

SPORTS

Welcome to Wildcard Weekend



Liam McKenna
Sports Editor

Well, it's wildcard weekend in the NFL and predictions abound about who will advance further into the NFL playoffs. Will Ben Roethlisberger finally show his true colors and live up to his capabilities? Will defence conquer offence in the Panthers-Giants game? Will Tom Brady continue his undefeated playoff streak? Will there be boobs? All of these important questions will be answered in this week's edition of the *Cadre*.

Who will take the Wildcard games?

Ah, the wildcard! If I were a betting man looking for advice in this column, I'd take the Buccaneers, Patriots, Giants, and Bengals, although not necessarily in that order and maybe not those particular teams. Actually, if I really was a betting man, I'd probably go and look somewhere else.

Who will win the Superbowl?

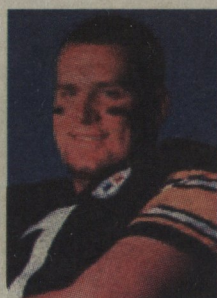
The winner of the Superbowl will probably be the Indianapolis

Colts, barring any huge upset, plane crash, or act of God. Hopefully Peyton can pull it together. By the way, what was the Manning family thinking naming their kids Peyton and Eli? Those poor kids were so embarrassed by their names they had to go and make football stars of themselves to give them any sort of confidence. To prevent any tragedy of this sort happening in your family and bringing in millions of dollars, name your kids something normal, like "Ted." Just hope for a boy.

What's the deal with Ben Roethlisberger? Will he show up in the playoffs? Where was he all season?

Up yours, that's the deal with Ben Roethlisberger. Why is everyone whining about this guy's season? He

had a better QB rating than last year, and rushed for two more touchdowns. Sure, his passing was a little lower and he missed a few games because he was hurt, but it's nothing to cry about. He has a good supporting cast around him



— just hope he doesn't have a cast on his thumb, which is injured and could be the only thing adversely affecting his performance in Cincinnati. If the Steelers lose, and I suspect they will, it won't be Roethlisberger's fault.

Will there be boobs? Yes.

Unfortunately, they will belong to John Madden.

Is Carolina going to give the Giants a run?

I don't think so. If it was based on having one of the best uniforms in



sports, maybe, but Delhomme and the Panthers shouldn't be able to defeat the Giants. Why not? I'm not really sure. I like the Giants better. Actually, I probably like the Panthers better, but I

just think the Giants will win. Once again, if you're placing your bets on this column, that's your choice. I'll only take responsibility (and a 40% cut) from you if win.

Why are you writing about football? You always write about hockey. Do you even know how to play football?

Ha, ha! Of course I know how to play football. My picks are based on a careful formula, far too advanced for you to understand. As a general outline, it involves dividing the save percentage of the team's shortstop with the team's overall handicap using a multitude of variables, including which team has more tattoos and fewer sissy soup commercials.

Unheralded Canadian Squad Defends World Junior Hockey Gold



Josh Lewis
Sports Reporter

It was a fairytale ending that no one expected, but when the dust settled, it seemed rather fitting. Team Canada won the 2006 World Junior Hockey Championship in Vancouver on Thursday, with a 5-0 blowout against heavily-favoured Russia in the gold medal game. Michael Blunden led the home side with a pair of goals, while Steve Downie, Blake Comeau and Kyle Chipchura also scored. Goaltender Justin Pogge, a third round pick of the Toronto Maple Leafs, netted his second straight shutout, his third of the tournament.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. This was the year of the big, bad Americans. The tournament favourites were supposed to steamroll everything in their path. Russia was supposed to give them a run for their money and settle for silver. And Canada? The team without a single returning player from last year's gold medal game was supposed to be lucky if they got a medal.

Instead, the Americans couldn't steamroll Switzerland, Canada won Group A, and the U.S. team ran out of gas, giving Russia an easy road to the gold medal game. With the pre-tournament favourites out of the running, the focus shifted to Canada-Russia, just like old times. Da da Canada, nyet nyet Soviet. Unlike 1972, however, the Russians were supposed to win. Evgeni Malkin was going to run roughshod over the Canadian blueline. Russia's team speed was going to immobilize our forwards. And Anton Khudobin was going to shut us down when we did get a scoring chance.

Instead, Steve Downie (Canada's player of the game) got the Russians off their game and mad as hell. Canada's blueline stood its considerable ground. Ryan O'Marra, Michael Blunden and Luc Bourdon delivered bone-crunching hit after bone-crunching hit. And most importantly, Justin Pogge delivered the

performance of his life.

What happened to the almighty Soviets?

Something must have gone wrong, right? The Russians simply screwed up. That had to be it. Canada was lucky to win. Right?

Maybe Canada's work ethic, determination, and sheer refusal to lose paid off. Maybe our boys showed that it takes more than skill to be a world champion. Maybe it takes heart. Passion. Teamwork. Determination and integrity. In other words, the Canadian game.

This team is a tremendous testament to Canadian hockey. No Crosby. No Carter. No Bergeron. No dominating force on offense. Most of our players were unknown to all but the diehards. And we had a goalie that no one, bar a few Leafs fans, had ever heard of.

The United States iced the strongest team it has ever sent to the WJC. The Russians had some phenom named Malkin. The Finns had Tuukka Rask (another Leaf prospect), whose 53-save shutout of Sweden in the quarter-finals earned him the top goaltender award.

Canada answered with an unsung, lunch-bucket group of kids. We weren't supposed to even challenge for gold. Yet those kids, led by hard-nosed coach Brent Sutter, battled with everything they had. They weren't the most skilled, or the best skaters, or top-notch prospects, but their grit and determination allowed them to defeat those who were.

In 2005, Canada iced what was probably the best team in the history of the world junior championship. The 2006 edition was the polar opposite, but Sutter's crew found a way to get the job done. Kudos to every member of the Canadian team and to Hockey Canada for defeating the best the world had to offer, the Canadian way.

Da da Canada, nyet nyet Soviet.