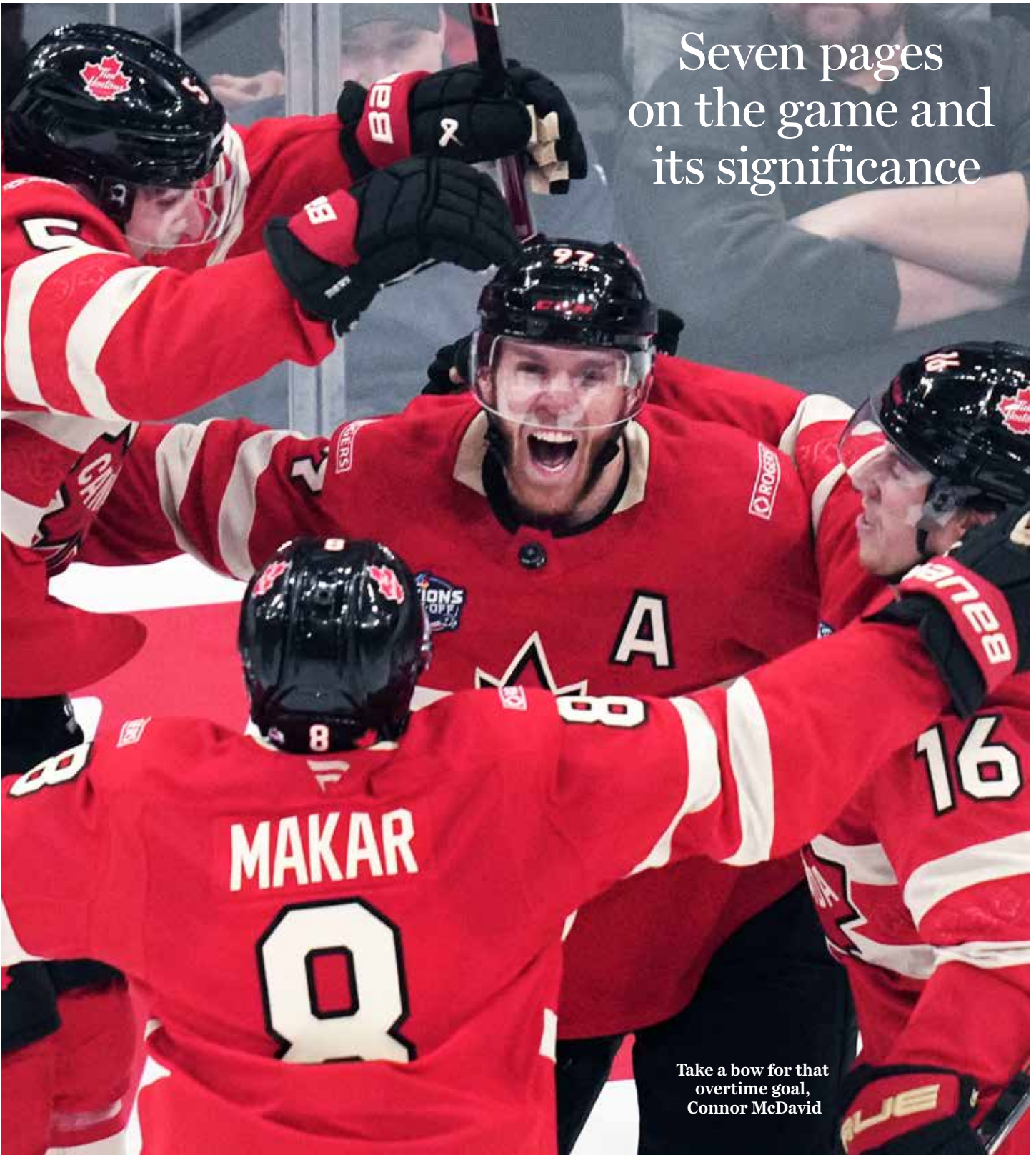


CANADIAN REVENGE



Seven pages
on the game and
its significance

Take a bow for that
overtime goal,
Connor McDavid

Overtime torch passes from Crosby to McDavid

STEVE SIMMONS

When Sidney Crosby scored the Golden Goal in Vancouver, a goal we still talk about, still watch on highlight films, he didn't have a particularly great gold medal game. Just a life-changing ending to be celebrated forever.

The same was true for Connor McDavid on Thursday night, playing the first meaningful hockey as an adult for Team Canada, frustrated through three periods against Team USA in the gold medal game, searching for his hands and his legs, fighting to locate his game, and then everything changed.

The way it always seems to change for the players known as the best of the best.

The best player in the world, who didn't look much like that on Thursday night, ended the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament by scoring at 8:18 of overtime to give Canada a hold-your-breath championship victory and a 3-2 win over an equally deserving Team USA.

The goal came 38 seconds later into the game than Crosby's winning goal came in the Vancouver Olympics of 2010, the goal that sent a nation into hockey celebration that, frankly, has lasted for years. Amazing how two moments, so far apart, circumstantially so different, end up being so much the same.

This wasn't an Olympic win for Team Canada. In the momentum of what the 4 Nations tournament had become, it only felt like one.

And this wasn't just the best-on-best tournament, the way the National Hockey League advertised it. In the end, this was best-versus-best in the final. A tournament of tremendous highs and fabulous speed and ebbs and flows and, eventually, a mis-



Cale Makar hoists the 4 Nations trophy after Thursday night's win at TD Garden in Boston

BRUCE BENNETT / GETTY IMAGES

take and, without notice, a conclusion. That's how it ends most nights in hockey.

And a torch of sorts has now been passed — if there is such a thing — from the genera-

tional Crosby to the player of this generation, McDavid: One overtime goal of significance passed on to another one 15 years later.

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Sidney Crosby shakes hands with Zach Werenski of Team United States after Canada's overtime win.

BRUCE BENNETT / GETTY IMAGES

The assist on the winning goal came from the Maple Leaf winger Mitch Marner, his second of the night, his second game-winning play in the three tournament wins by Canada. This was a great night of sorts for the two Maple Leafs playing head to head, Canadian versus American, in the tournament.

Just seconds before McDavid took a Marner pass and brilliantly shot the puck past the great Connor Hellebuyck, Leafs captain Auston Matthews had the series-winning goal apparently on his stick.

It was that close.

The best shooter in hockey, Matthews, took his shot. The stunning Canadian goaltender, the beleaguered Jordan Binnington, picked the right night and right moment to be great, made a superb save on Matthews that prevented him from being named tournament MVP.

Matthews had set up the first two American goals. Almost scored one or two in the third period. Almost. Couldn't finish when it mattered most but played some of his best — three-zone, 200-foot hockey — when it mattered most. Had he scored the winner, he, not Nathan MacKinnon, would have been named tournament MVP. But it didn't end that way for Matthews, for Team USA.

Of all his Game 7s, this was a Game 7 he didn't deserve to lose.

Nobody deserved to lose this one. The winner of the tournament was Team Canada but the real winner was hockey. The return of international hockey. The kind of hockey that's going to make watching the NHL difficult in the first days post-tournament. The real winner: Hockey fans.

This hockey had everything — speed, passion, intelligence, excellence, defensive brilliance, physical play, the Tkachuk brothers playing together until Matthew couldn't finish the tournament. This was a video game come to life on my 65-inch screen.

It wasn't about politics. It wasn't your game vs. our game or our game vs. your game. This wasn't about booing anthems or potential tariffs. It wasn't about which country had the better team or the better players. It was two equals standing in the middle of the ring, tossing hockey haymakers at each other, throwing punches in the first seconds of Montreal on Saturday night, throwing passes in the final second in Boston late Thursday night.

The Americans are now playing hockey the way Canadians used to. They play physical. They forecheck. They used their

size. They go to the net. The Canadians may be more top heavy in talent — with MacKinnon, McDavid, Cale Maker — but not necessarily an equal match 23 on 23. That meant for a fabulous ending to a fabulous tournament that didn't arrive with expectations of any real kind — and it sets the tone for what should be a spectacular Winter Olympics one year from now in Italy.

But first there had to be a 4 Nations celebration. You have to do that. McDavid was thrilled to score and, hard as he is on himself, he knew he wasn't contributing early on.

He's forever honest about his game that way.

"I was not very good all night," said McDavid afterward. "I struggled all night."

And then he scored the overtime winner.

Just like Crosby did 15 years ago.

The Crosby goal meant Olympic gold for Canada. The McDavid goal meant an in-season tournament win for Canada. It's the same but it's not the same.

It's a win for Canada. A huge moment for McDavid. A giant victory for the game that differentiates us more from than anything else from our American neighbours.

It was about hockey. It was about who we are and what we care about most.

Postmedia News



The moment of truth, as the overtime winner beats U.S. goalie Connor Hellebuyck

BRUCE BENNETT / GETTY IMAGES

Not just hockey. Not just politics. Everything.

Scott Stinson

Maybe Donald Trump wants to take over Canada just so his country can finally win a hockey tournament again.

And, of course, it was Connor McDavid who said: not yet.

In the end, the final of the 4 Nations Face-Off was exactly what was expected: tense, taut, more than a little terrifying, a battle of two teams that have little between them. Canada, the hockey nation that has been reluctant to give up its crown. And America, the country that has been trying, for a couple of decades now, to wrest it away.

For everyone on the ice, as McDavid found space in the slot and then buried a Mitch Marner pass from the corner to win the final in overtime, a play with freaky echoes of Vancouver 2010, that mattered a lot. Canada retains the championship belt, to be put on the line again a year from now at the Olympics in northern Italy.

For everyone at home, hockey supremacy was just part of the story.

This was a chance to stick it in the ear of Donald J. Trump, Canada's mocker-in-chief.

And damn if it wasn't a little satisfying that McDavid and friends did exactly that.

The crowd at TD Garden in Boston booed the Canadian national anthem, obvious payback for the Montreal fans who did the same thing to The Star Spangled Banner last week. No one in Boston likely considered the context: they were just booing our anthem; we were responding to Trump's annexation talk and his law-breaking tariff plans. This wasn't just about rooting for the home team.

From the moment the tournament began, there was a distinct sense that the players did not quite grasp the environment in which they were playing.

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When the American national anthem was first booed enthusiastically in Montreal on Saturday night, members of Team USA like Matthew Tkachuk sniffed that they didn't appreciate it. "That's all I got," he said, evidently not wanting to get drawn into a larger discussion of the meaning of booing an anthem.

In the days since, members of both teams talked about being apolitical about — waves hands dramatically in the air — all of this.

"We're here to play hockey. This is not a political forum," said Team USA general manager Bill Guerin on Thursday morning, after he received a good-luck call from Trump. "This is a hockey tournament. And he's just trying to be supportive in the best way that he could, and we appreciate it."

Mmmm, OK.

Here was American coach Mike Sullivan on the same Trump call: "It was a distinct honour," he said. "Politics aside, when the president of the United States takes the time to speak to our players, it's an incredible honour."

Ah. Right, then.

Player after player was similarly enthusiastic.

Forward J.T. Miller, recently traded from the Vancouver Canucks because he couldn't get along with the Swedish captain: "It was pretty cool. It was so awesome to get his support. It's a pretty big deal for him to take time out of his schedule to talk to us for five minutes."

Defenceman Zach Werenski: "We're proud Americans, and we want to make the country proud. And just to hear from him was awesome."

Even on the Canadian side of the aisle, there was a fun-and-games whiff to the endeavour.

Coach Jon Cooper said politics were not a motivating factor for his team.

"Other than the fact of the talk of



Brady Tkachuk and Auston Matthews lick their wounds.

RUCE BENNETT / GETTY

the 51st state, and then somebody saying, 'Wow, we'd have one hell of a hockey team.'

Little joke there. Good one, coach. Cooper went on to say that all the Canadians could do was try to represent their country well. Fair enough.

But glaringly absent from all of the pre-game talk, especially from the Americans, was even the slightest acknowledgement that the Canadians had every right to be aggrieved at their opponents, and more to the point at the president over whom Team USA was collectively swooning.

This isn't "politics," in the normal sense when otherwise reasonable people might disagree over the best way to fund government services or tackle overspending.

This is something else entirely: The President of the United States spending literal weeks now openly musing about wiping Canada, as a country, off the map, simply because he thinks it would be a good business deal for his country.

Guerin, Miller, Sullivan, Tkachuk and whoever else can wave this away as merely this thorny politics business in which they choose not to get involved but, respectfully, they can cram it. Donald Trump is an absolute

menace to his allies, and Americans who choose to pretend like this is all part of the normal cut and thrust of politics are very much responsible for why we are where we are.

So, for a night, on a sheet of ice in a city that knows a thing about revolutions, some Canadians had a chance to bloody the nose of their would-be oppressor.

Was Jordan Binnington thinking about annexation threats when he was making six saves in overtime to keep Canada alive? No, he was just stopping pucks. And Marner was just digging out the puck and looking for a pass, and McDavid was finishing his chance.

Marner to McDavid will now fit in there nicely with Gretzky to Lemieux and Iginla to Crosby in Canada's moments of hockey glory.

But this one comes as Canada has felt under siege, from bizarre and unexpected forces. We've been celebrating our identity in response, waving our flags and puffing out our chests a little.

Those big wins of the past are properly seen as this country's great hockey moments. This one felt more like a celebration of Canada.

National Post

‘This is one of the few times we’re loudly proud’

Tyler Dawson

EDMONTON • The hockey game between Canada and the United States was, at a bare minimum, about national pride.

Our country. Our game. At a time when Canadians feel distinctly under assault by the trade belligerence of U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration.

Canada’s win, said Tamara Virag, speaking during the first-period intermission, would be a “small, little F you.”

She got her wish, as Connor McDavid’s overtime goal sealed it. Victory for Canada.

“I don’t even watch hockey. I pay attention to politics. I care about politics. I’ve been feeling a lot more patriotic,” Virag said.

In Edmonton, as passionate a hockey town as exists in Canada, fans cheered their national team. It’s a fair bet that many of the fans at Campio, a downtown brewery, are Edmonton Oilers fans on any other day. Still, they were cheering for a team comprised of some of the most-loathed NHL players in the city. Among them, Sam Bennett, a Florida Panthers centre, who scored the second goal for Canada.

Canadians, as we always do, have set aside so many differences — few more feral than hockey team allegiance — in the face of American aggression, both on the ice, off the ice and in the nation’s barrooms.

Hockey, as with other sports, is a proxy for a city, a state, a nation’s pride, its confidence, its identity.



Hockey fans line the bar at Campio Brewery in Edmonton on Thursday.

SHAUGHN BUTTS / POSTMEDIA

One woman, seated at the bar and wearing a red Canada cowboy hat, said she was playing hooky from work to watch the game.

“I think it’s a big deal, especially after Trump’s tweets reinforcing the notion of Canada being the 51st state,” she said. “We’re often quietly proud, this is one of the few times we’re loudly proud.”

If anyone still believed it, the idea that sport has no relationship with

politics is now utterly indefensible. Have fans ever sung the Canadian anthem so loudly? In Montreal, no less? When last was the American anthem booed with such raw enthusiasm? Wayne Gretzky, the honorary Team Canada captain and Canadian hockey icon, raised eyebrows when he strode past the U.S. team bench, giving players the thumbs up.

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Even the commercials were political. Sobeys and Pizza Pizza both had obviously pro-Canadian advertisements. The Conservative and Liberal parties both had their advertising slots, in between the usual ads for cars and sports betting.

Not everyone sees the politics at play. For some, it's still just about the game.

Gee Josue, wearing a Canada sweater, sat at a table before the game began; many nearby patrons were eating before attending an Our Lady Peace concert at nearby Rogers Place.

"I still look at it as sport first," Josue said, as his drink arrived. "At the end of the day (the players) go back to their teams on both sides of the border."

Whether politics or Trump played into Thursday's passion or not, the game was about national pride. Of that there's no doubt.

"It's more just about asserting dominance as a hockey nation," said Jake Morin, as he sat at the bar. "I think it's a pretty big deal, to me — bringing pride to Canada."

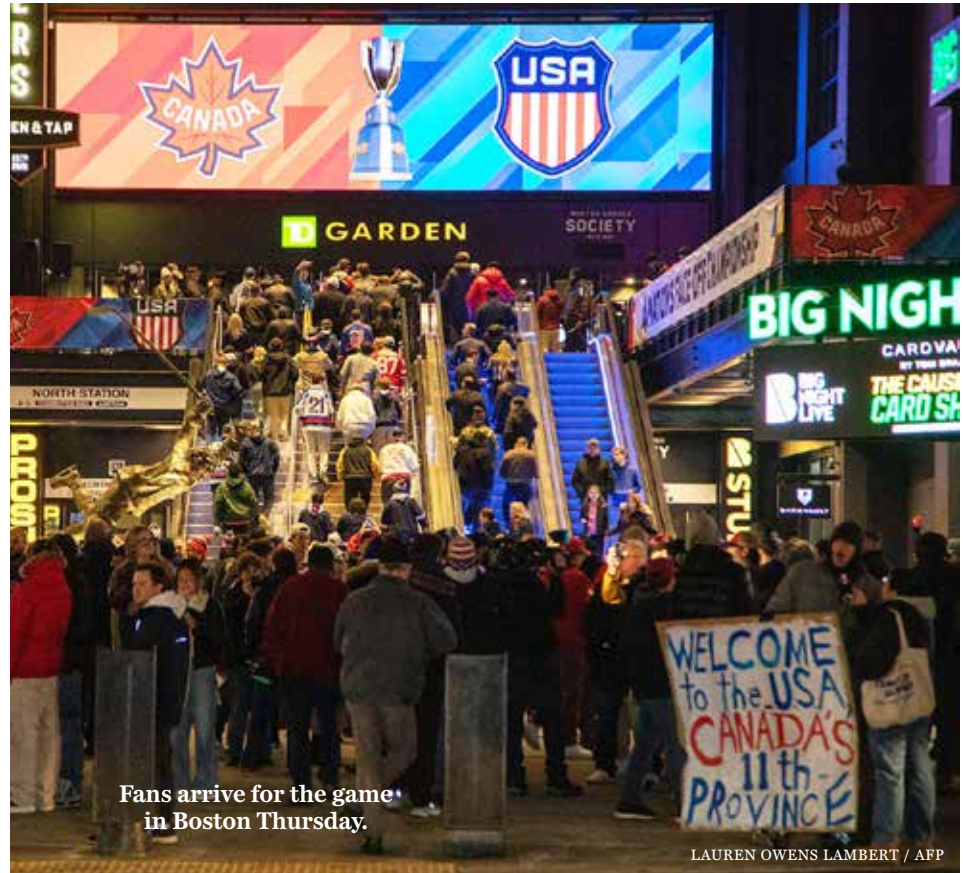
Still, the players made it political, intentionally or not, to say nothing of the politicians themselves.

After Team Canada's Brandon Hagel put a beatdown on American Matthew Tkachuk last Saturday, he told reporters he threw hands "for the flag."

Noah Hanifin, a U.S. defenceman, said, with useful clarity, on Thursday morning that he was hoping for "the win tonight for our country and for Trump." This came after Donald Trump spoke to the team, which White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said left the players "jubilant."

"We look forward to the United States beating our soon-to-be 51st state, Canada," Leavitt told reporters.

Well, that won't happen. But this



Fans arrive for the game in Boston Thursday.

LAUREN OWENS LAMBERT / AFP

game was about far more than just hockey. How could it not be?

"I think it plays into it a lot," said Krystal Vandenberg. "With Trump saying he's going to annex Canada I think it has sparked a real patriotism in Canada. Hockey is our sport."

It has been decades since tension between Canada and the United States as reached such heights and if there's any place Canadians think they ought to be able to defend their national honour, it's on the ice.

The Saturday fights — the fights were noticeably absent Thursday — are, in some small way, a reflection of this tension.

Everywhere in Canada, there are expressions of patriotism. The little things: a new flag, plastered in the living room window.

The little-but-inconvenient things: trying to figure out if that head of broccoli is USA grown.

The big things: cancelling enough

trips to the U.S. that the tourism industry could see multi-billion-dollar losses, or selling the family Tesla.

It takes no great knowledge of history to understand just how much our relationship with the United States defines Canada's identity and just how much threats from down south rally Canadians around the flag. Canadian pride, pollsters have found, has spiked 10 percentage points in the last year as Trump has amped-up his rhetoric.

Canadians, famously polite, have infamously been booing the Star Spangled Banner at NHL games.

Katie Vandenberg, originally from the United Kingdom, likened it to the raucous — and often rowdy — national pride fostered during soccer tournaments across the pond.

"It's a hostile atmosphere, defending your country," Vandenberg said.

Hostile, indeed. A win for Canada.

National Post

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