



Photo by Guillaume Nolet

Supporters react as Brienne Jenner scores Canada's first goal during the women's gold medal game, making it a one-goal game with less than four minutes to go in the third period. Close to 50 people had gathered at JAKK Tuesdays Sports Pub in Kingston to cheer on Kingston native Jayna Hefford last Thursday during the women's hockey gold medal win against the United States.

Team Canada strikes gold

By Guillaume Nolet

No hockey fan would have predicted such a fairy-tale ending as the one witnessed last Thursday between one of the most intense rivalries in women's hockey.

Of the millions of hockey supporters watching the game, none were on the edge of their seats more than friends and family of Kingstonian Jayna Hefford, centre for the women's Canadian team, who gathered at JAKK Tuesdays Sports Pub in Kingston to watch it all unfold.

Close to 50 supporters of Hefford and fellow Kingstonian Geneviève Lacasse, third goalie, were present to watch the historical match. The Canadian women came back from a two-point deficit late in the third period to tie the game and win in overtime to defend their fourth Olympic gold title.

"This game was a typical Canada-U.S.A. game," said Beth Duff, who coached Hefford in her debut in the minor leagues.

"Both teams are talented. Both teams possess a great passion for hockey. Both teams have the drive and desire to win that gold medal," said Duff, who also organized the event.

The first 20 minutes of the game were spent time in the penalty box and no player made it onto the scoreboard.

Two of the biggest Hefford supporters in the crowd were her mother, Sandra, and former teammate Carolyn Nugent, both wearing their red and white Canadian jerseys.

"After the second period, I thought the U.S. team had the control. Canada needed to take more shots on goal, and less penalties," said Nugent, who played with Hefford in 1996 with the Kingston Kodiaks.

"A nice blend of players is what makes the Canadian team so strong. A mix of young players like (Meghan) Acosta-Marciano, (Charline) Labonté and (Marie-Philip) Poulin and very experienced players like (Caroline) Ouellette, (Jayna) Hefford and (Hayley) Wickenheiser makes Team Canada so unique," added Nugent.

The place went crazy with flags waving and arms in the air as supporters celebrated after the goal by Marie-Philip Poulin which tied the game with less than a minute to go in regulation time.

"You could see the spirits on the Canadian team lift, knowing that all they needed was a goal," said Duff, who said she always believed the girls would never give up.

A storybook ending, the golden goal, scored by Poulin in overtime, gave Canada its fourth gold medal since the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City.

"The players on Team Canada never gave up and they all have that never-say-die attitude," said Duff.

Hefford's mother said she felt a bit nostalgic about the Sochi game.

"I decided not to go to cheer her on at the Olympics for different reasons, so there is a bit of nostalgia now that it is over," said Hefford.

Since her first Olympics back in 1998, when Canada brought home a silver medal from Nagano, Japan, Hefford has helped popularize girls' hockey not only in Kingston but also all over Canada.

Fans and supporters eyes were glued to the screen during the medal ceremony. When the Kingston native was shown on the big screen receiving her medal, the crowd burst into a wave of cheers and applause.

Hefford, who will be 40-years-old at the next winter games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, still has not yet discussed her future career plans.

"Jayna will have the final say, and she has not yet decided," said her proud mother.

"There's still a chance she might be playing in four years. She loves training as much as playing," added Hefford.

"It just felt like such a common bond, that we were wishing and hoping together, as a group, for the best for Jayna and her teammates," said former coach Duff.

"We were able to erupt in a huge cheer, all as one, when that golden goal was scored. It is a time that we'll never forget and never forget who we were with," she said.



(Above) From left, Heather Douglas, Sandra Hefford, Carolyn Nugent and Lisa Duff Dunkelberg celebrate after Team Canada ties the game against the United States when Poulin scored Canada's second goal in regulation time with less than a minute to go in the third period.

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(Left) Murray MacDonald, Bill Ritske and Joni Hopkins celebrate Canada's 1-0 win over the U.S. in the men's hockey semi-final game on Feb. 21 at Dem Bones in Belleville.

Photo by Alistair Maitland