally reset after that?

Well, you just do. And then you throw Quinn Hughes over the boards and let him do his thing.

Hughes' overtime goal turned Zibanejad's dramatic equalizer into a mere footnote and gave the Americans an unbearably tense 2-1 victory in the Olympic quarterfinals. The United States moves on to face upstart Slovakia, the ninth-ranked team in the world with just seven NHL players, only one of them who could be classified as anything close to a star — Montreal Canadiens forward Juraj Slafkovský. It'll be no cakewalk, not with the joy, confidence and structure the Slovaks have been playing with in this tournament. But Team USA is now a heavy favorite to advance to the gold-medal game, where either Finland or arch-rival Canada will be waiting.

One step closer to the matchup so many have been wanting to see since last year's stirring 4 Nations Face-Off, which Canada won in overtime.

"I'm just pumped we get to keep this going," said Devils forward Jack Hughes, Quinn's younger brother. "You don't want to end it in the quarters. That's a great team over there, and I don't think anyone saw us playing them in the quarters at the start of the tournament. Whoever it was, a great team was going to be eliminated tonight, and we wanted to keep this thing going. It's the best hockey, the Olympics. It's fun to keep it rolling."

Fun now. Harrowing for a while there.

In a fierce and physical tight-checking game, the U.S. led 1-0 on Dylan Larkin's goal midway through the second period. The Americans were smothering the Swedes, with only Lucas Raymond able to break through for a few high-quality scoring chances, and goaltender Connor Hellebuyck up to the challenge each time. The Americans clogged lanes, harassed puck-carriers, and broke up pass after pass with quick sticks. For 58 minutes and 29 seconds, the tenacious Swedes kept hacking their way through the jungle, only to be smacked back by a stray twig each time.

They stayed patient. They played their game.

"The problem is, if you become impatient, then they're going to make sure that you pay for it," Zibanejad said. "We had to keep playing, keep playing, keep putting pucks behind them, keep working them and eventually get our chances. And we did. It wasn't enough."

Indeed, with Jacob Markström on the bench for an extra attacker, Sweden finally broke through. And even then, just barely. Zibanejad's sharp-angle one-timer off a Raymond feed trickled through Hellebuyck and into the net. The ever-so-quiet Zibanejad looked to the heavens, pumped his fists and unleashed a primal scream, exulting to the rafters.

And after making it through that final minute and a half, the Americans regrouped. They're hockey players. It's just what they do.

"You've got to pick yourself back up," Quinn Hughes said. "We've got guys that have won Cups and gone deep in the playoffs, superstars in the league. So I feel like it's a resilient group (with) a lot of experience. You just pick yourself back up, get ready to go. I felt like we had an attack mindset in overtime."

The bench wasn't terribly animated between the end of regulation and the start of overtime. Frustration? Sure. Panic? Never. Business as usual.

"There was stuff said on the bench, but it's not like we (were histrionic)," Matthew Tkachuk said. "For a lot of guys on the team, we're pretty even-keeled. A lot of guys that have played in big games."

Few bigger than this one. Even when you've won the last two Stanley Cup championships, as Tkachuk's Florida Panthers have. The Olympics are a different beast.

But so is Quinn Hughes. And a little more than three minutes into overtime, Hughes took a pass from his Minnesota Wild teammate Matt



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Boldy, wheeled around along the blue line, went right up the gut and unleashed a wicked shot right through Swedish captain Gabriel Landeskog and right past Markström, who had done so much to keep his team in the game.

Hughes, because of injury, wasn't on the 4 Nations team that narrowly lost to Canada. But he's on this one. And even on this stage, perhaps especially on this stage, it's a little easier to withstand the stomach-punch of a last-minute equalizer when he's on the bench — someone who can snatch victory right back.

He's the kind of player who can be the difference between winning and losing, between believing and doubting, between a second-place finish last year, and a gold medal this year.

"He just was, right?" Slavin said. "We definitely missed him last year at 4 Nations. He's here, he's doing his thing, and it definitely makes our team better. It's unbelievable."

### Larkin scores first Olympic goal

Larkin is four goals from a fifth straight 30-goal season for the Detroit Red Wings team he captains. Yet he had gone without a goal in the first three games of the tournament and didn't have a lot of chances after being one of the United States' best players at the 4 Nations.

Wednesday, his line was by far the Americans' best line, with Tage Thompson getting an abundance of chances and Larkin finally snapping a 0-0 second-period tie with a nifty redirection of Jack Hughes' one-timer from the point after Larkin, the best faceoff man in the tournament, won the draw.

"He always shows up in big moments," Brady Tkachuk said. "It's just the type of player that he is and it's so fun to be on the same team, he's such a great player. He just stepped up. He's always the X-factor. He's playing PK, he's a great five-on-five player, and he scored a big goal for us. He's just a fantastic player."

It was a cool moment for Larkin and the Hughes brothers, all Michigan residents who teamed up on the scoring battery. The Hugheses, Larkin, Zach Werenski, Hellebuyck, Jake Sanderson and Kyle Connor are part of a star-studded summer group that skates almost daily in Plymouth in a session run by Jim Hughes, dad of the Hughes brothers.

It was a cool moment for Larkin, Hughes and his brother Quinn, all Michigan residents who teamed up on the scoring battery. The Hughes brothers have combined for nine points in four games, but more notably, the Hugheses, Larkin, Zach Werenski, Connor Hellebuyck, Jake Sanderson and Kyle Connor are part of a star-studded summer group that skates almost daily in Plymouth in a session run by Jim Hughes, dad of the Hughes brothers.

"Those skates, we're talking really high-end players, so it's a great tune-up for the season," Werenski said.

Quinn Hughes picked up his fifth assist in four games to tie Brian Leetch (2002) for the most assists by an American defenseman in an Olympic tournament with NHL participation. Hughes' four-game assist streak is now the longest run by an American player in an Olympics featuring NHLers. He also tied Nicklas Lidstrom (2002, Sweden) for the longest assist streak by a defenseman in an Olympics with NHLers.

### Markström starts second game in a row

Despite playing the night before in a qualifying-round win over Latvia, New Jersey Devils netminder Jacob Markström got the start for the Swedes. And he didn't look any worse for the wear.

Markström made 37 saves and was the biggest reason Sweden remained in the game into the third period. The only goal he gave up to that point was one he didn't have a chance on, as Larkin — left almost completely unchecked by Rasmus Dahlin in front of the net — tipped

Jack Hughes' shot. Dahlin was standing next to Larkin, but didn't put his body or his stick on him, allowing him a clean look for the tip.

Markström was flawless otherwise. One of his best saves came midway through the second period, when Auston Matthews made a slick touch pass off a Matt Boldy centering feed to Jake Guentzel, who was racing in alongside him. Markström coolly slid to his right and made the stop. Markström also made two point-blank saves on Tage Thompson during an American power play late in the second period.

Filip Gustavsson started the tournament in goal for Sweden but struggled so dramatically he was scratched for a second game in a row with his Minnesota Wild backup, Jesper Wallstedt, backing up Markstrom. Gustavsson entered as Sweden's No. 1 but went 1-1 in the tournament with a 2.55 goals-against average and .889 save percentage.

Hellebuyck wasn't tested quite as much as Markström was, but he had quite the game-long duel with Sweden's Lucas Raymond, who finished the game with five shots on goal, three of them dangerous chances.

Late in the first period, Oliver Ekman-Larsson sprung Raymond for a breakaway right up the gut, and Hellebuyck calmly made the save. Then, early in the second period, Gabriel Landeskog found Raymond at the back door with a brilliant no-look backhand pass through four bodies, but Hellebuyck — never out of position — got his left pad on it. Later in the second, Hellebuyck denied Raymond again, shrugging off a hard shot off the rush.

He played a strong game before his shutout was ruined by Zibanejad's extra-attacker goal. He couldn't believe the puck had made it through him, but like his teammates, he had to mentally reset in a hurry.

"I guess you could say mentally strong, but you're playing a good game, you feel like you deserve to win," Hellebuyck said. "It's hockey. You don't shut out every single night. If you're playing the right way and feel like you should win, you usually get the result."

### Hedman hurt

As one of the three premier teams in the tournament, the Swedes were never supposed to play in the qualification round. But — and he was almost ashamed to admit it — Victor Hedman was almost glad they did. Hedman missed nearly two months with an elbow injury, returning to the Tampa Bay Lightning for just the last three games before the Olympic break. He needed all the action he could get in order to reach midseason form in a hurry.

"Being a little selfish, for me, to get this extra game was huge," the big defenseman said after a 5-1 win over Latvia on Tuesday. "I haven't played a whole lot this year. Get the timing, get the legs into it, get ready for tomorrow."

Unfortunately for Hedman — and for Sweden — Hedman never got a chance against the United States. Coach Sam Hallam said Hedman suffered a lower-body injury during warmups. Hedman stayed in uniform and sat on the bench to support his teammates, but did not play.

"We knew there was no place he'd rather be than on the ice to compete with us," said captain Gabriel Landeskog.

"I was hurting for him," Landeskog said. "I really was. And I still am. I know how long he'd be working toward this and looking forward toward this. That sucks."

Interestingly, Jesper Bratt, one of New Jersey's best forwards, was also on the bench and didn't play a single shift until the third period after being scratched against Latvia. This, despite the fact Hallam scratched Marcus Johansson.

Bratt scored the winning goal for Sweden to beat the U.S. in last year's 4 Nations round-robin.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026



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1379711 Websites

The Athletic / Inside the Nick Suzuki decision that kept Team Canada's Olympic hopes alive

By Arpon Basu

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — When Nick Suzuki jumped over the boards with 4:34 to play in regulation with Team Canada down 3-2 to the Czech Republic, he did so with a heavy mind, a sense of responsibility for the predicament Canada found itself in: a potentially imminent elimination from the Olympics.

Suzuki missed an open net in the second period with the game tied 2-2. He was also on the ice and in pursuit of Martin Nečas when Ondrej Palat took a drop pass and gave the Czechs a 3-2 lead with a little less than eight minutes left in the third period.

Of the two, Suzuki was more upset with himself on the goal against — one where the Czechs had six skaters on the ice for a long time, and where Palat was the sixth player to enter the defensive zone — than he was for missing the open net, saying he would have liked to better anticipate the drop pass to Palat as opposed to having his stick in the lane to prevent a pass to David Pastrňák on the weak side.

All of this was on his mind when he jumped on the ice, playing between Mark Stone and Mitch Marner as a replacement for captain Sidney Crosby, with less than five minutes left in regulation.

"After that," Suzuki said, "I knew I had to step up and do something."

The shift was not amounting to much when, with 3:39 left — or 55 seconds into his shift — Suzuki hit the red line with the puck as Stone and Marner headed to the bench.

When Suzuki was younger, when he first started working with Montreal Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis, he would regularly extend shifts to try for one more offensive opportunity. It took some time and persistence from St. Louis to get Suzuki and his regular linemate Cole Caufield to stop doing that and instead just put the puck deep and get off the ice when it was time for a change.

But when Suzuki hit that red line, he knew Stone and Marner were already close enough to the Canada bench to get the change in safely, and so he remembered something else St. Louis has been preaching to him in Montreal.

He extended his shift, yes. But he did it in a smart, calculated way, in a way that St. Louis always preaches to his players: when you have multiple options available to you, don't simply choose a good option, choose the best option.

"It's kind of something that Marty (St. Louis) always talks about. If you're by yourself, linemates are changing, maybe just try to get it in, go forecheck by yourself and buy yourself some time for fresh guys to get out there," Suzuki said, "and I was able to do that."

The Canadians will play for an Olympic medal after winning a nail-biter vs. the Czech Republic in overtime on Wednesday.

Suzuki held onto the puck, absorbed a light cross-check from Lukas Sedlak, chipped it softly into the Czech zone and prepared himself to battle defenseman Filip Hronek for that puck. The goal was simply to get a stick on the puck, to keep it alive, to give Canada's next line a chance to spend its shift in the offensive zone.

Despite everything that was on Suzuki's mind, how badly he wanted to make up for a perceived mistake on what was still the potential winning goal at the time, he made a second calculated evaluation on the play.

"They played yesterday and we knew we've just got to keep wearing them down and getting in hard on the forecheck," Suzuki said. "(Hronek) plays a lot of minutes. I just tried to do my best to go win that battle."

And because of the first calculated evaluation Suzuki made — to keep the puck to begin with — Seth Jarvis was able to enter the offensive zone with fresh legs and a fresh mind, and recovered the puck in the spot Suzuki placed it for him to collect. As that happened, Devon Toews was also coming off the bench fresh, and Suzuki curled toward the front of the net as Jarvis sent Toews the puck at the blue line.

And as Suzuki made that curl, he did a subtle little thing to make the play work. He showed Toews the blade of his stick, on his forehand side, wide of the net.

Essentially, he gave Toews a target, and Toews hit it perfectly.

Suzuki tipped the puck between Lukáš Dostál's legs, the game was tied, a nervous Canadian-heavy crowd exploded, and Suzuki's goal celebration nearly saw him fall through the open gate where the skating camera operator had just gotten on the ice surface.

But it all began with Suzuki — with tired legs and a tired, burdened mind — making a decision.

Canada's captain addressed his teammates before the third period, motivating them to a 4-3 overtime win over the Czech Republic.

"That was an elite play," Canada forward Brad Marchand said. "I don't know where he was at in his shift but the fact he got that in by himself, created the forecheck and won a battle, allowing those guys to get in — it's not just the tip, it's the entire play. That's what sometimes guys don't get credit for. He's done that 1,000 times throughout the tournament, but some people are just counting points.

"That's why we're not too concerned about it; we know the effort he puts in every day and that's why we appreciate it."

Marchand's answer was tainted by him being told Suzuki had been getting some criticism for how his tournament had been going. His line with Nathan MacKinnon and Brandon Hagel was somewhat inconsistent, and Suzuki himself had admitted he was having some trouble adjusting to plays along the walls in the defensive zone, something he doesn't do as a natural center but must as a winger.

That criticism was loud online, but it did not reach Canada's dressing room.

"Yeah, no one's really worried about outside noise, no one pays attention to that in our room," Marchand said. "Every guy is valued and has a role to do. He's been having a great tournament through our eyes, regardless of what the outside says. We're in this position because of the whole team. It was great to see him get that. He's a big-time player, he's showed that his whole career, and he showed that again tonight."

Best-on-best hockey is about details, and that emphasis on details is only heightened at the Olympics. Suzuki felt he had not paid enough attention to the details on the Czech go-ahead goal, and that he needed to do something about it.

More than the goal, more than the tip, what Suzuki did about it was make a decision.

The right decision.

The best decision.

"Like I told you, he's a Swiss army knife, he can play with anybody, and I thought he elevated his game," Canada coach Jon Cooper said. "And



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when our country needed a goal, Nick Suzuki answered, and good for him.”

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

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The Athletic / How a pep talk from an injured Sidney Crosby fueled Canada's Olympic quarterfinal win

By Pierre LeBrun

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — Team USA had just tied the game late and an entire country was on pins and needles.

It was the intermission before overtime of the 2010 gold medal game in Vancouver. Team Canada captain Scott Niedermayer spoke up, hoping to calm the frayed nerves of a dressing room that was a little rattled after giving up a late-game lead.

“It was nothing out of the ordinary, but you get into those situations where it gets a little hairy, the nerves start coming out, the mind kind of leads you down the wrong path,” Niedermayer, humble as always, told The Athletic over the phone Wednesday. “The message was just, ‘Believe in each other. Trust your teammates. If we keep doing things the right way, that we have a chance to win a hockey game.’”

“And I’m sure somewhere along those lines it was the same thing with Sid today,” Niedermayer added.

That would be Sidney Crosby who Niedermayer was referring to.

Of course, it was Crosby who would score the “Golden Goal” in that overtime period. Over the years, Crosby has spoken about Niedermayer’s leadership from that Olympic team and how he learned from it.

An injured Crosby addressed the team before the third period on Wednesday.

His message?

“Go get it, boys,” head coach Jon Cooper said after a dramatic, come-from-behind, overtime win over the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals. “There was a lot more than that. But, you know, he’s a true leader. And ... they don’t want this to be the end of the tournament for him.”

Crosby was unable to finish Canada’s Olympic quarterfinal game on Wednesday because of a lower-body injury.

I bet you could hear a pin drop as a hobbled No. 87 delivered those words to a room full of players who look up to him in every which way.

“He understands it’s about the team, it’s about the team having success,” Niedermayer said. “Nothing would surprise me about what he would say and how the guys would respond. There’s a lot of respect for him for sure. So none of that surprises me.”

They needed the pep talk. Adversity hit Team Canada in waves on Wednesday. A Czech team that came out swinging. A Canadian icon injured. A go-ahead goal by the Czechs, which replays show had six of their skaters on the ice.

Punch after punch after punch. Emotions running high. That scary feeling of an underdog ripping your lifelong Olympic dream away from you.

It was all right there. And you know what? With the minutes ticking away late in the third period, down 3-2, there was no sign of panic on that Canadian bench.

No. 87’s leadership was still being felt.

“The group is super comfortable being uncomfortable,” said Cooper. “And that’s what it is. It was calm. Everybody had complete faith in whoever was going over the boards; it just felt it was like a matter of time, it was going to happen.”

Added Nathan MacKinnon: “It’s a game that’s very emotional. You’re trying to stay in the moment. I thought the bench was really positive all game, even though it was back and forth.”

Nick Suzuki, who replaced Crosby on a line between Mitch Marner and Mark Stone, played the first hero as his amazing redirection tied it with 3:27 left in the third period.

That set up Marner’s overtime heroics, the biggest goal in his career. And a crisis averted for the world’s most hockey-obsessed nation.

“A weight lifted off our shoulders, for sure,” said 19-year-old star Macklin Celebrini. “Just seeing that puck go in, knowing that we won the game ... it was a good feeling for all of us.”

Ho-hum, just another three-point (one goal, two assists) night for Celebrini, who has owned these Olympics.

But his thoughts, like everyone else on Team Canada, were of concern when Crosby left the game injured, unable to put weight on his right leg after taking a hit from Radko Gudas.

“It’s super tough,” Celebrini said. “He’s the leader, captain, heart and soul of our team. He’s a guy that everyone looks to, so for him to go down, it was tough, but I think we did a good job rallying and staying on the gas.”

Added Connor McDavid: “Obviously disappointing. Never fun, never easy to see your captain go down like that.”

The natural motivation that came from Crosby’s address to the team was self-evident in how each Team Canada player talked about it after the game. They would go through a wall for their captain. They didn’t want his Olympic career to end that way on this night.

“I can see how they have that respect for him and that would definitely be a motivating factor,” said Niedermayer. “It’s tough to see a guy like that who has done so much, having to leave the game and who knows what it means for the rest of the Olympics. But I’m sure guys will use that as motivation because guys have all the respect in the world for him, and rightly so.”

“I don’t think you can ask anything more from a hockey player, to be honest,” added Niedermayer. “Never mind how he plays and the success he has, but how he handles himself and treats people. It’s all of it, right?”

Cooper didn’t have an update on Crosby after the game, but the captain underwent testing, according to a league source. Everyone hopes it wasn’t his last game as a Canadian Olympian. Everyone is hoping he can come back before the end of the tournament. But there was no way of knowing that in the immediate aftermath of Wednesday.

Crosby’s closest pals from Nova Scotia couldn’t hide their concern, either.

“I mean it’s tough,” MacKinnon said. “... He’s the man, we want him on the bench, we want him on the team. It sucks he got hurt but we had to stay focused and just keep going.”

Added Marchand: “Yeah, it’s tough when you lose a guy like that, obviously one of the best ever to play the game. Such a big character on the bench and in the room. Big presence in big moments. But you don’t have a choice, you’ve got to keep going. It was great that the team came



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together and battled through that adversity tonight. You have to give the Czechs a lot of credit."

You sure do. The Czech Republic sleepwalked through its 3-2 win over Denmark on Tuesday in the qualifying playoffs and showed zero evidence it was going to try to be dragon-slayers 24 hours later.

They were physical and aggressive and took the game to Canada. It was a gutsy, gutsy performance by the Czechs, who have eliminated Canada three years in a row in the World Junior Championships.

"We're a mature group that believes in each other," said Gudas, who played a whale of a game. "We know we can play with anybody and showed that today. That was our best game. We battled for each other, we skated for each other, we laid our body on the line for each other. ... I don't think anybody picked us. So I was really happy with the guys, the way they performed, the way they handled this game, the pressure, the stars on the other side. We didn't care who was out there, we just played for each other, we played hard."

They almost pulled it off. It was almost Nagano 1998 all over again when Dominik Hasek and the Czechs upset Wayne Gretzky and Eric Lindros in the semifinals of the NHL's first Olympics.

But not on this day. Adversity knocked Team Canada down, but not out.

Which might make them stronger for the rest of the way.

"I think it's good to have a little adversity like this," said MacKinnon. "You know, a humbling, hard game. We won our first games — 5-0, 5-1, 10-2 — so it's good to have a little adversity and keep us a little more humble maybe."

If these were best-of-seven series, it would be hard to bet against Team Canada. The cream would rise to the top by Game 7. But the thing about these one-game knockout scenarios is that anything can happen. The drama can be unrivaled in that sense. And we got a dose of it on Wednesday at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena.

"That's the great thing about this tournament," Cooper said. "This is the Olympic Games. This is the best of the best. This is why all the players want to come to this, because they want to show who they are, and they want to flex. And if you think you're rolling through this tournament, you're sorely mistaken.

"And yes, we like the fact that we won the first three games and didn't have to play for the qualification game. Hell, yeah. But that doesn't mean you're gonna keep on winning. It doesn't mean because you got the Maple Leaf on your jersey that hey, oh my gosh, you're gonna be first.

"You've got to work to that," continued Cooper, the passion oozing out of his pores. "And the guys in there know it. So we came here to play six games. We've played four. We've gotten better in four, and we're going to get better in game five. And that's the mission this group is on. And whether it's the opponent or somebody said, you beat him before, did the Czechs come in here saying we're losing? No way. You know, they came in here saying, Canada ain't beating us twice. And they were nearly right."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

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The Athletic / Jordan Binnington vindicates Hockey Canada's belief in him with Olympic heroics

By Mark Lazerus

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — It wasn't just the puck that was on Marty Nečas' stick. It was the game — 73 seconds left in a tied game in the Olympic men's hockey quarterfinals against mighty Canada. It was history — a chance for the Czechs to pull off a monumental upset over possibly the most talented hockey team ever assembled. It was the well-being of a nation — some 40 million deeply stressed Canadians holding their collective breath.

And it was Jordan Binnington — his reputation and that of his backers after years of hand-wringing north of the border over the embarrassing state of Canadian goaltending compared with the embarrassment of riches in other countries, particularly the United States.

All of that flashed in the minds of nearly everyone in the hockey community in the four seconds it took for Nečas to grab the puck and outrace Devon Toews — whose blocked shot triggered the breakthrough — to Binnington's net. Binnington came well out of his crease before backtracking to the top of the blue paint as Nečas barreled in. He had spent much of the game settled deeper in his crease than usual, choosing conservatism over aggression. But this was aggressive. Nečas said he was tired at the end of his shift, and he knew Toews was right on him. Binnington got down low, and when Nečas went to his backhand, Binnington went hard to his right and made a clean save with his right pad, calmly covering the puck with his left hand and stopping play.

"Tried to go backhand five-hole and kind of missed the window there," Nečas said after Canada went on to win 4-3 in overtime on a Mitch Marner goal, sending the Canadians into the semifinals.

Had Nečas been wearing a Colorado Avalanche jersey and Binnington been in a St. Louis Blues sweater, maybe that play ends differently. But with a Maple Leaf on his chest?

Binnington just wins.

"He's a gamer," teammate Brandon Hagel said. "We knew that from the 4 Nations. It's not just a one-and-done. When big games come around, Jordan Binnington comes around."

It's hard to overstate just how bad Binnington has been this season for the Blues. And "bad" might sound harsh, but it's the only appropriate word. He hasn't struggled a bit. He hasn't been scuffling. He hasn't had an up-and-down year.

He's been bad. Real bad. Worst in the entire NHL, actually. He's allowed 20.61 more goals than expected, per Evolving Hockey. That's 86th out of 86 goalies, and he can't even see 85th from down there. He has an ungodly .864 save percentage. He's won eight games all season. He's been nothing short of a disaster.

And yet Hockey Canada general manager Doug Armstrong — who happens to be Binnington's GM in St. Louis — didn't hesitate to put him on the team. And Canada head coach Jon Cooper didn't think twice to make him the starter over Logan Thompson, who's been outstanding for the Washington Capitals. And his teammates didn't blink when asked to play in front of him.

This isn't the NHL, these aren't the St. Louis Blues, and this isn't Jordan Binnington, NHL goalie. This is Jordan Binnington, international tournament goalie.

That guy's great.

"I love that guy," Tom Wilson said. "He's a gamer. We're confident in him coming up big in that moment. He made two or three that saved our tournament."

Wilson was actually underplaying it. Binnington saved the Canadians' bacon a whole bunch of times.

There were the two stops he made on Czech captain Roman Červenka early in the third period on a harrowing shift that seemed like it would



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never end. There was a point-blank Radko Gudas shot midway through the third. There was a reflex stop on a David Kämpf flash rebound in the second period. There was the Nečas breakaway with 1:13 left in regulation.

Then in three-on-three overtime, Nečas found a trailing Radim Simek all alone in the slot. Binnington came way out and met the moment, as he always seems to. At least, on this stage.

"Massive, some massive saves there," Marnier said. "When we really needed him, he was there, and that's something that you can always trust in Binner. You love to see that out of your goalie and the confidence he's rolling with."

Binnington is no stranger to big games, of course. He led the Blues from last place to the Stanley Cup as a rookie, posting a .914 save percentage in 26 playoff games. But it's been a rocky road since. He followed that up with two straight poor postseason performances in two first-round exits. And after a strong 2023-24 season, his play has deteriorated over the past two seasons, to the point that he's fallen into a full-blown timeshare with Joel Hofer.

Binnington was seen as a liability going into the 4 Nations Face-Off last year, but he clawed his way to three wins in four games, outdueling Connor Hellebuyck in an overtime win over the Americans. In that overtime, Binnington robbed Auston Matthews of the game-winner twice. Even after that performance, there was endless gnashing of teeth and garment-rending over who should be Canada's goalie, the man who could counter the three-headed American monster of Hellebuyck, Jake Oettinger and Jeremy Swayman.

Czechia had better goaltending with Lukas Dostal, Karel Vejmelka and Dan Vladar. Sweden had better goaltending with Jacob Markström, Filip Gustavsson and Jesper Wallstedt. Finland had better goaltending with Juuse Saros. It seemed like everyone had better goaltending than Canada.

At various points in this Olympic cycle, the conventional wisdom was that it should have been Thompson. Or it should have been Mackenzie Blackwood. Or it should have been Scott Wedgewood. Or Darcy Kuemper. Sam Montembeault. Jet Greaves, even. Anyone but Binnington.

Hockey Canada never budged. Binnington showed why on Wednesday night at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena. Again and again and again and again.

In that moment, in that jersey, Binnington is the man Canada wants between the pipes. No matter what happened in the NHL, no matter what happened in the group stage, no matter what happened earlier in the game.

"That's Binner for you," Drew Doughty said. "Big saves, big times. And that's why he's our goalie."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379714 Websites

The Athletic / Canada defeats Czech Republic in OT thriller to reach Olympic men's hockey semifinals

By Pierre LeBrun and Arpon Basu

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — Mitch Marnier has been maligned for years as a player who does not come up clutch when it matters the most.

But his relatively short history playing best-on-best for Team Canada is the exact opposite of that. And when Team Canada needed him most, Marnier scored the biggest goal of his life.

Marnier took on three Czech Republic defenders, stickhandled into the teeth of the defense and somehow flipped a backhand inside the far post to the top corner at 1:22 of overtime to allow Team Canada to survive and win 4-3 against the Czech Republic in the Olympic quarterfinals on Wednesday.

The narrative surrounding Marnier throughout his career with the Toronto Maple Leafs was that he wilted in the playoffs, and the pressure in his hometown got so suffocating, so toxic, that Marnier left as soon as he could.

He hasn't played in the playoffs for the Vegas Golden Knights yet, but his teammate on the Knights, Mark Stone, has had no exposure to what Marnier was painted as in his Toronto days. As a Canada teammate, he has seen Marnier score an overtime winner against Sweden in the 4 Nations Face-Off and set up Connor McDavid's overtime winner in the 4 Nations championship game.

And now this.

"Yeah, as a teammate, I haven't experienced that," Stone said. "4 Nations, he gets a huge overtime goal for us, makes an incredible play for the winner. And then tonight, when we need him the most, he makes the play.

"So, um, I think it's a Toronto thing."

Crosby was unable to finish Canada's Olympic quarterfinal game on Wednesday because of a lower-body injury.

"It's the it factor, man. Mitch Marnier's got it," Canada coach Jon Cooper said. "I've watched it in world championships, 4 Nations, Olympics, I've seen it all out of him. And there's just never doubt in my mind about throwing that kid over the boards, because he doesn't disappoint. Sometimes your hair falls out at times, but in the end, he never disappoints."

Though Marnier has scored some big goals with the Maple Leaf on his sweater, nothing can top this. At least so far. And having his loved ones in the building only added to the magnitude of it for Marnier.

"I think the same kind of emotions (as scoring at 4 Nations), just shock and excitement and something really cool. Now it's even more special," Marnier said. "I have my son here with me. He's pretty young. He probably won't remember. He's probably sleeping on mom, but it'll be something cool to look back at one day with him and just show him where he was and what he was doing in this moment."

Team Canada had to come back to tie the game twice and also survived the departure of captain Sidney Crosby midway through the game.

"You definitely just want to keep pushing and keep doing your things and keep doing your things," Marnier said. "He's probably one of the most positive guys on a bench. He's always speaking positively and keeping the group up on themselves. That's what we tried to do, and we kept doing (it)."

Crosby left midway through the second period with what Team Canada called a lower-body injury after taking two consecutive hits from Czech defenseman Radko Gudas. On the first hit along the boards at center ice, Crosby's right leg appeared to fold underneath him as Gudas fell on him. Crosby looked like he was in pain but stayed on the ice, venturing into the offensive zone where he was once again met at the boards by Gudas, but Martin Nečas also sandwiched him against the boards.

Crosby returned to the bench slowly, sat briefly with a trainer and left for the Canada dressing room, never to return.



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The Czechs led 2-1 at the time, and Crosby's departure only added to a nation's shock that Team Canada found itself in this predicament in its first elimination game of a tournament it is favored to win.

Canada had not trailed in an Olympic game with NHL players since the preliminary round of the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, never trailing in the knockout round of that tournament or the entirety of the 2014 Olympics in Sochi.

And yet here they were, after winning three preliminary-round games that were ultimately meaningless by a combined score of 20-3, sitting in the dressing room at first intermission facing adversity for the first time.

And then Crosby was gone.

But Canada rallied to tie the game on a goal by Nathan MacKinnon and again on a goal by Nick Suzuki with a bit more than three minutes left in regulation time, setting up the Marner heroics in overtime.

"It's tough when you lose a guy like that, obviously one of the best ever to play the game," Crosby's good friend Brad Marchand said of the loss of his captain. "Such a big character on the bench and in the room. Big presence in big moments. But you don't have a choice, you've got to keep going. It was great that the team came together and battled through that adversity tonight. You have to give the Czechs a lot of credit."

Mach3 super line put together again

They started apart, but Macklin Celebrini, Connor McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon were again reunited late in the first period and by the middle of the second period, they were a thing again.

Also of note, Celebrini replaced the injured Crosby on the first power-play unit and assisted on MacKinnon's power-play goal, which evened the score 2-2.

Crosby's injury hurts Team Canada for all kinds of reasons, but certainly the fact that his line with Marner and Stone was the most consistent since the start of the Olympic tournament is undeniable. So there's that.

With Team Canada going the Mach3 route the rest of the game, and without No. 87 in the middle of his line, suddenly this looks more top-heavy as a forward group than was ever the plan.

Consider that head coach Jon Cooper explained early in the tournament how important it was to go with the three-headed monster down the middle of McDavid, MacKinnon and Crosby all centering their own lines. It was a balanced approach. Now with Crosby injured and MacKinnon and McDavid doing the '87 Canada Cup thing, one has to wonder how that affects the offense moving forward.

It was an opportunity certainly for Montreal Canadiens captain Suzuki to shine, given the elevated role after the injury to Crosby, and we thought he had his best game of the Olympics so far. And he absolutely did, his tying goal on a beautiful redirect tying the game 3-3 late in the third period, one of the biggest goals of his career.

Redemption for Suzuki

Suzuki entered the game having a difficult tournament, not really looking like himself as he attempted to adjust to the wing on a line with MacKinnon. There was wide speculation that he would be the one to come out of the Canada lineup with Marchand's return from injury.

In the second period, a puck bounced to Suzuki with Lukáš Dostál out of position. He had an empty cage staring at him. He got down on one knee and one-timed the shot. He did everything right.

And he rang the shot off the outside post.

As the puck bounced off the post and out, Suzuki took a second to look down at the ice. The weight of his difficult tournament appeared to feel heaviest in that moment.

"Just kind of some disbelief," Suzuki said of what was running through his mind. "When the net's that open, you've got to bury those, especially in these tournaments. You never know what's going to happen in these games. I just tried to bear down and capitalize on the next one I get."

He did.

"When our country needed a goal," Cooper said, "Nick Suzuki answered, and good for him."

With a little more than three minutes left in regulation, Stone and Marner headed to the Canada bench for a change with Suzuki carrying the puck. Just as he crossed the red line, Suzuki could have put the puck deep and gotten off the ice. He instead chipped it in and went after it himself, beating Filip Hronek in a puck battle and maintaining possession for Canada long enough for Seth Jarvis to enter the play from the bench. Suzuki pushed the puck forward to an area of the ice where Jarvis could get it, Jarvis worked the puck back to the blue line, Suzuki got to the front of the net and tipped the Toews shot home.

"Yeah, it was a lot of relief, for sure," Suzuki said. "I think that the third (Czech) goal, I didn't love my back check, I think I could have gotten a better stick on that for the drop pass. After that, I knew I had to step up and do something."

Speaking of which...

The missed Czech too-many-men call

The goal Suzuki was referring to was scored by Ondrej Palat at 12:18 of the third period to give the Czechs a 3-2 lead. It came after a Thomas Harley shot was blocked by Tomas Hertl, creating an odd-man situation toward the Canada end with only Drew Doughty back and Suzuki giving chase on Nečas as he raced up the ice with the puck.

When Palat scored, no one felt worse than Harley for how that play went down.

"(Suzuki) came around the back of the net and I could have just hit it," Harley said. "I thought I had some more space, that I could walk into it, and Hertl made a great play. Came out, slide and block, went out the other way and backchecking that rush I was praying we'd get a save.

"It didn't work out that way, but (Jordan Binnington) came up huge other times in the game and built us up."

What Harley did not realize at the time, and what most of the team didn't either, was the Czechs had six players on the ice when Hertl blocked that Harley shot.

Suzuki and Doughty struggled to sort out the 3-on-2 coverage on the goal that almost ended Canada's Olympic tournament. Why? cz got away with having 6 players on the ice.

Cooper was asked about the too-many-men situation on that goal toward the end of his scrum with the media. Cooper gave a sly smile, rolled his eyes, and walked away. End of scrum.

MacKinnon, asked if he saw the six Czech players on the ice on the 3-2 goal, said: "Yeah. The refs didn't, though."

Gudas on a war path

Gudas expressed concern for Crosby after the game, saying there was nothing dirty about it and it just appeared to be a bad outcome of a hockey play.

"I was just trying to hold the red line," Gudas said. "Just trying to play hard, everybody is playing physical. ... Yeah I'm not sure (what happened). That team is so fast, so quick, you worry about the next shift, the next play. Hopefully he's OK, you never want to see a guy get hurt, especially in these tournaments."



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Gudas played his trademark hard, physical brand of hockey throughout the game, and his fingerprints were all over the first two periods.

When Stone was looking to get a change near the midway point of the first period, just a few steps from the red line, instead of gaining the line and getting the puck in deep, Stone sent a pass cross-ice in the neutral zone. And Gudas was waiting for it.

He pounced on the pass attempt and got the play going in the other direction, catching Canada flat-footed and culminating in Lukas Sedlak opening the scoring for the Czechs and tying the game 1-1. It was a big momentum swing in the game.

Gudas was a menace all game, nearly decapitating Suzuki in the neutral zone in the second and getting called for a questionable roughing penalty on Brandon Hagel with just over a minute left in the second period.

Binnington came up big when he had to

There is no Team Canada player under more scrutiny than goaltender Jordan Binnington. Though he benefits from unwavering belief from Cooper and his teammates, the country looked at Binnington's career-worst season with the St. Louis Blues and wondered if he could arrive in Milan with a clean slate.

His tournament-opening shutout win against the Czechs soothed some of that national doubt, and while the two goals Binnington allowed in a 10-2 rout against France were not great, that was not exactly the type of competitive environment in which Binnington typically thrives.

Binnington has been the worst goalie in the NHL this season. But in Canada's nail-biter of an Olympic quarterfinal he made save after save.

You could maybe say Binnington overplayed the shooter on David Pastrňák's power-play goal, but he came up with a massive save on Martin Nečas on a breakaway with 1:10 to play in regulation, allowing Canada to reach overtime, where he made another huge save on Radim Simek, who was left unchecked on the weak side.

Marnier won the game for Canada 22 seconds later.

"Two really big saves near the end. Huge ones. One in overtime, and I think one was like, a minute left or something," Canada defenseman Drew Doughty said. "That's Binner for you. Big saves big times, and that's why he's our goalie."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379715 Websites

The Athletic / What are the overtime rules in the Olympic hockey tournament?

By Jesse Granger

Feb. 18, 2026

Overtime — and particularly the shootout — has produced some of the most memorable moments in Olympic hockey history.

In 1994, in Lillehammer, Norway, Peter Forsberg pulled off a move in the shootout that was so legendary it won Sweden a gold medal and became a postage stamp in his home country, and the deke has been called "the Forsberg" by players ever since.

In the women's tournament in 2018, in PyeongChang, South Korea, Jocelyne Lamoureux-Davidson triple-deked around Canadian goalie Shannon Szabados, and then Maddie Rooney made a save on the other end to deliver gold for the United States women.

There won't be a similar moment in this year's gold medal games in Milan, Italy, after the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) made changes to its overtime rules.

The federation adopted new rules for these Olympics, eliminating the shootout in the gold medal game and replacing it with three-on-three overtime for 20-minute periods until one side scores. The new overtime rules change depending on the round of the tournament, so here's an overview of how the games will be decided in each stage.

Quarterfinals and semifinals

In the preliminary round, overtime games featured five minutes sudden-death, three-on-three overtime, followed by a five-round shootout if necessary. The men's preliminary round featured one overtime game — Switzerland beat Czechia 4-3 — while the women's tournament had two games: Germany's 2-1 overtime win over France and Switzerland's 4-3 shootout win over Czechia.

Now that teams have reached the knockout stage of the tournament, the sudden-death, three-on-three overtime extends from five minutes to 10 minutes. If no goal is scored, the game will be decided in (at least) a five-round shootout. In the Olympics, teams can reuse the same shooter as many times as they'd like after the fifth round — a change for the men, because that's not allowed in the NHL.

Hockey fans will remember T.J. Oshie's incredible shootout performance in 2014 in Sochi, Russia, when he took six consecutive shootout attempts for the United States, and scored on Russia's Sergei Bobrovsky in four of them, to secure a win in the preliminary round.

One of the biggest upsets in Olympic hockey history featured a 10-minute overtime followed by a shootout. The Czech Republic knocked off a star-studded Canadian roster in the semifinal game of the 1998 Olympics in Nagano, Japan. Legendary goaltender Dominik Hašek stopped all five of Canada's shooters (Theo Fleury, Ray Bourque, Joe Nieuwendyk, Eric Lindros and Brendan Shanahan) in the shootout to win it for the Czech Republic, which went on to win gold.

The overtime in that game was five-on-five, compared to the three-on-three format the tournament will be using this year.

Gold-medal game

This is where the IIHF made the most significant changes, eliminating the shootout entirely. If teams reach overtime in the gold-medal game, they will play full, 20-minute periods of sudden-death overtime at three-on-three until a winning goal is scored.

This ensures any championship game that goes beyond regulation will end with a golden goal.

Perhaps the most famous golden goal in hockey history happened in 2010 in Vancouver. Just over seven minutes into the 20-minute overtime period, Sidney Crosby peeled off the side boards, took a pass from Jerome Iginla and beat goaltender Ryan Miller with a shot to win it.

That overtime was played at four-on-four, so if one of this year's gold medal games reaches overtime, there will be more open ice.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379716 Websites

The Athletic / Sidney Crosby injured in Canada's Olympic hockey quarterfinal game: What we know

By Michael Russo



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Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — You know Sidney Crosby is genuinely hurt and unable to play when Canada's strong-minded and still-a-superstar captain doesn't come out for the third period of a win-or-go-home quarterfinal game in the Olympics.

"You just rarely see it," Canada coach Jon Cooper said of Crosby, the two-time Olympic gold medalist. "For him, something definitely went wrong, but he just thought he wasn't in a position to help the team the rest of the night."

After Crosby addressed the team during the second intermission of Wednesday's quarterfinal against the Czech Republic, Canada actually fell behind 3-2 on Ondrej Palat's go-ahead goal in the third before Nick Suzuki forced overtime with a late-tying goal. Mitch Marner executed his latest overtime heroics with the biggest goal of his hockey career.

Marner also scored in overtime against Sweden in the 4 Nations Face-Off and assisted on Connor McDavid's overtime goal over the United States in the 4 Nations final.

Now the question is whether we'll see Crosby again in these Olympics, either in Friday's semifinal or in a potential gold medal game Sunday.

Cooper said Crosby will be evaluated after sustaining an injury to his right leg in the second period Wednesday.

"If we lose this game, we didn't want this to be Sid's last game of this Olympics," Cooper said. "So it was a big motivator for the guys coming out."

Crosby was hurt midway through the period when veteran defenseman Radko Gudas came to finish his check on him between the benches. Crosby tried to duck the hit; his legs split and Gudas seemed to topple over him. His right leg bent awkwardly.

"I honestly haven't seen it," Canada's Tom Wilson said. "Gudy plays the game hard, I know him and I don't think he's a guy that ever wants to intentionally injure somebody. I'll go watch it, but it was a gutsy effort by those guys. Hopefully Sid is OK."

Gudas said he was just trying to finish his check and hopes Crosby is OK.

Crosby was clearly laboring as he skated into the offensive zone following the collision with Gudas. After being checked again by Gudas and Martin Nečas, Crosby took one stride and immediately showed signs of injury. He skated slowly to the bench, sat there for a few minutes and then slowly made his way to the locker room with a trainer.

"We just rally around him," defenseman Drew Doughty said. "Hopefully he's gonna be alright for the next one. But if he's not, guys gotta step up. That's just the bottom line. Sucks to see your captain go down and a player of that stature. But what are you gonna do, really?"

The Pittsburgh Penguins star, 38, has two goals and four assists in now parts of four games these Olympics. He has seven goals and nine assists in 17 career games in the Olympics.

"That's our guy, that's our leader, Captain Canada," Seth Jarvis said. "When stuff like that happens, you hate it, but we rallied together, rallied around him. Want to make sure he has a chance to play again, and that's what we did."

"Yeah it's tough when you lose a guy like that," Brad Marchand said. "Obviously one of the best ever to play the game. Such a big character on the bench and in the room. Big presence in big moments. But you don't have a choice, you've got to keep going. It was great that the team came together and battled through that adversity tonight. You have to give the Czechs a lot of credit."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379717 Websites

The Athletic / Slovakia continues magical Olympic hockey run, will play for a medal after bouncing Germany

By Mark Lazerus

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — Of all the remarkable things that happened during Slovakia's 6-2 quarterfinal victory over Germany on Wednesday afternoon, perhaps the most impressive feat belonged to the Slovak athletic trainer, who deftly managed to keep an ice pack on the nation's most important neck as Juraj Slafkovský leapt to his feet in celebration of Milos Kelemen's second-period goal.

Moments earlier, Slafkovský, the 21-year-old rising superstar who has put Slovakia back on the hockey map, had gone head-first into the boards, partially from his own momentum, partially from a nudge from a Moritz Seider fly-by. Slafkovský lay flat on the ice, face down, for several seconds before slowly getting up and trudging back to the bench, where he received a quick neck rub and an ice pack. A hockey-loving nation, which has been waiting for a player like this — for a team like this — since the days of Marián Hossa, Zdeno Chára, Peter Bondra, Pavol Demitra, Ziggy Palffy and Marián Gaborik, held its collective breath.

Then Kelemen went outside and inside around German defenseman Lukas Kälble, sending the pretzeled German off his feet and the fans at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena — and Slafkovský — onto theirs with a slick backhander over Philipp Grubauer's outstretched glove. Thirty-three seconds later, Oliver Okuliar made it 3-0, and the rout was on.

Slovakia is back. Back in the spotlight. Back to international relevance. Back to playing for medals.

"I still kind of can't believe we made it to (the) top four," Washington Capitals defenseman Martin Fehérváry said. "Obviously, I believed in our group, but this tournament — NHL players, stars on the other teams — it seems a little bit unreal. I'm just so happy and excited. I never really made it to (the) top four at some big tournament."

Slovakia is actually the defending Olympic bronze medalist after a stirring run in Beijing in 2022. But that tournament was held without fans because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and without NHL players. This is something entirely different, and it's a shocking performance from a young team that's at least four years ahead of schedule.

The upstart Slovaks, by far the story of this otherwise milquetoast tournament, will face either the United States or the winner of Wednesday's Switzerland-Finland game in the semifinals on Friday, and are guaranteed to play in a medal game. When the tournament began, the thought of another bronze medal was almost laughable, a long-term goal that just didn't seem realistic yet for this young group of players, most of whom toil in relative anonymity in leagues in the Czech Republic or Switzerland.

Now, they're thinking about gold. Why the heck not?

"Yeah, for sure," New Jersey Devils defenseman Šimon Nemeč said. "If we're in the semifinal, you have to think about that."

That Slafkovský was on the bench for the 33-second span that turned this game from a taut affair to a laughter shouldn't be overlooked. Slafkovský, the Montreal Canadiens winger who was the NHL's No. 1 draft pick in 2022, has gotten the lion's share of the attention in these Games, and understandably so. He's a true star and a big-game



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performer, with 10 goals in 10 Olympic games entering the quarterfinals. He's the hope of a nation.

But he's not alone. Against a German team with high expectations and a much higher level of talent — Leon Draisaitl, Tim Stützle, JJ Peterka, Seider, Grubauer — Slovakia had a total team effort to advance to the semis. St. Louis Blues rookie Dalibor Dvorský has been consistently excellent in Milan and has three goals and three assists in four games after adding one of each against Germany. San Jose Sharks rookie Pavol Regenda had two goals and an assist as well. Nemeč has been dynamic on the back end. Samuel Hlavaj, who struggled so mightily in the American Hockey League this season that the Minnesota Wild demoted him to the ECHL for a game — has been a rock in net, with a .932 save percentage in three starts.

And the rest of the mostly anonymous Slovaks — only seven are in the NHL — have completely bought in on a smart, physical, conservative-but-opportunistic team game that has allowed them to stun Finland in the opener, survive a scare from Italy, then give mighty Sweden a tough game in the group-stage finale. In that Sweden game, the Slovaks scored a late goal that made a loss effectively a win, as it gave them the edge in goal differential, meaning a Group B victory and a bye into the quarterfinals.

"It's not going to be about Slafkovský or Nemeč or other guys," Slovakia coach Vladimír Országh said. "If we want to be successful, we can't be about a couple guys. And our team is not about a couple guys. Our team is about 25 guys we have on the roster. They work, they stick together on the ice and every day somebody else is a hero. But for me, all the guys are heroes."

Not only are the Slovaks playing well, but they're also playing loose. They seem to be having more fun than any other team in the tournament, from their silly goal song to their joke-filled press scrums.

Turns out, playing hockey with your friends is fun.

"I don't know how many games we've played together. We played so many games together," Nemeč said. "We know each other and it's more fun to play if you know the guys, if you grow up with them. Like me, Juraj, Dalibor — we are really good friends. Then it's easier to play with them."

"We play the sport we love, right?" Dvorský added. "We should be having fun playing it, and we are."

On the other side, the Germans were in almost disbelief. Given their star power and expectations, the 2026 Olympics were nothing short of a disaster for Germany, which brought its deepest roster ever to Milan.

"I think we threw way too many pucks away," Stützle said through gritted teeth. "Especially if we had them in the O-zone, we were shooting into way too many blocks. It happened a lot this tournament, where we kind of got out-chanced in the second period, where they get two-on-one, three-on-one breaks. We did it again today."

It was supposed to be Germany or the Czech Republic or Switzerland that upended this tournament. But it was Slovakia who crashed the party. And given the age and dynamic nature of their team — Slafkovský is 21, Dvorský is 20, Nemeč is 22, Regenda, Martin Pospíšil and Martin Fehérvári are 26, Hlavaj is 24 — it'll be the last time they're overlooked.

The upstarts are just starting up.

"Coming into the tournament, seeing the roster, I don't think anybody believed us," Regenda said. "And probably neither did we. ... In a tournament like underdogs can bite really hard, so we are really happy where we are right now. Top four, unbelievable."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

The Athletic / NHL Draft prospect Alberts Šmits turns heads with Olympic men's hockey performance

By Arpon Basu

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN — Four years ago in Beijing, a teenage prospect arrived on the Olympic stage, took the men's ice hockey tournament by storm and gave a massive boost to his NHL draft stock.

His performance in that Beijing tournament heavily influenced the Montreal Canadiens' decision to draft Juraj Slafkovský with the No. 1 pick at the 2022 NHL Draft. It gave them confidence that a big stage did not scare him and he would not wilt under the pressure, something Slafkovský is showing with Slovakia again at these Olympics.

A similar story might have been written by Latvia's 6-foot-3, 205-pound teenage defenseman Alberts Šmits, the lone draft-eligible player in the Olympic tournament this year.

Šmits' tournament came to an end in the qualifying round Tuesday when Latvia lost 4-1 to Sweden, but the rangy, physical defenseman with excellent hands and feet left an excellent impression on his teammates and anyone who watched him.

Earlier in the tournament, after Latvia faced the United States in the preliminary round, Šmits was asked about the opportunity in front of him to give a Slafkovský-like boost to his draft stock with a strong performance against the best players in the world. He had just come off a loss, but he was able to see the big-picture benefits of his time in Milan.

"Of course it's a great opportunity, a great challenge for me that I'm glad and honored to take, to see myself and see what I need to improve to play against those types of players, the top players in the world," he said on Feb. 12. "It's a big challenge I have for me and for us as a team."

It was a telling sign of his competitive nature that five days later, in the immediate aftermath of his country's elimination, Šmits was unable to see the big picture anymore. He didn't care about his draft stock.

"That's not why I came here," he said Tuesday after the loss to Sweden. "I came here to help my team and do my best to help my country. I didn't come here for the draft rankings."

That may very well be true, but how Šmits is viewed by NHL teams after his performance in a best-on-best tournament can only have improved. He played on his team's top pair, averaged 18:44 of ice time per game and not only did not look out of place, but looked like he belonged just two months after his 18th birthday.

Latvia and Columbus Blue Jackets goalie Elvis Merzljikins is no NHL scout, but when he was asked about the young players on the Latvia roster, he gave a long answer about the poise they played with, how it was impressive for him to watch them face this level of competition and play freely, with little to no nerves, and how it bodes well for the future of Latvian hockey.

But when asked specifically about Šmits, Merzljikins put on his NHL scouting cap.

"I'm definitely, when I get back home I need to talk to Columbus, because that's what I meant. Mostly, I was talking about him," he said. "The forwards I really don't care because they're not really my job; my closest friends are my defensemen. And him, he played lights out. The kid is really calm, focused, makes decisions quick, physical. Blocking shots, he doesn't really care about getting hurt or pain or anything. And mentally, he's really mature as a kid as well."



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"It's exactly him I was talking about. I'm happy and proud of him, and I'm happy that we have this type of player coming up for the future and the next many years for our nation."

What impressed his veteran teammates the most was how Šmits never backed down despite the quality of opponent he was facing. He was not in awe, he was not intimidated, he just played.

"I'm here to show what I can do on the ice," Šmits said after the game against the U.S. "I'm here to compete and not to admire other players."

Šmits demonstrated that most clearly against the Americans when he lined up U.S. captain Auston Matthews and dropped him with a big open-ice hit.

"He has a swagger, and that's good," Merzjkins said. "He has a similar character as me. Maybe that's why I like him, he really doesn't give a s—who is in front of him, what is the name, it doesn't matter. He is just going to go cross-check the guy, give it back if he has to, and obviously protect me. He has all good values.

"So again, I seriously have to go talk to Columbus."

Our NHL Draft experts Corey Pronman and Scott Wheeler both have Šmits in the top 10 of their latest draft rankings; Pronman has him at No. 8, Wheeler at No. 5. The only Latvian to ever be drafted in the first round is Zemgus Girgensons, who was taken by the Buffalo Sabres with the No. 14 pick in 2012. Šmits is all but assured to go higher than Girgensons did, especially after his performance in Milan.

"He's definitely a very mature kid, definitely the most mature 18-year-old I've seen," Girgensons said. "Great player, great skill, great poise for his age, so I think he's going to do great things moving forward ... On the ice, I think it's just poise, his poise with the puck; he can hold on to the puck.

"Usually guys that age try to rush plays and get rid of it; he definitely has the poise with it."

Latvia captain Kaspars Daugaviņš played 91 games in the NHL, but he was also a third-round pick of the Ottawa Senators in 2006. When Girgensons was taken in the first round, and Teddy Blueger was taken at No. 52 by the Pittsburgh Penguins, it set off a run of five straight years where a Latvian player got drafted.

Daugaviņš hopes Šmits can have a similar effect on Latvia in the coming years.

"It puts the belief in other kids when you have somebody drafted really high," he said. "First of all, it's the kids that watch him; they will start believing. But the other thing is hockey will know, like, the scouts. Two or three years ago when we won a bronze medal at the world championships, the scouts in the world start thinking, 'Oh, these guys know how to play hockey.'

"So the next generations will be seen."

For now, Šmits is headed back to Jukurit in Finland, a country he moved to on his own at age 13 to further his hockey career and has played in ever since. Wherever he lands in the draft is not his concern right now, and when asked by a Finnish reporter after the loss to Sweden if this would be his final season in Finland, Šmits responded that it was far too early to answer that question.

But as far as Merzjkins is concerned, after what he saw in Milan, it's not too early at all.

"I think he has a good chance to start playing in the NHL," he said. "I've seen a lot. Obviously I had never seen him on the small ice, but now I think he easily can play."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379719 Websites

The Athletic / USA vs. Sweden Olympic quarterfinal pits 7 Wild teammates against one another

By Michael Russo

Feb. 18, 2026

MILAN – Defensemen hate playing Joel Eriksson Ek. All Minnesota Wild fans know that.

So do Quinn Hughes and Brock Faber. The American defensemen both know they won't have to look hard Wednesday to find where Sweden's menace of a center will be on the ice.

"Right at the net creating havoc," said Faber, a second-pair defenseman and first-over-the-boards penalty killer for the United States.

From the moment Olympic rosters were set, the common question inside the Wild dressing room was what would it be like for Hughes, Faber and Matt Boldy to have to go up against Eriksson Ek, Marcus Johansson and potentially Filip Gustavsson or Jesper Wallstedt in the Olympics. Another teammate, Jonas Brodin, had been set to play for Sweden but missed out due to a lower-body injury that required surgery.

Well, how delicious. That meeting comes in the quarterfinals, not semis or gold medal game.

Standing in the way of the three American players — plus general manager Bill Guerin, coach John Hynes (one of USA's assistants) and a number of other Wild staff — are Eriksson Ek and the talented Swedes, whose road to a medal became more difficult when they gave up a goal in the final minute of their final preliminary game to Slovakia, turning a win into what felt like a loss.

The two-goal win, rather than the three-goal margin Sweden had, meant Slovakia won their group on goal difference and gave Sweden a quarterfinal date with the U.S. after it smoked Latvia 5-1 in the qualifying round Tuesday.

"They got a good team," Faber said of the Swedes. "Didn't necessarily click for them (in the prelims), but they beat us in the 4 Nations. They've got a solid, deep, really, really good hockey team. So we're gonna need to be our best. And obviously, playing against Ekker will be a lot of fun."

So would playing Gustavsson, who didn't dress Tuesday against Latvia. Wallstedt backed up Jacob Markström, so even though coach Sam Hallam wouldn't tip his hand, one wonders if Gustavsson didn't dress because he's starting against the United States and it's not Markström playing on back-to-back days.

"I think many times you see goalies who play back-to-back play even better the second night," Hallam said. "But let's see if everybody's fresh and ready to go."

Gustavsson is 1-1 in the tournament with a 2.55 goals-against average and .889 save percentage.

"That would be fun," Boldy said, smiling.

"I hope I get some good looks," said Faber. "No, he's a great goalie when he's hot. We know him as well as anyone, and when he's playing well, he's hard to beat."

Eriksson Ek loves his Wild teammates, especially Boldy, his linemate in Minnesota. But this is USA vs. Sweden, so he won't take it easy if Boldy, Faber or Hughes is standing between him and the crease.



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"I don't think they will, either," said Eriksson Ek, who has a short-handed goal and an assist in four games. "We're out there playing for our countries right now. One game and just put everything into it."

Faber is having a strong tournament. The two-time Olympian scored his first career Olympics goal against Germany and has an assist for two points in three games. He's also part of a 9-for-9 penalty kill.

"I'm super happy for Fabes," Boldy said. "I know he's got a bunch of family in the crowd, too. So it's pretty cool to score here. I felt the same way when I scored, but to see one of your best friends have a goal like that in the Olympics was pretty awesome."

Boldy has scored a goal in three games and is coming off an eight-shot performance against Germany. He has impressed the past two games on the United States' top line with Jake Guentzel and Auston Matthews.

"I'm just trying to make a difference any way I can," Boldy said. "I think our line's playing great. We're getting a lot of chances. Auston's been unreal. I think goals are out there, and we're getting chances to score. Some of them aren't going in, but some of them are. And I think the way we're playing the game is pretty honest and the right way."

There's no doubt Boldy has impressed. Coach Mike Sullivan has called him an "emerging star," and Vincent Trocheck continues to be blown away by Boldy's skill level.

"I think it was eye-opening for me last year at 4 Nations," Trocheck said. "I wasn't as familiar with him before that tournament. I think he came into that tournament as one of our best players. We've played in the regular season a couple times since then, and you notice him more and more every game. Here, he's been one of our best players. He just does all the little things so well. Great shot, skates well. He plays well defensively. He's a 200-foot player. Just a great tournament. There's a lot to like."

And then of course, there's Hughes, who has four assists in three games.

"He's a game changer on the blue line," Sullivan said.

Wallstedt hasn't played in the tournament, while Johansson has no points in two games. As for the rest of the Wild Olympians, Nico Sturm and Germany play Samuel Hlavaj and Slovakia, while David Spacek and the Czech Republic face Canada.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379720 Websites

The Athletic / How to watch Team USA vs. Sweden in 2026 Olympics men's hockey quarterfinals

By Garrett Chorpenning

Feb. 18, 2026

Following an undefeated stretch in the preliminary round, Team USA's men's Olympic hockey team bypassed qualifying altogether and advanced to the quarterfinals, awaiting its next opponent. On Tuesday, it was decided: With its 5-1 rout of Latvia, Sweden punched its ticket to the next round, moving one step closer to the podium.

Unfortunately, the United States picked the short straw, and it can't afford to take the Swedes lightly. Slovakia won Group B, not Sweden, despite the latter's more NHL-laden roster. On the other hand, the U.S. hasn't been on the ice since Sunday, while its opponent just fought to see another day exactly 24 hours before Wednesday's quarterfinal.

Ultimately, it depends on your view of the glass: This is either a genuine test that will further prepare Team USA for the final stages of the

tournament, or it's a bad draw for the Americans that could bring a sudden and unexpected end to their gold medal pursuit.

The U.S. didn't play to its full potential in the prelims, a statement best exemplified by a shaky 6-3 victory over Denmark last weekend. The Danes took a 2-1 advantage into the second period before Team USA pulled away, getting six goals from six different players. Even still, the U.S. decidedly went 3-0 and did what it needed to do to get to the meat of the tournament.

Sweden arrives to the quarterfinals having gone 3-1, with victories over Italy, Slovakia and Latvia and a 4-1 loss to Finland. Notably, the Swedes took down Team USA when they last met at the 4 Nations Face-Off in 2025. The U.S. had Jake Oettinger in goal that day, however — not a well-rested Connor Hellebuyck, who will be manning the net Wednesday. If you're looking for an X-factor, you've got one.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379721 Websites

The Athletic / The full Tom Wilson experience is on display at the Olympics: 'A nightmare to play against'

By Sean Gentille

Feb. 18, 2026

An ultra-rare combination of skill, skating and frightening physicality, with a game that now toes the line of legality after a multitude of trips to the other side, Wilson had spent years stating his case to make the Canadian men's national team for a best-on-best tournament.

In 2025, he'd fallen short. The 4 Nations Face-Off, widely seen as a dry run for the 2026 Olympics, came and went, highlighted by a preliminary-round game between Canada and the United States that featured three fights in nine seconds and reminded the sport just what it had missed during the NHL's 12-year Olympic absence. Wilson watched from his couch.

As the Olympic roster announcement on Dec. 31 loomed, on one of his regular calls with Matt Nichol — the Ottawa Senators' director of player health and performance and Wilson's offseason trainer since he was 16 years old — Wilson went through his competition for a roster slot. Over the summer, he was one of 42 NHL players to skate at the Canadian national team orientation camp. He understood the enormity of the task.

On the phone with Nichol, Wilson rattled off star after star, wondering how he'd leapfrog enough of them, laying bare just how badly he wanted to make it happen. Two minutes of ice time per game? Zero minutes? Whatever. He just wanted to be on the roster.

"Dude," Nichol responded, "you have more goals than seven of the guys you just mentioned."

Wilson, one season after scoring a career-high 33 goals for the Washington Capitals, was already on track to be a point-per-game NHL player for the first time. Not only did Wilson make the team, he's been taking regular shifts with Connor McDavid, the best player on Earth, and Macklin Celebrini, the possible heir to McDavid's throne.

It's a role Wilson is qualified to fill, and it's certainly one he accepts.

"If I have to block a slap shot in the last minute of the game, you bet I'm going to do it. And if I have to play five minutes, that's fine," Wilson told The Athletic before the Olympics. "If I have to play 15, 18, whatever, and bring energy and offense or whatever the coach needs of me, I'm prepared to do that, too."



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All signs point to him again playing a big role again in Canada's quarterfinal game against Czechia on Wednesday. Wilson will be in the lineup despite a brief, bizarre fight with France's Pierre Crinon late in Canada's 10-2 win in the preliminary round. Crinon had just exited the penalty box after elbowing Nathan MacKinnon in the chin; Wilson targeted Crinon and hit him cleanly before things devolved.

"Yeah, that guy obviously didn't want to fight Tom. He just wanted to wrestle," MacKinnon told reporters in Milan. "I wouldn't want to fight Tom either."

The French hockey federation suspended Crinon for the remainder of the tournament for egging on Canadian fans as he left the ice.

Canada? They get to luxuriate in the full Tom Wilson experience. The guy who chased down Crinon is also the guy who opened the scoring with some net-front clean-up work, and the guy who started a warp-speed rush by Celebrini and McDavid, resulting in a goal by the latter.

"That was the conversation I had with him the day he left for (orientation camp)," Nichol said. "We've known each other for 16 years. I love your attitude. I love everything about you. I love your humility. But you're there because you deserve to be there. You're a hell of a f—ing hockey player. You're not just there to bang and smash. You can do other stuff."

"(He hasn't just) opened other people's eyes. I think he's opened his own eyes."

Tom Wilson scuffles with France's Pierre Crinon with referees trying to separate them and a France player looking on.

Sixteen years ago, Nichol (also the creator and founder of BioSteel sports nutrition products) wasn't accepting new clients, and he certainly wasn't in the business of taking on minor hockey players. Former NHL goalie Curtis Joseph told Nichol about a "big, athletic kid" playing for the Toronto Jr. Canadiens in the Greater Toronto Hockey League, though, and piqued his interest.

"I knew right away he was special — not necessarily physically, but very mature, very focused," Nichol said. "It's a different level of being polite and respectful and highly, highly, highly coachable."

After three years of work with Nichol, and two seasons with the Plymouth Whalers of the Ontario Hockey League, Wilson, then 6-foot-3 and more than 200 pounds, was the No. 15 North American skater heading into the 2012 draft. Washington selected him at No. 16. He was in the NHL by the following spring, seeing time in a pair of postseason games against the New York Rangers.

By fall, he was a regular in the Capitals' lineup, playing fourth-line minutes with the likes of Jay Beagle and Aaron Volpatti. Wilson's rookie contract helped Washington navigate the salary cap as they chased the Stanley Cup, and his skill set — fast enough to track down anyone, physical enough to make them pay, willing enough to fight without provocation — made him a seamless fit.

"He was going to be a physical player. He was gonna be someone that won puck battles, was strong on the walls and went to the net front, up and down your wings," said Spencer Carbery, Washington's coach since the 2023-24 season. "And yeah, you hope when you pick someone in the first round that they're gonna blossom into more, but that was all he was really asked to do coming into a really good Washington Capitals lineup."

The challenge, Capitals president of hockey operations Brian MacLellan said, was finding a way to help Wilson hit his top-six potential while also contributing down the lineup as a more traditional bottom-sixer out of necessity.

"You see that pattern all the time, where a physically developed kid comes in, and everybody pushes these guys into the league early, and they don't develop their offensive game. They don't go to the AHL and

play power play and learn all that stuff," MacLellan said. "He was that guy, but he learned it on the fly here, which took a number of years."

Along the way, Wilson earned a spot on the penalty kill. Later, he got time with the second power-play unit. By 2017-18, he was regularly the third man on a line with Alex Ovechkin, the leading goal scorer in NHL history, and Nicklas Backstrom, one of the best playmakers of his generation.

McDavid and Celebrini, in other words, aren't the first ultra-elite talents to find success with Wilson as their linemate. They're just the most recent.

"I found that I could complement those guys. 'I'll be the guy to go get the puck and get it back to you. I want you to have the puck, Nicky. I don't want the puck. I want you to have it, and then you'll give it back when the time's right,'" Wilson said. "So I just transitioned to (asking) 'How can I help those star players? How can I complement them? How do I get to the point where they are OK, and they want me to play on their line?'"

"Nick and Ovi, the first couple of times, were like, 'What's this guy doing on our line?' Then you make some good plays and they're like, 'You know what ...?' That was a big realization for me, when those top-six guys started feeling a lot more comfortable having me go into the dirty areas, getting them the puck and understanding that I could help their game."

In the 2018 postseason, largely playing with Ovechkin and Evgeny Kuznetsov, Wilson produced 15 points in 21 games. The Capitals outscored their opponents 20-11 in his five-on-five minutes, and he scored two goals in the Stanley Cup Final win over the Vegas Golden Knights.

His days of producing like a bottom-sixer were over. The mindset, though, persisted in ways that caused problems for Wilson, the Capitals and other NHL players. He was suspended four separate times from 2017-18, including for three games during the Capitals' Cup run. Wilson hit Pittsburgh Penguins forward Zach Aston-Reese in the head, concussing him and breaking his jaw.

The NHL doesn't hand out postseason suspensions lightly. Wilson's history and Aston-Reese's injury forced their hand — and the message, to a significant extent, was received. Wilson has been suspended twice since the Aston-Reese hit: once for boarding in 2021 and once for high-sticking in 2024.

"He's always going to have that (reputation). It's always going to be with him," Carbery said. "But if you've looked at him over the past few years, I think he's genuinely learned and become so much better when it comes to making sure he stays inside the rules."

Bone-rattling hits are undeniably still part of his game. Those hits can be borderline, as Filip Chytil and Logan Stankoven learned this season. Wilson's approach to delivering them, though, has changed sufficiently enough to stay on the right side of the disciplinary line. Part of that was understanding that he was big enough and fast enough to demolish opponents, whether or not it was his primary intention.

"I grew up watching 'Rock'em Sock'em,' Don Cherry, finishing hits," Wilson said. "That's part of my game. ... Every shift, I play one way, and I think I had to learn a little bit like, 'Hey, that kid in preseason cutting across the middle, it's maybe not worth making that hit.' At the end of the day, I was missing too much time and it was hurting our team, and I had to change my mentality in my game a little bit to grow and to add to other parts of my game, which I think ended up benefiting me a little."

Around that time, Wilson switched up the mix in his offseason work with Nichol, focusing less on pure strength. A torn ACL in the spring of 2022 was a roadblock, but it also offered a change in perspective.

"In some ways, it opened his eyes and opened opportunities to play a different way," Nichol said. "You don't have to be going 1,000 miles an hour. He has the skill."



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As the Caps' elite offensive players aged out, Wilson kept adding to his bag, and kept watching his role grow, by his count, "10 percent" every season. These days, he's Washington's emotional talisman and, outside of Ovechkin, its leading locker-room voice. During Ovechkin's pursuit of Wayne Gretzky's goals record last season, Wilson was a spokesman of sorts for the roster, speaking at length day after day about his teammate's greatness, contextualizing each moment even as the attendant circus mushroomed around him.

That, Wilson said, was a privilege — something he took on because Ovechkin deserved it, and because the team needed it.

"I tried to create a standard for myself early in my career that I was going to be one of the hardest-working guys. I was gonna do whatever it took to make the NHL, then I was going to do whatever it took to stay in the NHL," Wilson said. "Now I'm going to do whatever it takes to help the team win every single night."

Two years out from the ACL injury, Wilson is more productive than ever, partially due to what Carbery calls a "masterful" ability to turn information into action. Early in their time together, Carbery told Wilson to be on the lookout for more power-play opportunities from the front of the net. Wilson had typically stayed further back in the slot, in a shooter's spot favored by former teammate T.J. Oshie.

"Now all of a sudden, he's scoring from the Oshie spot, but he's also adding five, eight, nine goals from the top of the crease, whether it's a tip or a rebound goal," Carbery said. "Good luck moving Tom Wilson from the net-front. He's gonna set up camp there and you're not moving him."

The end result, Capitals teammate Trevor van Riemsdyk said, is a "unicorn" among NHL players.

"He's one of the best teammates you could have and a nightmare to play against," van Riemsdyk said. "He can go through you, he can go around you, he can do whatever. He's turned himself into a high-end player, a point producer, a power-play guy, a penalty killer — he does it all. I can't think of another guy like him in the league that does everything he does at such a high level."

To anyone in the Capitals' orbit, no part of Wilson's contribution in Milan qualifies as a surprise. Ahead of the tournament, general manager Chris Patrick, an American, said Wilson "plays the way every Canadian parent would want their kid to play hockey."

"He plays honest, he plays hard, he plays physical, he plays offensive, he's a great teammate, he has guys' backs," Patrick said. "He checks every box of 'What's our identity as a national program?'"

Oshie, also an American and now a broadcaster, said on television Saturday morning that the presence of Wilson, his "little brother," might make him root for Canada against the United States.

Capitals goaltender Logan Thompson, a more conspicuous 4 Nations snub by Team Canada, said he was happier to see Wilson's name on the Olympic roster than his own.

Carbery, a Canadian, was already projecting Wilson's linemates — one in particular — weeks before Team Canada's first practice.

"He can play with McDavid if you want him to play on the wing," Carbery said. "He can get pucks off the (boards). He can help McDavid get a puck out of the corner and get it up top. And now it gets into 97's hands, and then 43 (Wilson) goes to the net."

Carbery also called back to the Capitals' first-round victory over the Montreal Canadiens last spring, when an open-ice demolition by Wilson on Canadiens defenseman Alex Carrier — brutal, borderline, ultimately legal — quite clearly decided the series. The Capitals tied Game 4 as a direct result of the hit, eventually winning 5-2 and taking a 3-1 series lead.

"That hit, 18,000 people (in Montreal) were like ... what? Goal immediately," Carbery said. "Series over." He snapped his fingers. "Just like that."

Then Carbery fantasized about a similar scene playing out in Milan.

"The tensions are high, every puck battle's important, it's a one-goal game. And next thing you know, Tom's in on the forecheck, wins a puck battle, gets it out front — goal, Canada. You could absolutely see that happening."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unless he can do it in Milan.



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

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

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

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

Sweden coach Sam Hallam tries to use it.

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

American Vincent Trocheck tries to focus it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Would a gold medal be enough, or would the skepticism follow him into Winnipeg's next playoff series, whenever that may be? Probably the latter, if we're being honest. In the hockey world, the silver of Lord Stanley still trumps the gold of the Olympic Games. But it certainly

wouldn't hurt the public perception. It could, at the very least, nudge the narrative.

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

And who knows? It might even make him smile.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379722 Websites

ESPN / Grades, questions from Team USA's Olympic hockey win vs. Sweden - ESPN

Ryan S. Clark

Feb 18, 2026

Two of the first three quarterfinal games of the 2026 Olympic men's hockey tournament went to overtime, so should hockey fans be surprised that the game between the United States and Sweden did as well?

In the first tournament featuring active NHL players since the 2014 Sochi Games, Team USA entered the event with the second-best gold medal odds, behind Canada.

The team in third? Sweden. And Tre Kronor proved a worthy opponent in this contest, scoring a tying goal with 1:31 remaining in the third period, before Quinn Hughes scored the OT game winner.

What did we learn about Team USA in this challenging outing? Which players stood out the most — and what big questions persist as the team prepares for Slovakia in the semifinals?

Takeaway 1: Quinn Hughes might be Team USA's most important skater

Scoring a game-winning goal in 3-on-3 overtime to advance to the semifinal round is the singular act that is going to receive attention. But Hughes' performance in his team's latest victory over Sweden affirms the fact that he might be the most crucial skater on Team USA.

Hughes entered Wednesday as the only skater on the American roster who has logged more than 20 minutes in every game. He's playing against the opponents' top lines. He's controlling the pace of the game in ways that can exhaust an opponent, while allowing the U.S. to find more openings on net.

This was all on display against Sweden. He logged more than 27 minutes and averaged 56 seconds per shift. That was the most of any American player, and it was three seconds more than what Sweden's Erik Karlsson had on his average shift.

That's what made his overtime goal even more emphatic. Hughes was on the ice for the final 75 seconds. He made the sort of moves that forced Sweden center Joel Eriksson Ek, his teammate with the Minnesota Wild, to concentrate as he was closing in on net. Then came the moment when Hughes found the space and launched the shot that sent the U.S. to the semifinals.

Takeaway 2: Was Team USA a bit too conservative in the third period?

We'll touch on Team USA's overall defensive performance here shortly. But what made the U.S. more conservative in the third compared to how



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it performed in the second period when it was consistently generating scoring chances?

It's worth acknowledging that the U.S. entered Wednesday with a plus-7 scoring margin in the second period. Dylan Larkin's goal pushed it to a plus-8 margin as part of a period that saw the team establish consistency. Larkin's redirected salvo was part of this push that saw the U.S. gradually get chances at the net front against Sweden. Seeing how the U.S. was able to attack the net created the belief that it could be more of the same in the third period.

And yet, Team USA went from finishing with 20 shots in total throughout the second period to having just four shots in the third period. It initially appeared that the U.S. was going to come out of the quarterfinal with the round's first shutout, before Mika Zibanejad scored with 91 seconds left to force overtime.

In overtime, the U.S. finished with more shots -- five -- in a frame that barely went 90 seconds than it had throughout the entire third period.

Takeaway 3: Was this the strongest defensive performance of the men's tournament?

The momentum really started with Charlie McAvoy delivering a hit on Gabriel Landeskog. The next step was to deny Sweden a shot on goal for the first six minutes. Even when the Swedes did record a shot, it was an offering from distance that Connor Hellebuyck turned aside with his blocker.

Everything Hughes and McAvoy did in the defensive end was supplemented by efforts from Brock Faber, Jake Sanderson, Jaccob Slavin and Zach Werenski, with Noah Hanifin filling in as the seventh defenseman when needed. U.S. forward J.T. Miller gave up his body on numerous occasions to block shots, and the penalty kill remained the only perfect unit in the men's tournament. It has not allowed a power-play goal in 10 attempts.

And, of course, it helps having Hellebuyck, who made 27 saves.

Having that sort of consistency on a day that saw Germany allow six goals, Canada overcome defensive breakdowns to win in overtime over Czechia and Switzerland lose in overtime after having a two-goal lead against Finland only adds to why the Americans are going to the next round coming off a superb defensive effort.

Player of the game: Quinn Hughes, D

We've covered quite a bit of what made the oldest Hughes brother such an important player for Team USA in the grand scheme.

But when it came to the scope of what he did against Sweden? Those are all the things that make Hughes one of the best defensemen -- and one of the best players -- in the world.

He was crucial to their defensive effort. He had an assist on his team's first goal, was on the ice more than any skater and scored the game-winning goal in overtime.

Big question for the semis

What lessons can be applied against Slovakia? Team USA had its strongest defensive performance of the tournament but will now face an offensive juggernaut.

Slovakia exploded for six goals against Germany in a continuation of what it has done at the Olympics in general. The defending bronze medalists are fourth in goals per game. That includes scoring four against Finland and putting up three goals in a loss to Sweden in the opening round.

Team USA replicating much, if not all, of what it did against Sweden could be the difference between playing for gold or bronze.

Overall team grade: B+

The four shots registered in the third period is the only thing preventing the U.S. from getting a higher grade here. Even though the Americans scored just one goal in the second period, that frame appeared to provide them with an opening to grab more goals before the Swedes forced overtime with a late game-tying goal.

Still, Team USA's defensive performance is the sort that set a blueprint for continuing to advance to play for a gold medal.

ESPN LOADED: 02.19.2026

1379723 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Mamer wows, Crosby goes down as Canada dodges disaster

Luke Fox

MILAN — This hockey team so many call the best they've ever seen, they never stopped believing.

But they will concede they flew a little close to the sun.

"You look down the bench, and you see the players we have on our team, and you know no one's going to quit, and we have a great chance of coming back," says Drew Doughty, calmed by two Stanley Cups and two Olympic gold medals, and now a heart-in-throat 4-3 overtime thriller over Czechia as he goes for three.

"But as the time keeps ticking, you're like: Holy f----- this isn't ideal. But I never stopped believing. And look what happened."

Team Canada — the juggernaut that steamrolled through the preliminary tournament at Milano Santagiulia Arena — hadn't trailed in a best-of-best Olympics since 2010 in Vancouver.

Yet here they were, first down 2-1 and now down 3-2 against an inspired and injury-causing Czech side that had found its A game against the Group A champs.

Only three minutes and 27 seconds stood between the underdogs and the Czechs' greatest upset since Wayne Gretzky (who was in the building Wednesday) got skipped over in the shootout.

"I mean, I've been in Game 7 OT before," Canada's Thomas Harley said. "(This) was more stressful."

Stressful because the sleepy Czechs, skating on fire and fumes after Tuesday's survival match over Denmark, had spread their weapons and checked with precision. They had made good on their clean looks and began to shell up to kill clock and Canadian dreams.

"This might be the best team ever," Czech sniper David Pastrnak had warned of Canada. "Let's put the respect aside a little bit and try to take their game to them. Offensively, their power is incredible."

"You know, we have nothing to lose. So, we're gonna go out there and leave it all out there."

But stressful, too, because today's villain, Radko Gudas, had taken out Canada's heart-and-soul captain, Sidney Crosby, halfway through with a right-leg-crunching hit.

In pain and unable to return in the third period, Crosby addressed his teammates at intermission: "Go get it, boys."

Do it for Sid.

Canada wanted to deliver for the guy who has delivered so much to it.



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"We didn't want this to be Sid's last game at this Olympics," coach Jon Cooper said.

Memories of Nagano 1998 danced in the ether.

A nation clenched.

"Everybody knows how big these games are, how important they are, especially when you're playing the Czechs. They're known for really cherishing these opportunities, and they love playing in world tournaments more than anybody," Brad Marchand said. "We knew they were going to come out extremely hard. And they did."

Whooped by Canada 5-0 last week — only because, Martin Necas quipped, "We knew we're not going to win two in a row against Canada" — the Czechs submitted their best effort of these Winter Games.

"We know we can play with anybody and showed that today. That was our best game," Gudas said. "We battled for each other, we skated for each other, we laid our body on the line for each other."

The Canadians needed a dominant second period — outshooting the underdogs 17-5 in the frame — and a power-play conversion (Celebrini to McDavid to Nathan MacKinnon) just to tie the thing once.

And after Ondrej Palat's controversial go-ahead snipe off a late rush (more on that below), they were desperate for more magic.

Not ideal. Yet, no panic.

"The group is super comfortable being uncomfortable," Cooper said of his star-studded bench. "It was calm. Everybody had complete faith in whoever was going over the boards. It just felt it was like a matter of time. It was going to happen."

"We know what we have in this room," Macklin Celebrini added. "But at the end of the day, it's a one-game knockout. One mistake can ruin it all."

Seconds drained.

"Our country needed a goal. Nick Suzuki answered," Cooper said.

Suzuki's hard forecheck and ensuing slot tip of a Devon Toews point shot gave his nation new life.

A breath.

"Just kind of a lot of joy," Suzuki said. "I wanted to do something to help the team, so it was obviously a big goal to tie it up and send it to overtime."

Which goal was bigger, Nick, yours or Mitch Marner's?

"Definitely Mitch."

Marner had delivered a three-on-three OT dagger once before draped in this red sweater. At the 4 Nations Face-Off over Sweden. But Marner's dance and dangle through three Czech defenders and nifty far-side backhand past a locked-in Lukas Dostal has supplanted 2025's heroics as the new Biggest Goal of His Life.

"Same kind of emotions. Just shock and excitement and something really cool," Marner said. "Now it's even more special. I have my son (Miles) here with me. He's pretty young (nine months). He probably won't remember. He's probably sleeping on Mom. But it'll be something cool to look back at one day with him and just kind of show him where he was and what he was doing in this moment."

"I thought he wasn't a big-game player," Brandon Hagel teased. "But he just showed the world."

Marner describes this quarterfinal's emotions as a "roller coaster ride, ups and downs," but one built on trust. In goalie Jordan Binnington, who stoned Necas on a clear breakaway. In Suzuki, filling in at centre for

Crosby. In a relief and a joy and a victory that was always waiting around the corner.

"I can't even explain a feeling like that," Doughty said. "Even before he did score, I had flashbacks of 4 Nations, and was like, 'Oh, something could happen here.' And, man, it's a sick goal."

Marchand describes Marner's moment as "massive relief" and "extreme excitement" wrapped into one.

"In these tournaments, it can end on a bounce. It's stressful, but it's exciting," Marchand said. "We won our first games 5-0, 5-1, 10-2. So, it's good to have a little adversity and keep us a little more humble, maybe."

Yes, adversity has now smacked the Canadians as hard as an angry Gudas. Crosby's status for Friday's game against Finland is unknown.

The Finns could very well provide a test just as stiff as those relentless Czechs.

"They came in here saying, Canada ain't beating us twice — and they were nearly right," Cooper said.

"This is the Olympic Games. This is the best of the best. This is why all the players want to come to this, because they want to show who they are, and they want to flex. And if you think you're rolling through this tournament, you're sorely mistaken.

"Yes, we like the fact that we won the first three games and didn't have to play for the qualification game. Hell, yeah. But that doesn't mean you're gonna keep on winning. It doesn't mean because you got the Maple Leaf on your jersey that, 'Hey, oh my gosh, you're gonna be first.' You've got to work to that. And the guys in there know it."

Fox's Fast Five

- Celebrini continues to wow.

He became the first teenager to score in an elimination game in a best-on-best tournament, then got promoted to the top power-play unit in Crosby's absence.

He assisted on two more, including Marner's winner, picking up his ninth point and surpassing Evgeni Malkin (Russia, 2006) for most points by a teenager in an NHL-participation Olympics.

As the dust settles on Celebrini's three-point night, only his centreman, Connor McDavid, stands ahead of him in Olympic scoring.

- Marner takes us through the biggest goal of his life:

"Just saw Mack going up the ice with it, and then was debating on staying high by the blue line or coming back. Ultimately tried to come back and just give him a spot if he wanted to drop it or not.

"He did, and then from that point on just tried to get the blue line, tried to see what my options were, see if I could kick it out to him and then just saw a little bit of a hole and a gap there that I was lucky enough to shoot through. Then, from that point on, just tried to get it in a spot that I could go kind of in and out with and get it off my stick far side.

"Adrenaline. Trust in your skillsets, I guess, that you work on so hard throughout the summer. You just trust yourself to make a play there. Lucky enough, I was able to."

- Cooper was asked about Czechia having too many men on the ice during Ondrej Palat's 3-2 go-ahead goal — which was celebrated by six men.

The coach smiled and walked away without a word.

- Czech starter Lukas Dostal didn't blink about the opportunity to take the crease less than 24 hours after defeating Denmark Tuesday.



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"Playing in Europe before, we always played back-to-back. It was always Friday-Saturday or Saturday-Sunday. So, I have no problem with playing back-to-backs," the goalie stated.

What about at the NHL level, though?

"Actually, this season, I got pulled against Dallas in the middle of the game (an 8-3 loss on Dec. 20)," the Anaheim Ducks star said. "I walked to the tunnel and Q told me, 'Hey, be ready for tomorrow. So, we played back-to-back (versus Columbus), and then we won the game.'"

• Juraj Slafkovsky has led his tiny country back to the Olympic semifinal. He compared the accomplishment to the bronze medal Slovakia won in Beijing, sans NHLers.

"It's probably 100 times better," Slafkovsky said. "You've got the best players over here, and we managed to come here and go to the semifinals. It's big for me, big for our country, big for every supporter we have."

Added Erik Cernak: "Amazing. Before the tournament, if we would say we're gonna make semifinals, probably people would laugh at you. But we did it, and it's not done yet."

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Sportsnet.ca / 'It got real': Quinn Hughes' magic caps wild quarterfinals, sends U.S. to semis

Luke Fox

MILAN — As the curtain closed on the best and most tightly contested day of the Olympic men's hockey tournament, Dylan Larkin got honest.

The Team USA star revealed that Wednesday's highwire act, a 2-1 overtime victory over a resilient Team Sweden in a do-or-die quarterfinal, was the most nervous he's ever felt in a hockey game.

"Us too!" echoed fans invested in the fate of the Americans, Canadians, Swedes, Finns, Czechs and Swiss. For each one of those nations found themselves in a next-goal-wins, 3-on-3 scenario. And three of those countries had their Olympic dream crushed by a goal horn and a frozen clock and had to watch their opposition mob and exhale and smile.

"It got real," Larkin said. "As intense of a game, as tight of a game, as I've probably ever played in. And the small ice not being great late in the game, late in the period, it got even tighter."

The stakes just skyrocketed here at Milano Santagiulia Arena, a pop-up shop of horrors where the heavily favoured Americans and Canadians were one goal away from going home medal-less. Ditto Team Finland, which needed three unanswered goals and some 3-on-3 heroics from Artturi Lehkonen to stave off an improving Team Switzerland.

Sure, each one of the top four seeds advanced — USA gets Slovakia, and Canada draws the Finns in Friday's semis — but not without a fight and a fright.

Pins and needles everywhere.

"You can feel it, right?" Larkin said.

Just as USA's OT hero, Quinn Hughes, could feel all the things he missed, due to injury, at last winter's 4 Nations Face-Off.

Given room to juke, Hughes skipped and slithered on multiple shifts in the fourth period before opening space for himself and snapping a ping-swoosh puck past Jacob Markstrom.

"At first, I didn't know if it went post and in or post and out," Matthew Tkachuk said. "But once I heard the roar and him start to celebrate, it was definitely the highest I've jumped since my surgery."

Fellow top-pair defenceman Charlie McAvoy says Hughes's winning sequence sums up his game in a nutshell.

"It's a 3-on-3, and you want to put the puck in his hands, so you're getting it to him and then look at what he can create all for himself there with his ability, all of his skill," McAvoy marvelled. "With his skating, his stickhandling, he's able to create something out of nothing there and win us that hockey game kind of all by himself."

Hughes said he entered OT with an attack mindset and only felt one thing at the end: relief.

"I mean, really enjoying wearing the crest and playing with the superstars that we have on our team, and getting to know these guys and the village and all of it," Hughes said. "You just want to extend it as long as you can."

Jack Hughes couldn't be happier to have his older brother upgrading the Americans' roster.

"That's unreal. That's a massive goal, massive moment. One of our best players taking over there and winning that game for us," J. Hughes said.

Tkachuk says Team USA is a better team this time around, thanks to the minute-munching, ankle-breaking Quinn.

"He's a threat in the offensive zone. Every time, defensively, he's able to skate pucks and be kind of like that one-man breakout. Him and Charlie have formed an unbelievable pair for us," Tkachuk said.

"That was one of those games where it's 40 of some of the best players in the world fighting at both ends of the ice. Not a lot of room both sides, not a lot of heavy chances on either side.

"You put two really good teams together, and you think that it's gonna be this high-flying offensive, but it's actually quite the opposite. And it took one guy to make a play at the end, and that was Quinn."

One guy to also crush the hopes of a proud hockey nation like Sweden, which was slow out the gates here and suffered a tremendous loss when Victor Hedman tweaked something in warmups and could not play.

Hedman sat on the bench and watched in disappointment.

"It just sucks when you're on the other side of it," Sweden's Filip Forsberg said.

William Nylander stopped to talk even though he didn't have the words for the heartbreak.

"It's hard to describe right now," Nylander said. "I mean, it's tough when the Olympics only happens every so often. So, it's a good learning experience, that's for sure."

"Pretty empty right now," managed a hushed Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who left his pregnant wife and young son back in Canada to chase gold.

"Sorry, I don't have a lot of answers. It's hard to kind of take everything in. But obviously, just being with the guys getting the chance to come here and battle and experience the Olympics with an unbelievable group of guys. And I felt like even if we didn't get the result, we were getting better for every game. Even tonight, I thought we played pretty decent."

Sadly, happily, Wednesday at the hockey rinks of Milan had no tolerance for decent.

Only excellent would do.

"It's one of those moments," USA goalie Connor Hellebuyck said, "where you'll look back at years down the road and just be so proud to be a part of it."



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Sportsnet.ca / Biggest goal of Suzuki's life revives Canada in win over Czechia

Eric Engels

BROSSARD, Que. — Nick Suzuki was 55 seconds into what was shaping up to be his last shift of a devastating loss when he flashed in front of Lukas Dostal and scored the biggest goal of his life.

Suzuki manufactured it out of thin air, taking on four members of Team Czechia on his own to get the puck deep and keep it there.

He beat Filip Hronek out of the corner to give the puck to Seth Jarvis, and then he beat Hronek to the net to tip home Devon Toews' wide point shot with 3:27 to go to tie the game 3-3.

Take your hearts out of your throats, Canada.

Suzuki's had to be beating out of his chest after riding the roller-coaster he'd been on since the Olympic tournament got under way in Milan.

He was at his best in Game 1, dangerous with the puck and perfectly placed without it, a persistent threat at one end of the ice and a neutralizer at the other end of it, as efficient at five-on-five as he was on the penalty kill, versatile enough to do it all from the wing rather than his natural position at centre, with a goal notched to punctuate Canada's 5-0 win over Czechia.

But had he been better through the next two wins over Switzerland and France, he'd have not been the subject of national debate revolving around who would come out of the lineup for Brad Marchand in Wednesday's quarterfinal rematch with Czechia.

Suzuki's Montreal Canadiens teammate, Brendan Gallagher, had a premonition Tuesday that Canada would benefit from keeping him in.

"I would say they're going to start playing elimination games, some games that are a little bit more important, and I think you're going to see Suzy at his best," Gallagher said. "He's been playing just fine. He's been doing exactly what he's been asked to do. They have some special talent on that team that are scoring goals, but Suz can do a lot of things. He can win faceoffs, he can kill penalties, be very difficult to play against, his details are going to be strong, especially as they get into elimination games. I think people will start to realize how important a player he is."

If they didn't earlier in the tournament, the likely did when Sidney Crosby left the game favouring his right leg early in the second period.

That's when Suzuki jumped from the fourth line to the second, between Mitch Marner and Mark Stone.

From there, he clanked his best scoring chance of the tournament past the gaping net and into the far post, missing Canada's best look at a lead after Nathan MacKinnon tied the game 2-2.

Doubt could've overwhelmed Suzuki and Marner when they were two of five Canadians counterpunched on the play Ondrej Palat finished to put Czechia up 3-2 with 7:42 to go in regulation.

But if it sunk in right then and there for the rest of the nation, it didn't for Suzuki and Marner, with the former tying the game before the latter won it 1:22 into overtime with a backhand that kissed the top corner of Dostal's net.

"We just stayed with our program, stayed with just pushing," Marner said to Sportsnet's Kyle Bukauskas after the game, "and that was a massive tip by Nick."

The captain of the Canadiens has scored 169 goals over his NHL career, including two in the Stanley Cup Final and 11 more in the playoffs.

But this one for Canada saved himself and his teammates from an Olympic nightmare.

It wasn't Suzuki's only contribution to this classic Canadian comeback. He played 14:16, pulled back key face-offs in his own zone while his teammates struggled to win them against Czechia's Tomas Hertl, David Kampf and Lucas Sedlak, and just kept pushing from different parts of the lineup.

It's what Suzuki was brought to Milan to do — to bring the versatility that saw him score 33 goals and 102 points and post a plus-41 through the 83 games played between the end of the 4 Nations Face-off and the beginning of the Olympics.

"I feel like if you asked Nick, I think Nick expects himself to be there, and he's progressed and he's been on that path of being one of those guys," said 2014 gold medalist with Canada and Canadiens coach Martin St. Louis on Tuesday.

Suzuki had to be feeling fortunate to continue being one of those guys, following two games played beneath his standard.

Reigning Conn Smythe winner Sam Bennett looked on from the stands.

He and the rest of the country held their breath as Jordan Binnington kept Team Canada a shot away from surviving.

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Sportsnet.ca / Slafkovsky's leadership fuelling Slovakia's run to Olympic medal round

Eric Engels

BROSSARD, Que. — This was Team Slovakia in full flight, chests puffed out, confidence spilling over the brim to establish a stifling forecheck and put a stranglehold on a tired German side that had just beaten France 21 hours earlier to advance to the Olympic quarterfinal.

It played strong and hard, tight defensively and free offensively, earning 21 of the first 27 shots and the first four goals of Wednesday's game. It played in the image of its best player, the one who put them in this position to begin with.

Of course, we're referring to Juraj Slafkovsky, whose multipoint performances through the preliminary round pushed Slovakia into the driver's seat of this ride to the medal round. With three goals and three assists through the opening games against Finland, Italy and Sweden, he put the car in gear and revved its engine to the red line, and then it ran the Germans over in a 6-2 rout at Santagiulia Arena.

The Kosice native may have only notched a secondary assist on the closing goal of this game, but he set the tone at the start of it, flashing the leadership traits he honed through four years of NHL development with the Montreal Canadiens.

"I wouldn't necessarily think he came into the league that way as an 18-year-old," said coach Martin St. Louis a day prior, and he was right about that.



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The Slafkovsky who arrived in Montreal in the fall of 2022 — after being drafted first overall by the Canadiens that summer — was a six-foot-three, 238-pound man-child. He was confident yet concerned, with dominant performances at the Beijing Olympics and world championship inspiring self-belief and the prospect of playing against the best players in the world night-in, night-out, but largely balancing that self-belief out with some trepidation.

Slafkovsky dipped his toe in NHL waters several times through his first 155 games before building up the courage to ritually dive into the deep end.

But that's where he's been swimming over the last year and change, with 35 of his 63 goals and 75 of his 156 points earned over 102 games played since Jan. 1 of 2025.

"He's evolved to a guy that wants to lead with his actions on the ice, and guys usually will follow that," said St. Louis. "I think he's evolved to that... Looks like he's picked up from where he left off here, and he's not looking back. He's just moving forward, and guys are following him."

In Montreal this season, it's been Ivan Demidov and Oliver Kapanen — the former leading all rookies in points (46), the latter tied for the rookie lead in goals (18), both of them under Slafkovsky's command.

"To see him move to the line with Demi and Kappy and drive it to be unbelievable for us this year shows he is a leader," said Canadiens teammate Kaiden Guhle. "I think it's just his mindset. He's a young leader that we love having, and you can see guys following."

It's happening in Milan, too.

Against the Germans, it was Pavol Regenda, Oliver Okuliar, Dalibor Dvorsky and Milos Kelemen following Slafkovsky — to the corners, to the front of the net, and on the counterattack to beat Seattle Kraken goaltender Philipp Grubauer for goals before Slafkovsky started the play that led to Tomas Tatar's empty netter in the dying minutes.

He started the game with three of Slovakia's 17 first-period shots, including two dangerous ones on a momentum-fuelling power play.

It ran through Slafkovsky because it was set to, but also because he was demanding it to. He wanted the puck and was calling for it, just like he did through the first three games of the tournament.

It all looked familiar to Canadiens teammate Lane Hutson.

"I think what he's doing in the Olympics is pretty special, but we always see him doing it," Hutson said on Tuesday. "That maybe goes unnoticed, but he does a lot of the little things right and he can really drive possession and hang on to the pucks and make those high-end plays. To see it on the Olympic scene is pretty special, and I'm definitely not surprised with it."

"I think you can just see his consistency," the 33-year-old said. "He was able to really carry over his finish to last season into this year. From game to game, he's having an impact. He's finding a way to really be consistent, playing with different players and impacting the game in different ways. I think he's feeling really confident when he has the puck on his stick, and he's been dominant for us. I think what you're seeing at the Olympics is just exactly what we've seen all year."

It's propelled Slafkovsky to 21 goals and 24 assists through the first 57 games of this season, and to seven points through the first four games of the Olympics.

He was the MVP last time around, with seven goals posted to help Slovakia to its first-ever bronze medal in men's hockey.

But Slafkovsky's gone from caterpillar to butterfly since then, with no steps in his metamorphosis skipped.

And yet, six weeks from his 22nd birthday, he's only just taking flight.

"The way he protects the puck, creates space for himself is really where I've seen him evolve the most," said Gallagher. "He's had little details in his game that have improved; he's learned. He's still a young player, too, so he's going to keep getting better."

The Canadiens are banking on it, and so is Team Slovakia in their quest for another Olympic medal.

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TSN.CA / 'A lot of guts': Canada rallies around injured Crosby to advance to Olympic semifinal

Mark Masters

MILAN — Team Canada captain Sidney Crosby exited Wednesday's 4-3 quarterfinal win against Czechia with a lower-body injury. The 38-year-old centre's knee bent awkwardly as he tried to avoid a hit from defenceman Radko Gudas early in the second period.

"It's obviously hard to watch your captain go down and not return," said alternate captain Connor McDavid, who produced two assists on Wednesday to raise his tournament-leading total to 11 points. "Hopefully he's OK, but it's tough. There's no way around it. But I thought our group responded well."

With the game tied 2-2 after 40 minutes, Crosby addressed his teammates during the intermission. The main message?

"Go get it, boys," coach Jon Cooper revealed. "There was a lot more than that, but he's a true leader. They didn't want this to be the end of the tournament for him ... It was a big motivator for our guys coming out."

"He had just great things to say about our team and [having] confidence in us going into that third," said winger Mitch Marner, who scored the overtime winner.

Crosby is due to undergo an MRI to determine the severity of the injury. A further update is expected when Canada holds an optional practice at 6:15 am ET on Thursday.

"We rallied around him," said winger Seth Jarvis. "We know he's going to want to come back and play so we're just making sure he gets another game. That's our mentality right now."

Trailing 2-1, Canada pushed hard in the second period after Crosby left the game and eventually scored to tie it courtesy a Nathan MacKinnon power-play goal.

But the third period was tight and the tension rose with each passing minute. Czechia grabbed a 3-2 lead on a goal by Ondrej Palat with 7:42 remaining. The Czechs actually had six skaters on the ice during the play, but somehow no one seemed to notice.

Canada struggled to generate much in the ensuing minutes. Enter Nick Suzuki. With Crosby sidelined, the Montreal Canadiens captain shifted back to his natural centre position on a line with Marner and Mark Stone.

"Nick got better as the game went on," Cooper said. "He had to play a big role when Sid went out."

Suzuki missed a golden opportunity in the second period when he had an open net to shoot at and hit the post. He was also on the ice when Palat scored the go-ahead goal in the third period.

Suzuki seemed determined to change his luck during a shift late in the third. Stone and Marner went to the bench for a change, but Suzuki



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dumped a puck into the Czech zone and won a battle with Filip Hronek to retain possession. He then fed Devon Toews at the point and deflected home the ensuing shot from the defenceman.

"It felt amazing," Suzuki said. "I missed the one empty netter backdoor in the second there and I kind of wanted my backcheck back there on their third goal. I knew I needed to make the most of my next opportunity. I was just trying to do the right thing and get to the net and get my stick on it."

"That was an elite play," said winger Brad Marchand. "I don't know where he was at in his shift, but the fact he got that in by himself, created the forecheck and won a battle, allowing those guys to get in — it's not just the tip, it's the entire play."

"Our country needed a goal," Cooper said. "Nick Suzuki answers."

Czechia had a glorious chance to regain the lead with just over one minute remaining in regulation, but Jordan Binnington stopped Martin Necas on a breakaway. The St. Louis Blues goalie denied the initial chance as well as a rebound.

"He was great again in the big moments," McDavid said. "That's what he does."

Binnington also denied defenceman Radim Simek on a point-blank chance early in overtime.

Just like in overtime of the 4 Nations Face-Off final last year, Binnington saved his best for last.

"When we really needed him, he was there," Marner said. "That's something you can always trust in Binner."

On the second shift of overtime, 19-year-old phenom Macklin Celebrini dropped a pass to Marner, who skated through the neutral zone with speed. He dodged Simek and former Leafs teammates David Kampf and Ondrej Kase before sending a backhand shot over the shoulder of goalie Lukas Dostal.

"Mac gave it back to me and, honestly, I was trying to see if I could kick it out to him on the blue line there because I saw he kind of had time," Marner said. "I was looking to make a play to him and saw two guys cheat over to it. So, I just tried to jump into the hole and lucky enough I was able to. And then, from that moment on, tried to put it to a spot that I could get it back, and then made a quick move and got it on and off my stick on the backhand to the far side."

"Honestly, I didn't expect him to go all the way through the middle like that," Dostal said. "I believed he was reaching for the puck so I didn't think he had a [hold] of it. The puck stood up on him so that's why he was able to lift the puck. I thought he was reaching for the puck."

Marner also scored a 3-on-3 overtime winner against Sweden at the 4 Nations Face-Off on a similar play. He experienced a similar feeling of "shock and excitement" on Wednesday, but this goal was much bigger for a couple reasons. Canada, of course, needed it to stay alive at the Olympics, but there was also the family factor.

"Now it's even more special," Marner said. "I have my son here with me. He's pretty young [born last May]. He probably won't remember. He's probably sleeping on mom, but it will be something cool to look back at one day with him and show him where he was and what he was doing in this moment."

Marner's mom cradled little Miles as Marner and Team Canada celebrated on the ice on Wednesday night.

"There were so many little moments in that game that resulted in that one moment," Marner said. "Massive saves by Binner. Massive goal by Suzuki and then Binnington again with a massive save on Necas there at the end of the third. Happy to [play] a part in that game."

Wednesday's game was much closer than the preliminary round opener when Canada shutout Czechia 5-0.

"You could tell today there were some moments they could shoot and they did the extra move and it just happens," Dostal said. "We experienced it yesterday when we played Denmark. When you have to win you kind of, I don't want to say become a little shaky, but you have it in your head so you do that extra move. That's what I felt like Canada sometimes did today, but we couldn't finish."

Canada did not trail in the preliminary round while racking up wins of 5-0, 5-1 and 10-2 over Czechia, Switzerland and France. So, Wednesday represented the team's first true taste of adversity in Milan.

"We knew there was going to be moments like this throughout the tournament," said McDavid. "It's what it's all about. It's what best-on-best provides and we knew it was coming. I like how we responded."

"A lot of guts there," said defenceman Cale Makar, who played a team high 26 minutes and 41 seconds. "I mean, Marns to be able to split the D and go in there. And then, before overtime, I feel like, for us, it was just sticking with it. We knew we would get some chances at some point and we just had to capitalize and guys were starting to get to the net."

What did it feel like when Marner finally stopped the clock?

"Massive relief and extreme excitement," Marchand said. "We came here with a goal in mind and in these tournaments where it can end on a bounce, it's stressful. But it's exciting."

Canada will now take on Finland in Friday's semifinal. They are expecting more drama in the medal round.

"This is the Olympic Games," said Cooper. "This is the best of the best. This is why all the players want to come to this, because they want to show who they are, and they want to flex. And if you think you're rolling through this tournament, you're sorely mistaken. Yes, we like the fact that we won the first three games and didn't have to play the qualification game. Hell yeah, but that doesn't mean you're gonna keep on winning. It doesn't mean because you got the Maple Leaf on your jersey that, 'Hey, oh my gosh, you're gonna be first.' You've got to work to that. And the guys in there know it."

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