Daily Sports

# MEN'S OLYMPIC HOCKEY GROUP ROUND RECAP

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After five days and 18 games, the first leg of the men's hockey portion of the Olympics has concluded. Each team played three games against their opponents in their group to determine seeding for the actual bracket. Unlike women's hockey where the bottom teams are eliminated in the group stage, every team plays in the men's playoff bracket, and the groups are only for seeding purposes and to determine byes.

Play kicked off Wednesday with two group B matchups, starting with Slovakia taking on Finland. Slovakian 2022 NHL first overall pick Juraj Slafkovsky made his name known in the 2022 Olympics and replicated that performance with 2 goals in the Slovak 4-1 win.

Host Italy faced Sweden for the second game of the day as massive underdogs, and despite scoring the first goal of the game Italy fell 5-2.

Switzerland and France's game to begin day two saw action early, with the Swiss scoring not even a minute in. France failed to record a goal and saw a 4-0 loss in the opening of group A play.

The other Group A game featured Canada and Czechia. Rising star Macklin Celebrini scored with six seconds left in the first to open the scoring in an eventual 5-0 Canadian victory.

Group C play began later in the day with both matchups playing simultaneously. USA and Latvia faced off in one game, with the USA winning 5-1 despite shaky team chemistry.

The other group C game featured Denmark and Germany. Despite being outshot by 12, Germany's top-line NHL talent helped move them to a 3-1 win.

Day three began at 6 a.m. Eastern, with rivals Finland and Sweden starting things off. Sweden managed to outshoot Finland, but a vintage performance from Juuse Saros in net kept Finland ahead in what would be a 4-1 Finnish victory.

Italy and Slovakia played at the same time as the other group B game, with Italy goaltender and Anaheim Ducks' draft pick Damian Clara putting on a show to keep Italy in the game. A late goal to cut the lead from 3-1 to 3-2 gave Slovakia a scare, but they held on to avoid a huge upset.

Group A play for the day started with Czechia and France. France's performance continued to fall flat, dropping the game 6-3 in the Czech victory.

Canada and Switzerland played in their second games, with Canada taking it 5-1.

A hit from Canadian forward Tom Wilson on Kevin Fiala left Fiala down on the ice, with a stretcher needing to come in for Fiala. He has been ruled out of not only the tournament, but also the remainder of the season for the Los Angeles Kings.

Game three for Sweden and Slovakia was crucial for both. Tiebreakers are decided by goal differential, so this game mattered for who would win the group both by victor and by the final score. For Slovakia, it was win-and-in, while for Sweden, they would need to win by three goals to take the group and clinch the bye.

Sweden took a 5-2 lead late in the game off a Lucas Raymond goal, and it looked like the group and a ticket to the quarterfinal was theirs.

Dalibor Dvorsky, a St Louis Blues' draft pick, had different plans. Dvorsky scored with just 39 seconds to go, and though the game ended as a 5-3 Slovakian win, the Dvorsky goal was enough to push the Slovakians over the edge to win the group.

Finland and Italy's game was a complete 180 for the Italians, with the Finns winning 11-0 to end off Group B play.

Germany and Latvia faced off on the same day, with Germany leading 2-1 before conceding three straight to ultimately fall 4-3.

The USA and Denmark's match continued American uncertainty. Tied at one in the first, Nick Jensen fired a shot from center ice that grazed off USA's Matt Boldy's shin and went past Jeremy Swayman for a brutal goal. The US won the game 6-3 with improved team play, but the early game remains a problem.

Switzerland and Czechia's game was one of the best in the tournament, reaching overtime after a 3-3 regulation. It was Dean Kukan who ended the game in the extra frame to win the game for the Swiss.

The matchup between Canada and France wasn't a close game from the beginning. The Canadians outshot France by more than 30 in a 10-2 victory, with goals from all around the lineup.

The final game of group play pitted the USA and Germany against each other. The USA scored the first five goals of the game in a 5-1 victory to clinch them the group.

Canada and America finished as the only unbeaten teams, with Slovakia also winning their group bye and Finland receiving the last bye due to record and goal differential.

Canada takes on the winner of Czechia and Denmark, while the USA plays the winner of Sweden and Latvia. Slovakia takes on the winner of Germany and France, and Finland will see the winner of Switzerland and Italy. The winners of the quarterfinals will be reseeded for the semifinals.

The preliminary rounds begin today, with the quarterfinals tomorrow and the semis on Friday.

**The United States and Germany getting ready to face off in a match. The United States won 5-1.** PHOTO COURTESY OF @TEAMUSA ON INSTAGRAM

