



WHERE THE USA MEN’S HOCKEY TEAM WENT WRONG

by Raegan Skelly
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
SHE/HER/HERS
rcs23008@uconn.edu

Even if you don’t follow hockey, you know that the USA men’s hockey team is in hot water currently. Whether it’s because they laughed at Donald Trump’s belittlement of the USA women’s hockey team, where he joked that he would also “have to” invite the Women’s Olympic team (since they both won gold) or else, he’d be impeached or their White House visit in general. It has broken containment of the hockey world. Now, as someone upset with the team, I have an unpopular opinion to most: I’m not mad they went to the White House. I wasn’t surprised in the slightest; I’m not upset they took a phone call from the president. The team won their first gold medal since 1980; obviously, their president is going to call, obviously they’re going to pick up (or Kash Patel will on their behalf).

Here’s where the team went wrong: They are seemingly physically incapable of saying sorry. I have heard statements so far from Jack and Quinn Hughes, Jackson LaCombe, Jake Oettinger, Jeremy Swayman, Kyle Connor, and Auston Matthews, but you know what words haven’t left any of their mouths? “I apologize.” As someone deep on the side of hockey X, formerly known as Twitter, I can’t emphasize enough how quickly people were foaming at the mouth to forgive these guys. The number of Hughes Brothers stan accounts I saw in mourning (black profile pictures) was insurmountable. These were hockey’s golden boys, and their fall from grace with their female demographic is one I never saw coming.

The locker room video was posted on Monday night, and it took until Thursday for a player to acknowledge wrongdoing, with Swayman saying, “We should’ve reacted differently.” The first apology would come hours later with Charlie McAvoy saying he’s “Certainly sorry for how we responded to it in that moment.” How come it took four days for an apology? Instead, we got the Hughes Brothers doing various interviews stating how they previously hung out with the women’s team, which somehow absolves them of all public backlash? If the majority of the players had



just said “We support the USA women’s hockey team and apologize if our respect for them was ever called into question,” all would have been well for them, the standard here wasn’t high.

Now, why are they this way? We must remember who we’re talking about when we discuss this team: Men that don’t need to be political. They’re all white millionaires. Their entire life is handled by their team. Hockey doesn’t have players online condemning political leaders; they talk around issues, for fear of disrupting the locker room camaraderie. Hockey is team-centric; they think like a herd, at least publicly. To be a hockey player is to conform, Jake Sanderson said it best himself: “I’m not big into politics. I’m a hockey player.”

Hockey is a group-think sport. When Jack Hughes hammers on about the USA Hockey brotherhood, he’s not being dramatic; they’re developed into a unit since adolescence. Hockey is also not an individualist sport; the most “unique” or “individual” players are ones who wore patterned suits instead of black ones back when the NHL still had a dress code (think David Pastrnak). The majority of this team (17/25) went through the US National Team Development Program, meaning when they were 16-18 they all lived and trained in the same place. They

were raised together as a team. They’re allergic to accountability in a sense, and I know they’re not the ones who made the joke, but they didn’t do much about it either. Since the first few players to speak out on the situation didn’t apologize, their fellow teammates weren’t compelled to, either. They move as a unit, when Swayman said they should’ve reacted differently, it opened the floor for McAvoy to apologize. They can’t operate outside of the lines their teammates draw; they are inherently team players. Jack Hughes essentially doubled down on their behavior. He’s the player to have spoken out the most and has nothing of significance to say each time. This supposed new poster boy for USA Hockey can’t even address the crux of the matter, but does that make him hockey’s greatest mascot?

I want it on the record that I have been a fan of this team; this isn’t some downfall I prayed upon. I don’t think they’re deplorable women haters because they laughed at a “joke” (or seemingly did, not every player is in the video). Their conduct outside of this locker room, the refusal to apologize or acknowledge wrongdoing, the lens they’re taking of “Everything is so political” which, yes, Jack Hughes, wearing a Trump hat at the White House, is political, is my issue.

Instead of realizing why people are upset, the players are mad that people are “bringing” politics into their win (a topic that was invited into their locker room moments after winning gold). I want to make it clear, I’m not saying this win shouldn’t be celebrated, and I will always be a USA Hockey fan. Behave how you want, but to believe you’re above criticism is frustratingly naive. It displays a total misunderstanding of the situation,

when they scoff at people upset over their laughter and frame it like people are only upset about them going to the White House. They made their choices; their GM invited politics in, practically spoon fed an agenda into the final score, and players are mad they have to deal with repercussions. A historic gold medal was always going to be headline news; their celebrations after the fact were made into one.

