

# unMitigaTeD Au dactY

Is the "Dream Team" really Canada's best squad in Nagano?

Oh, No - ANOTHER Hockey Article!!!

Ah, a little national pride does a people good. Since last Saturday, I've taken up permanent residence on my couch, watching the games from Nagano. No doubt everyone's noticed how the country has come to a near-standstill in the past week, thanks to the Olympics.

In those two days where Ross Rebagliati's gold medal appeared to have gone up in smoke (pun intended), discussion of the incident was everywhere from the Pit to Parliament Hill, and virtually all Canadians held their breath (heh!), hoping that Rebagliati's appeal would be successful. As we now know it was, we've all sighed with relief and can now get back to the other major events of the Games. Needless to say, as the nation born on ice, the men's hockey tournament is on almost everybody's mind now. Having lost our honour to those infidels from the south in the World Cup, every self-respecting Canuck is anxiously awaiting Gretzky, Yzerman, and the rest of the gang to grab a little revenge (and the gold, I suppose).

While I'm definitely among the pro-Canada hordes, I have to honestly say that my interest in Olympic hockey has taken a bit of a turn this time -- I'm far more interested in the women's tournament than the men's. My reason: the "dream-team" concept makes me want to vomit. Even though it will be nowhere near as lopsided as the basketball dream team fiasco we've seen in the summer games, I'm still not sold. I don't think a squad of overpaid NHLers is going to have the same desire to win gold as a team of lesser-lights will.

Going back in time to previous Olympic tournaments, Canada has sent a team made up partially of future stars (Paul Kariya, Sean Burke), partially of disgruntled vets (Randy Gregg, Petr Nedved), but mainly stocked with a whole shwack of guys who had been passed over by the pros (Todd Hlushko, Derek Mayer, Fabian Joseph, Kevin Dahl, etc). These no-names had little to no chance of ever winning a Stanley Cup, so the Olympic gold became an adequate substitute. And they scrapped tooth and nail against better teams, coming oh so close to taking it all in '92 and '94. Will a player making \$1 000 000 a season and having a strong chance to win the Cup this spring be as willing to take a puck in the face for his country as a guy scraping by on a national team income (about \$20 000) who'll never rise higher than the IHL? With very few exceptions, for the NHLers, this tournament is nothing more than a status thing.

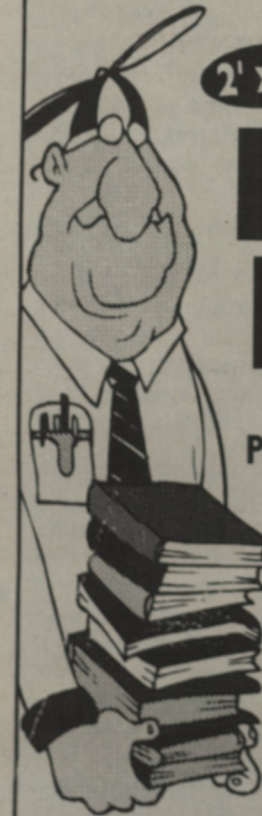
On the other hand, the women's tournament is another thing entirely. The obvious reasons of it being a new sport and Canada having the strongest team in the world are there. But as I see it, the women's tournament is more interesting because Canada's women's hockey squad should have more incentive to win all the marbles than the men's team. With no women's pro league existing anywhere (as far as I know) and no definite plans for one presently, this tournament represents the highest level of achievement currently available. As this could be the end of the road for some players, this could be further motivation to take it all. Secondly, the sport's status as a newly-official one at the Olympic level should fuel the desire to win the inaugural gold medal, as well as to prove the legitimacy of women's hockey at this level. Having

this much on the line, the likes of Geraldine Heaney and Hayley Wickenheiser should have more at stake than Eric Lindros and the millionaires' club.

With more at stake, we'll hopefully get more entertaining hockey. And even though I'll be no less proud if Canada's men's squad brings some gold home, I'll be waving my Maple Leaf just a little higher should the women's team win it all. It'll feel as though they had more to lose.

-Ross Williams, who's wearing his flag on his sleeve.

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