

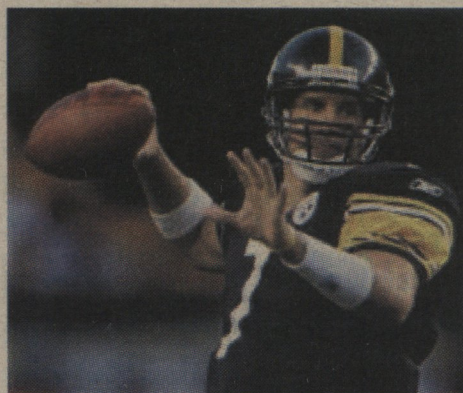
# SPORTS

## Holiday Recap: NFL Wraps Up Regular Season; Canada Gold Once Again

Justin Richard  
Contributor

As a relatively slow holiday season comes to a close, 12 NFL teams head to the postseason. Among those teams are the surprising Pittsburgh Steelers, who, with superstar rookie Ben Roethlisberger, are the apparent favorites, coming into the playoffs with the best record at 15-1. Also in the mix are returning champs, the Patriots, who are in a strong position to repeat as they have a bye to the second round. Philadelphia, who was a favorite to make it to the Super Bowl before entering the postseason, are now on a two game losing streak, mailing in their last two contests. It remains to be seen if they have the desire to compete in the playoffs, especially since the player they acquired in the off-season is on the injured list until at least the finals. The Colts, unfortunate enough to be in a strong AFC sitting with a 12-4 record and no bye, must pray for no wind in their matchups so that Peyton will be able to unleash his aerial assault on the opposing teams. With so many talented teams and no clear favorite, it should be an interesting winter.

As the entire nation probably knows by now, Canada has won another gold medal in junior men's action, securing their place as a world power in hockey once again. It also reinforces the domination that Canada has had on the world in the past years in hockey, as they now hold top position of every major tournament in hockey, both men's, women's and junior's. Bouncing back after a devastating loss to the US last year, they crushed the competition this year, winning the final game 6-1 against Russia, dominating the play from start to finish. Backed by the superb play of forwards Patrice



Bergeron and Jeff Carter, and defenseman Dion Phaneuf, Canada was able to go undefeated in round robin play, ultimately ending up with the gold. Only time will tell if the Canadians will be able to go back to back for the first time since 96-97, as they will only have 2 available returning players from this years squad for next year. But for now, it is time to relish in the hockey supremacy that is Canada.

## Canada Back on Top

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humiliating 8<sup>th</sup> place finish that year started the slump for Team Canada; in the next 6 years they would only manage 4 silver and two bronze. We all remember the heartbreaking loss to Russia in Halifax in '03 in front of a rowdy bunch of Canadian fanatics and '04 in Helsinki when star goaltender, Marc-Andre Fleury



Remember the days when Canada would win the gold medal every year at the World Junior Hockey Championships? I mean, they had a five year gold medal streak going from '93 to '97. It was just customary those days. School would be out for Christmas vacation; you would celebrate Christmas with your family, spend New Year's with your friends, and then watch the Canadian juniors win the gold medal. It had become a tradition — then 1998 happened. A

deflected a puck off a Canadian defender into our own goal to give the Americans the one goal lead and eventually the win.

I wouldn't blame the Canadian players for getting worse. Every year, we would send a very skilled and physical young hockey team. It has just been that other countries have become much more talented and simply outplayed Team Canada. But as you probably heard or saw, at the 2005 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championships in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Canada won the gold in a fashion that decimated opponents and embarrassed coaches, players and fans alike. This year, Canada dominated their opposition, outscoring them 41-7 in six games including an easy 6-1 victory over Alexandre Ovechkin and Team Russia to re-capture that precious gold-medal.

With this gold medal, Canada now holds every major international tournament title in hockey. These include the 2004 World Cup of Hockey, the 2004 Men's and Women's World Hockey Championships, and of course the 2002 Men's and Women's Olympic hockey gold medals. So, once again, Team Canada is on top of the hockey world, and they don't plan on stepping down anytime soon as young hockey talent continues to grow.

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