

The Puck Drop:

USA MEN'S HOCKEY WINS GOLD OVER CANADA

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For the first time in 46 years, the United States Men's Hockey team has been crowned the gold medal winners in the Winter Olympic games.

Thanks to an overtime goal by Jack Hughes of the New Jersey Devils, the U.S. defeated Canada Sunday morning, 2-1.

Last time the Men's Hockey squad won gold against the Soviet Union 4-3 in 1980, it was considered a miracle.

However, this time around, it wasn't necessarily a miracle; it was more like the stars were perfectly aligned.

The United States was playing on the same day that the Miracle on Ice occurred, Feb. 22, and it was the birthday of the late Johnny Gaudreau's son, Johnny Gaudreau Jr.

Gaudreau, a former member of the Columbus Blue Jackets and Team USA, and his brother Matthew passed away in August of 2024, after being hit by an alleged drunk driver while biking.

"It was good emotions. It

was happy emotions." Zach Werenski, the late Gaudreau's teammate at the Columbus Blue Jackets, said in an article from People.com. "It was something John would've been at, and to have his jersey out there for all the fans, for all the people to see... His family was in the crowd. We brought his kids on the ice for the picture, I mean, it was just incredible. We wanted to make him proud, and I think we did that."

After the squad won gold, they brought Gaudreau's son and his daughter Noa down to the ice, holding his jersey as they took a team photo.

After defeating Sweden in the semi-finals, the United States geared up to face Canada, their long-time rival, in the gold medal game. After suffering a leg injury in the quarterfinal game, Sidney Crosby, Canada's captain, said he would miss the gold medal game.

Despite that, defeating Canada was still a tall task for the Americans to accomplish.

Canada had won the last Olympics NHL players were allowed to play in 2010, Crosby scoring the gold medal winning goal in that game against the United States.

Heading into this matchup, with the stars aligned, the U.S. was looking for revenge.

In the first period, the United States was up 1-0, using incredible puck movement to slide through defenders, before deking the puck to backhand it into the goal.

Then, Cale Makar of Can-

ada scored to tie the score up 1-1. Neither team was able to score another goal, sending the game into overtime.

Canada had an opportunity to win it in the third with a shot from Devon Toews, but it would ultimately be saved by U.S. goaltender Connor Hellebuyck.

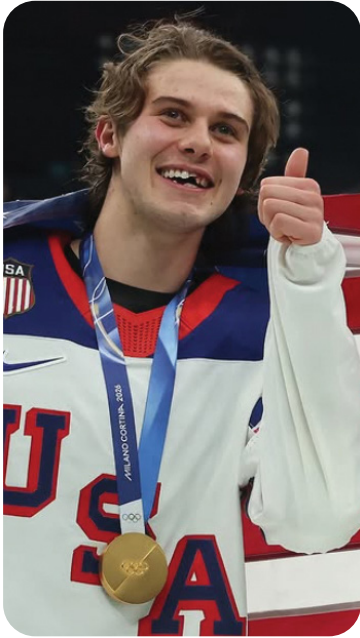
"It was an all-time performance from a superstar at his position. It'll go down as one of the best performances of all-time, right up there with Jimmy Craig. If we don't have him, we don't win." Matthew Tkachuk said about Hellebuyck, comparing him to the U.S.'s goaltender in 1980, in an article from NHL.com.

Hellebuyck was integral for the United States, saving 41 shots on goal for the entire game, even when Canada out-shot the U.S. (19-8) coming out of the second period.

Due to this save by Hellebuyck, it would send the game into overtime, where Jack Hughes would take it upon himself to win the game for his team.

Off a dish from his teammate, Werenski, Hughes slid the puck through Canada goaltender Jordan Binnington's five-hole and without missing a beat, ran to hug his teammates in a warm embrace.

"I can't even believe this, I mean, it's such an unbelievable game, USA-Canada. That's such a good game. They have so many great players. We're a great team." Hughes said in an article from NHL.com, "That's exactly how we



wanted it to go. We wanted to go through Canada and beat them. It's an unbelievable win for the Americans."

After the game, Hughes became immensely popular with fans, including his toothless smile, after losing a couple of teeth after being high-sticked earlier in the game.

After the squad won the game, you could feel the emotion from the players and coaches as they accepted their gold medals, still in disbelief of the feat they just accomplished.

"We've been thinking about those guys. They've been in the locker room telling us, 'It's your guys' turn, get it done,'" Charlie MacAvoy said in an article from NHL.com on the support they received from the 1980 gold medalists, "And we got it done, man. It just feels so surreal right now."



THE WORLD BASEBALL CLASSIC PREVIEW



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The World Baseball Classic is fast approaching, and this year the event is shaping up to be one of the most hyped and highly anticipated tournaments in history of the WBC.

This year, 20 teams will go for the quest to be crowned the world's best as they will start playing on March 5. The front-runners include reigning champs Japan, along with the USA and the Dominican Republic.

The United States is coming into the games with a new look as Mike Trout is out as Captain, and it is Aaron Judge as he looks to avenge their defeat to Japan a few years back. The rotation is arguably the strongest part of this roster, as they will have stars Tarik Skubal, Paul Skenes and Joe Ryan as their headliners.

Along with this group of pitchers, the United States will feature Clay Holmes and Mason Miller out of the bullpen. The lineup is also balanced with a wide variety of accomplished stars and up-and-comers.

Japan is looking to follow up on their run a few years ago that ended on a Shohei Ohtani strikeout of Mike Trout to end the game. This year, Ohtani will be back as he headlines the roster alongside Yoshinobu Yamamoto and Seiya Suzuki.

Japan will also return Munetaka Murekami, who just made the transfer over to the MLB as he gears up for his first season with the White Sox. However, something to

note for Japan is that they will not have Ohtani's arm, as he will just be hitting in the tournament.

The Dominican Republic is also looking to make a splash this year following a few disappointing years at the tourney. They boast the best lineup in the tournament by far, as they are headlined by Juan Soto and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. The pitching staff will be set to go with Sandy Alcantara and Christopher Sanchez. Unfortunately, The Dominican Republic are not the favorites, because of how good USA and Japan are as teams.

Outside of the clear top

three, Venezuela, Mexico and the Netherlands should all have solid tournaments as they all produce solid rosters in almost every tournament. Venezuela will look to lean on Wilyer Abreu and Ronald Acuña Jr. to carry them through the tournament.

For Mexico, they have an all-around solid roster headlined by Jarren Duran, who will provide some speed and spark to their offense. Their rotation will be a weak spot, although they will have a solid bullpen to hopefully combat that.

The Netherlands will also be strong again with Xander

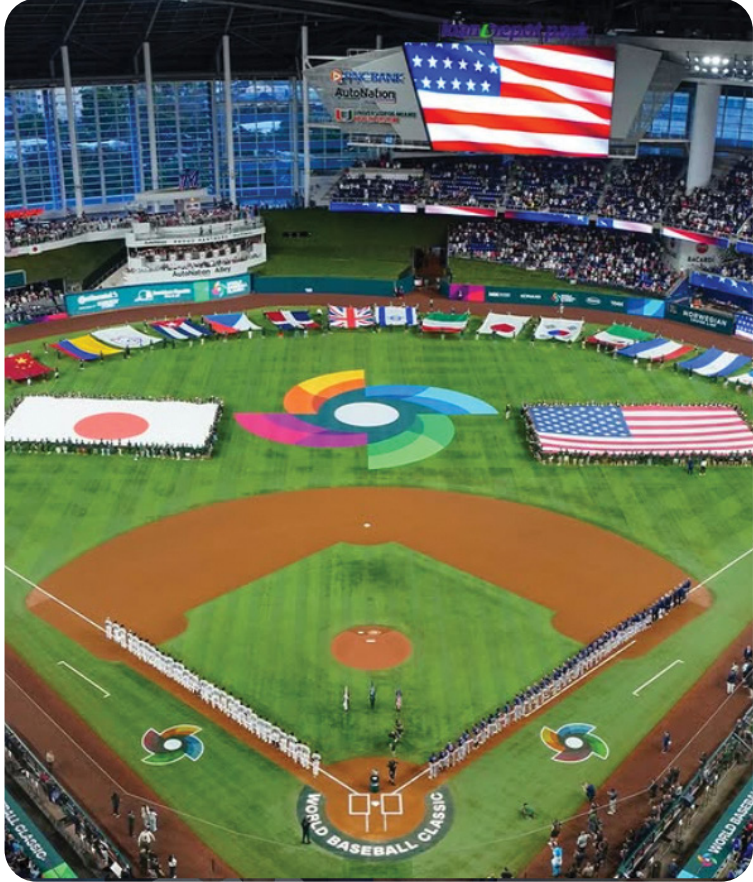
Bogaerts and Ozzie Albies, along with arguably the best defender in baseball, Cedane Rafaela. They will also have a few notable prospects on the roster, such as former top pick Drew Jones, who will help add depth to a team that could make a long run.

Teams also not to be mentioned in the upper echelon but could have breakout runs include Puerto Rico, Israel and Italy. Puerto Rico has been the talk of the tournament so far due to insurance issues with stars Carlos Correa and Francisco Lindor. Regardless of this fact, they still have aging star Nolan Arenado along with Edwin Diaz to anchor their bullpen.

Team Israel is looking to bounce back after a rough 2023 showing. In 2017, they had a magical run and are looking to do the same as they will have arguably their best roster of all-time. Led by Harrison Bader and Dean Kramer, they will have solid MLB talent along with some prospects looking to make a name for themselves on the national stage.

Finally, for Italy, they have a lot of decent pieces in a very well-rounded roster. Jac Caglianone and Kyle Teel are the names that jump off the list as they will look to boost Italy deep into the tourney, along with their plethora of veteran pitching.

This year's World Baseball Classic is set to promise big moments as the players set to make their way with their nations to a variety of sites in different countries to play. This is baseball's Olympics and will be a great kickoff to the MLB season.



The World Baseball Classic, featuring flags from participating countries. This event aims to make baseball a prominent world-wide sport. PHOTO COURTESY OF @WBCBASEBALL ON INSTAGRAM

THE LOCKER ROOM