

U.S., Canada to showcase North American hockey power in Milan

After years of close matches, the border rivalry may define the Olympic tournament in Italy

NEW YORK (AP) — One more goal. That's how close the U.S. was to beating Canada in the final at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics before losing in overtime.

One more goal. That's how close the U.S. was from tying Canada in the semifinals at the 2014 Sochi Olympics before losing 1-0.

One more goal. That's how close the U.S. was to beating Canada in the final at the 4 Nations Face-Off a year ago before losing in overtime.

"Canada won, right?" U.S. center Jack Eichel said. "So, they're obviously on top."

Canada has won every major international men's hockey tournament featuring the NHL's best players over the past 16 years, a run that includes the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. With Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Cale Makar joining forces for the first time on the same sheet of ice, the nation known as the cra-

dle of the sport goes into the Milan Cortina Olympics next month as the gold medal favorite.

"It's always been Canada," longtime U.S. star Patrick Kane said.

The U.S. has been closing ground for decades, and the 4 Nations put the border rivalry in the spotlight while ramping up expectations that the Games will be another showcase of North American dominance.

"The men haven't been able to get over that hump and defeat Canada and win a gold medal, and I think this is their best chance to do it," said retired U.S. winger T.J. Oshie, whose shootout heroics against host Russia in Sochi is one of the most memorable Olympic moments in history. "This is the best U.S.A. team that I've seen. And if they can come together like they did in the 4 Nations, I think that for the first time, I'd say it's a pretty fair fight going into it."

European powerhouses Sweden

and Finland, the latter being the defending Olympic champion, will be in the mix, as could the Czechs or Germans. But in a tournament without the Russians, the U.S. and Canada look like the teams to beat. BetMGM Sportsbook set Canada as a 5-4 favorite, ahead of the U.S. at just over 2-1.

Canada won the 4 Nations on McDavid's goal in Boston last February and has the deepest, most talented forward group of any of the 12 countries involved. That includes 19-year-old Macklin Celebriini, who was on the couch cheering last February while in awe of the quality of play on display.

"That was the best hockey I've ever watched," Celebriini said. "Just the pace, the amount of skill, physicality — all of it combined is the best."

It could be even faster in Milan, and not only because the rinks are more than 3 feet shorter than

NHL-regulation length.

"That'll probably make the game a lot tighter, too," Makar said. "The Olympics will be a completely different kind of thing, almost even more amplified."

The U.S. has hopes for its first men's hockey gold medal at the Olympics since the 1980 "Miracle on Ice" team. That's not a pipe dream, as the U.S. National Team Development Program and grassroots growth of the sport has closed the gap on Canada.

"The talent pool and the level of the play of the Americans now I think is as high as it's ever been," Kane said. "That's kind of how we felt in 2010, 2014, (and it) keeps getting better."

The teams split at the 4 Nations, games that U.S. center Jack Hughes described as crazy and just a taste of what he and other players are in for in Milan.

"Once you see the level of compe-

tition at the 4 Nations, you're so hungry to get back to that and you want to be in the Olympics so bad just because the level of hockey was so high," said Hughes, who will play with older brother Quinn at the Games.

Oshie grew up in Warroad, Minnesota, a 20-minute drive from the Canadian border. He described the simmering rivalry as hatred: "For a long time, they were just almost too good to get past."

Maybe not anymore, particularly given Canada's seeming vulnerability in goal and the U.S. strength at hockey's most important position. But there is no guarantee these teams face off in single-elimination play at the Olympics, so USA Hockey general manager Bill Guerin insists he and his staff did not construct a roster just to beat Canada.

"We built the best team possible," Guerin said. "We did that with us in mind. We're worried about us, not anybody else."

Harbaugh embraces challenge of turning Giants into contenders

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — John Harbaugh has done plenty of winning in the NFL, including 12 playoff appearances and a Super Bowl title.

The New York Giants for much of the past decade have done very little of it.

That is not stopping Harbaugh from dreaming big. Taking over as Giants coach, he has plenty of power in shaping their future and a visible eagerness to turn them back into a contender sooner than later.

"I wanted this job," Harbaugh said Tuesday at his introductory news conference. "I wanted this job and to be on the biggest stage in the biggest sport. I know the challenges, I understand the expectations, I know that the fans are hungry for a winner. We're here with one mission, to become — to earn the right — to be called the world champions in New York. And that's what we plan to do."

Harbaugh after 18 seasons with the Baltimore Ravens faces a challenge in bringing success to a storied franchise that has gone 45-105-1 and not made it past the divisional round since 2016.

As part of his arrangement to accept the gig, the 63-year-old reports directly to ownership rather than

general manager Joe Schoen, so Harbaugh will get to mold the organization in his image around the core led by young quarterback Jaxson Dart.

"He's going to be the most important cog in the wheel," said Chris Mara, the longtime executive who led the coaching search along with brother John and co-owner Steve Tisch. "But in terms of final say, this is going to be a collaborative effort between ownership, general manager and coach."

There are plenty of fresh success stories around the NFL of teams pairing a new coach with an established QB and winning right away. New England, Chicago and Jacksonville all made the playoffs this season following that recipe, and the Patriots are in the AFC championship game.

"That's what we're going to be chasing," Harbaugh said. "It's going to be about how we play. It's going to be about us every single day, just becoming as good as we can be."

The Giants were 4-13, costing former coach Brian Daboll and other assistants their jobs but also giving them a long runway to map out the options available. The moment Harbaugh became available in early January, he immediately became their top candidate.

"I didn't think he'd be available," Chris Mara said, adding that two-

time Super Bowl-winning coach Tom Coughlin put him in touch with Harbaugh and urged a meeting. "But for us, it was a home run."

Mara, Harbaugh and Schoen all downplayed the chain of command and tried to talk up just how strong the rapport already is between the new coach and the GM back for a fifth season. Harbaugh anticipates the working relationship being "phenomenally great," though the coming weeks and months building out a staff, signing free agents and making important decisions in the draft will tell that tale.

"We need to work together, and we're going to come to the final conclusion and it's always going to be able what's best for the New York Giants," Schoen said. "I have no problem with that, and I'm looking forward to working with him."

Harbaugh figures his role will be similar to how he and Ozzie Newsome and Eric DeCosta operated with the Ravens: evaluating players, giving input and contributing to the vision of the organization. Brother Jim, who just finished his second season coaching the Los Angeles Chargers after winning the national championship at Michigan, hyped up what it will be like in a new place.

"He said, 'You're going to be re-

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Grove City (10-5, 3-0) posted a 14-6 lead over the Rockets (2-12, 0-3) after the first and held a 24-14 halftime edge. Both teams scored nine points in the fourth and Grove City did not allow any Slippery Rock rally in the fourth to take the triumph.

Kyle Osborn added 11 points in the win, while Max Knouse had nine.

Doug Popovc's 14 points led the Rockets. Fred Campagna finished with 13.

Cochranton 73, Commodore Perry 45

COCHRANTON — Brady Rynd tallied 21 points to lead four players in double figures as Cochranton came away with a 73-45 decision over visiting Commodore Perry in Region 2 play.

The Cardinals (7-5 overall, 4-2 R 2) jumped out to a 23-10 lead before extending it to 36-14 at halftime and 61-25 after three stanzas.

Walker Carroll followed with 12 points for the Cardinals, Tyler Wright had 11 points and CJ Shorts added 10 points.

Nick Brown knocked down five triples to lead the Panthers with a game-high 23 points.

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John Harbaugh

New York Giants' head coach

ally excited to walk into that room for the first time with a different team — a team that you haven't been around — and you start fresh from the beginning and kind of build it up the way you want to," John Harbaugh said. "I just can't wait."

Patriarch Jack Harbaugh, in attendance for John's big day, smiled the entire time because he saw how much his son was enjoying a fresh start.

"I don't think I've seen him more excited and happier than he is right now," Jack said. "It feels right. It does feel right."

THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

NFL PLAYOFFS

Wild-card Playoffs

Saturday, Jan. 10

L.A. Rams 34, Carolina 31

Chicago 31, Green Bay 27

Sunday, Jan. 11

Buffalo 27, Jacksonville 24

San Francisco 23, Philadelphia 19

New England 16, L.A. Chargers 3

Monday, Jan. 12

Houston 30, Pittsburgh 6

Divisional Playoffs

Saturday, Jan. 17

Denver 33, Buffalo 30, OT

Seattle 41, San Francisco 6

Sunday, Jan. 18

New England 28, Houston 16

L.A. Rams 20, Chicago 17, OT

Conference Championships

Sunday, Jan. 25

AFC

New England at Denver, 3 p.m. (CBS/Paramount+)

NFC

L.A. Rams at Seattle, 6:30 p.m. (FOX)

Super Bowl LIX

Sunday, Feb. 8

At Santa Clara.

Conference Championships winners, 6:30 p.m. (NBC/Peacock)

NHL STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

GP W L OT Pts GF GA

Atlantic 48 31 13 4 66 170 121

Tampa Bay 50 30 16 4 64 157 153

Detroit 50 28 17 5 63 172 167

Boston 50 28 20 2 58 166 156

Toronto 49 24 17 8 56 165 164

Florida 48 25 20 3 53 154 160

Ottawa 49 23 19 7 53 163 164

Metropolitan 50 21 13 6 48 155 155

Carolina 50 31 15 4 66 173 157

N.Y. Islanders 49 27 17 5 59 145 137

Pittsburgh 48 23 14 11 57 156 147

Philadelphia 48 23 17 5 58 157 150

Washington 50 24 20 6 54 159 148

New Jersey 49 25 22 2 52 159 150

Columbus 49 22 20 7 51 149 164

N.Y. Rangers 50 21 13 6 48 155 155

WESTERN CONFERENCE

GP W L OT Pts GF GA

Central 47 34 5 76 190 112

Colorado 50 28 13 9 65 169 141

Dallas 51 28 14 9 65 164 147

Minnesota 49 25 20 4 54 158 135

Utah 49 25 20 4 54 158 135

Nashville 48 23 21 4 50 158 161

Chicago 49 20 22 7 47 135 154

St. Louis 49 19 22 8 46 120 168

Winnipeg 48 19 23 6 44 144 150

Pacific 47 34 5 76 190 112

Vegas 48 24 12 6 60 161 147

Edmonton 50 25 17 8 58 170 158

Anheim 49 25 21 3 53 163 175

San Jose 49 25 21 3 53 153 173

Seattle 48 21 18 9 51 133 147

Los Angeles 48 19 16 13 51 125 136

Calgary 49 21 23 5 47 127 145

Vancouver 49 16 28 5 37 129 180

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

MONDAY'S GAMES

Carolina 2, Buffalo