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***Jets players ready for best-on-best tournament
Morrissey, Connor and Hellebuyck honoured to play for their countries at 4 Nations***

By Jamie Thomas

MONTREAL – The 4 Nations Face-Off is set to begin in Montreal with Canada opening the tournament Wednesday against Sweden. For the three Winnipeg Jets involved at the event, it's been a long time since they have taken part of a best-on-best tournament.

Josh Morrissey last played for Canada at the 2017 World Hockey Championships and has been reunited with a group of big-name players that he teamed up with at the 2015 World Juniors.

"It's always an honour to represent Canada. Had a chance to do it a bunch growing up, Under-18's, World Juniors and stuff like that, including the World Juniors here in Montreal and Toronto," said Morrissey.

"It's cool to be back here, reminiscing on that with some of the guys. Shea Theodore, myself, (Connor) McDavid, Brayden Point and Sam Reinhart. So, it's cool that we are reconnecting here back in Montreal for this event that everyone is really excited for."

Morrissey has been paired with Blues defenceman Colton Parayko, the two have battled a lot in the regular season and playoffs but both are looking forward to working together.

"We complement each other really well. He's a big guy, long reach, right-handed shot. He's having a great year," said Morrissey.

"We've played him a lot over the years with him in St. Louis. For us it will be about communicating early and be on the same page as fast as possible."

Parayko said it has been a bit weird playing with Morrissey instead of going against him. But before becoming his teammate, Parayko has appreciated all the Jets defenceman brings to the game.

"Lots of things to be excited about playing with him, obviously a great defender. Skates extremely well, just the way he sees the ice, great breakout pass," said Parayko.

"We know he contributes a lot offensively, just with all those things, he's a well-rounded player. Just great that I get the opportunity to be paired with him."

Like many of his teammates, Morrissey is thrilled about the chance to play with Sidney Crosby.

"Hanging around the locker room, looking at the roster, the lines, stuff like that, it's pretty special," said Morrissey.

"For me with the age difference growing up, it's Sidney Crosby. He's an absolute legend. So, to get the chance to play with him, to practice with him, be with him in the locker room, it's pretty cool."

Kyle Connor last played for the United States at the 2016 World Championships with 4 Nations teammates Auston Matthews, Dylan Larkin, Brock Nelson and Noah Hanafin.

“It feels good to get that first practice out of the way yesterday and obviously today you get into a bit of a rhythm, a bit of a flow,” said Connor.

“A great dinner last night and be nice to come together as a team here.”

The team dinner that Connor mentioned had four special guests show up to give some pep talks. The foursome included Mike Eruzione and Rob McLanahan from the gold medal winning 1980 U.S. Olympic team, Mike Modano and Guy Gaudreau, father of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. Connor was thrilled to hear from Modano, who is arguably the greatest American born player in NHL history.

“He’s an idol for a lot of us American players, extra special with him being from Michigan. Just soak up every moment, listen to every word he had to say. He played so many games in the league and was so successful, you try to take little pieces from it,” said Connor.

“It was cool with everyone who came to speak. It just shows the history of USA hockey, so humble to be a part of it and to wear the USA on the chest.”

Mike Sullivan has not named his starting goaltender for Thursday’s game, but most feel it will be Hellebuyck who is wearing American colours for the first time since the 2017 World Championships. Connor was asked what makes Hellebuyck the best goalie of the 12 that are in Montreal.

“I don’t want to get his ego too high,” Connor joked.

“I just think his mind. To be able to think the game, constantly learning. I think that’s one of his biggest assets. He’s never satisfied. He seems so calm in the net, just a great presence. We see him every single day, you almost take him for granted but I think that mentality of just wanting to be the best, push himself every day is just fun to watch.”

As for Hellebuyck, he understands he is following a lot of great American goaltenders like Mike Richter and Ryan Miller.

“Yeah, it’s cool. It’s one of those things that’s kind of escaped me throughout my career. I had a couple of world championships but then the NHL wasn’t allowed to go to the last Olympics (in 2022),” said Hellebuyck.

“We missed that opportunity and then you never know are you going to get another shot. You got to stay in your prime for when that opportunity comes so being able to put the jersey on now, it’s one of those things that you felt wasn’t going to happen and now it is. Pretty surreal.”

The United States has an embarrassment of riches at the goaltending position right now with Hellebuyck, Thatcher Demko, Jeremy Swayman and Jake Oettinger. The Dallas Stars netminder is relishing the chance to practice with the two-time Vezina Trophy winner.

“Just getting to watch Helle up close has been a treat,” said Oettinger.

"You know he's been the best goalie in the league for the last few years so just pick his brain and try to take some stuff that he does so well and put it into my game."

<https://www.nhl.com/jets/news/the-year-of-25>

The Year of 25: It's all coming together right now for Parker Ford

By Winnipeg Jets PR

Surely it's just happenstance Parker Ford, who wears number 25 for the Manitoba Moose, is having an incredible start to 2025. Right?

Cosmic coincidence aside, the new year sees Ford on a torrid goal-scoring pace in the AHL. Not to mention scoring for the Winnipeg Jets in his NHL debut an easy drive from his hometown. It's all coming together right now for the second-year pro who continues to make the most of his opportunities within the organization. Speaking to those who work closely with the winger on the Moose, it's because Ford stays true to his game.

"It's just little details. (Ford) plays the game the right way on both sides of the puck. He's structurally sound without it. He gets to the dirty areas offensively," laid out Moose assistant coach Morgan Klimchuk. "I think you saw exactly that with how he scored that goal (with the Jets). He's in an area of the ice that, ultimately it's hard to get to, but often times guys have success when they do."

Ford's rapid scoring pace started as soon as the calendar clicked over to 2025. Ford struck in Manitoba's first game of the new year, and then in the next two games. The Wakefield, RI product now has nine goals in his past 11 AHL contests, including two multi-goal efforts in his past four games. That pace has Ford tied for ninth among AHL goal-scorers in 2025, despite playing less games than anyone in the top 20.

"I think I've just been doing the simple things like shooting the puck a little more," said Ford, trying to explain the recent deluge of goals. "That's something I've been wanting to do and sometimes they just start to go in a little more when you do that."

Ford leads the Moose with 13 goals and 19 points in 38 games, with 10 of those points coming over his past 11 outings. That production, along with his consistent and reliable game, earned Ford the chance to make his NHL debut at the end of January.

"It was a lot of fun playing up there," continued Ford. "It's a dream come true and I'm really happy with how everything went."

His debut couldn't have been scripted any better. With the Jets in Boston, Ford played his first NHL game at TD Garden. The arena is just a 90-minute drive, or 30-minute train ride, away from his hometown. That proximity allowed family and friends to pack the stands and cheer for Ford's first NHL goal. The moment provided Ford with an opportunity to reflect on everything required for him to reach that life goal.

"It was just special. Everyone who loves me was there. It's hard to put into words because of all the hard work you put in, all the hours and everyone who helped me get there. To see them enjoying their time watching me... it was really a dream."

While Ford was taking his solo lap in Boston and scoring his first NHL goal, his teammates were glued to various TV and mobile screens while the team was in Milwaukee. The group was excited to see their teammate enjoy some early success.

"It was incredible," smiled Moose defenceman (and Ford's roommate) Tyrel Bauer. "I don't know if it gets much better than that. Right near your hometown. All your friends and family able to come to the game and seeing the excitement on their faces on TV. Parker and I have a pretty good connection, and I couldn't be happier for him."

Ford's three-game stint with the Jets saw the winger record one goal, along with five hits, while averaging 7:50 of ice time. Like Klimchuk, Bauer also isn't surprised to see Ford taking further steps in his career because of the type of player, and teammate, he is.

"(Parker) brings energy every single game in the way he plays. Whether its forechecking, moving his feet, he's always in the play. He's always in the action, and he gets rewarded for hit. He goes to the dirty areas. He goes to the net. He plays the game the right way."

Ford picked up right where he left off in the AHL after being assigned to the Moose with the Jets heading to the Four Nations Cup break. Ford didn't score in his first game back, but he recorded a career-high eight shots on goal against the Iowa Wild. The next day saw him rack up two goals, and very nearly a third with seconds remaining on the clock of a 7-2 win against the Wild.

With his first NHL experience in the books, now begins the journey toward earning a full-time spot with the Jets. That path appears clearly to Ford; more of what he's been trying to accomplish every day with the Moose.

"I think I just need to keep finding ways to get better. There's always room for improvement. I just want to keep showcasing myself and playing my best possible game while helping the team win games. So I just need to keep it simple and try to get better every day."

Parker Ford and the Manitoba Moose are in for a busy week at Canada Life Centre with the Jets on their Four Nations Cup break. The Moose face off against the Texas Stars (Wednesday and Friday at 7 p.m.) along with the Milwaukee Admirals (Sunday and Monday at 2 p.m.). For full schedule and ticketing information visit moosehockey.com.

NHL.com

<https://www.nhl.com/news/connor-hellebuyck-ready-to-be-u-s-starter-for-4-nations-face-off>

Hellebuyck ready for chance to be U.S. starting goalie for 4 Nations Face-Off Jets star leads NHL in wins, teammates see him as 'super, super elite'

By Bill Price

BROSSARD, Quebec -- Connor Hellebuyck was asked if he was prepared to play every game for the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off. His answer couldn't have been more clear and more direct.

"Everyone should be," the Winnipeg Jets goalie said Monday.

United States coach Mike Sullivan said Tuesday he has decided who will start when the U.S. plays its first game, against Finland on Thursday at Bell Centre in Montreal (8 p.m. ET; ESPN, ESPN+, SN, TVAS), but would not reveal who it was.

"I think we have three very capable guys that have a body of work in the NHL to prove that," Sullivan said. "So regardless of which direction we go with that position, all of these guys are capable of making the timely saves that give this team a chance to win."

Still, it would be somewhat stunning if it's not Hellebuyck. And there is no doubt Hellebuyck will be ready.

"At this point, the season has started, let's go. I'm ready, I'm waiting," Hellebuyck said Monday after the United States' first practice at CN Sports Complex. "This is the most practice I've had in a long time. I just want to play some games."

"I know there are different systems going on and you need a little bit of time, but for a goaltender it's stop the puck. I'm ready for it."

The tournament, which runs through Feb. 20 with games at Bell Centre and TD Garden in Boston, will see the U.S. play three times in five days starting Thursday.

Hellebuyck is one of three goalies on the U.S. roster, along with Jake Oettinger of the Dallas Stars and Jeremy Swayman of the Boston Bruins.

Going by regular-season performance, Hellebuyck should be a lock to be the No. 1. The 31-year-old leads the NHL in wins (34), save percentage (.925, minimum 20 games) and goals-against average (2.06, minimum 20 games). He comes into the 4 Nations Face-Off having won six games in a row, and since the calendar turned to January he's 10-2-1 with a .913 save percentage and 2.22 GAA in 13 games.

"He's so big (6-foot-4, 207 pounds) and you have no net, you can't see any net when you're shooting on him," U.S. forward Matthew Tkachuk said. "I've played against him a bunch for a lot of years. He's a super, super elite goalie. It's really fun having him on my side."

Hellebuyck is one of the biggest reasons the U.S. is favored by some to win the 4 Nations Face-Off. In fact, of the four countries -- Canada, Finland, Sweden and the U.S. -- the United States seemingly has the best and deepest three-man goalie depth chart.

Along with Hellebuyck, there's Oettinger, who is second in the NHL in wins (26) and has a 2.35 GAA and .911 save percentage in 40 games for the Dallas Stars, and Swayman, who is 18-18-4 with a 2.98 GAA and .898 save percentage in 40 games with the Boston Bruins.

"They're studs," U.S. captain Auston Matthews said. "You can feel it in practice, just how athletic they are and how much space they take up in the net. So all three of those guys are incredible."

Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy has a unique take on the three goalies since he's been a teammate with each of them.

"There's no shortage of talent," he said. "You're talking about three of the best goaltenders in the world. 'Sway,' I get to see on a day-in/day-out (basis), how he competes, how he prepares. It's second to none."

"'Otter' was my goalie in college (Boston University), so I have a great relationship with him, watching him grow and develop and what led him to being a star in Dallas. And then I played with 'Helly' at the (2017) World Championship, so I got to play in front of him and see how he plays and competes.

"And obviously you get to see it all on display every night in the NHL. So it's a who's-who back there, and we have faith in whoever is going to be in net."

Forward Jack Hughes feels the same way, but also thinks Hellebuyck is the right choice.

"We've got the best goalie in the League, you know, so you can only play one of your goalies and we've got three great goalies," he said. "One of them happens to be the best in the NHL."

Hellebuyck clearly hopes he is the choice for the United States while he tries to take his game to a whole new level.

"I always strived to be the best I possibly can and wanted to be one of the best in the world," Hellebuyck said, "so this is a good milestone for that and lets me know that I'm doing some of the right things to taking care of myself the right way.

"That being said, it's still a lot of work ahead of me for where I want to go and what I want to achieve."

<https://www.nhl.com/news/4-nations-face-off-goalie-breakdown-united-states>

United States goalie breakdown for 4 Nations Face-Off opener Hellebuyck of Jets, Oettinger of Stars, Swayman of Bruins prepare for Finland

By Kevin Woodley

In a short tournament like the 4 Nations Face-Off, goaltending could make the difference between success and failure for each of the four countries participating in the round-robin tournament that runs from Wednesday to Feb. 20. So, just like NHL.com has done since the 2017 Stanley Cup Playoffs, we've charted the goals given up by each nation's goalies during the 2024-25 NHL regular season to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and see what patterns emerge that might be targeted. Today, it is the United States, which opens the tournament against Finland at Bell Centre on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; ABC, ESPN+, SN, TVAS).

Connor Hellebuyck Winnipeg Jets

While not officially announced, it seems a safe bet Hellebuyck, who won his second Vezina Trophy last season with the Winnipeg Jets, will at least get first crack at the job for the United States. With that in mind, each of the 89 goals allowed by Hellebuyck this season was tracked, and the majority of this analysis focuses on him.

Five-hole: There's not much that jumps out from Hellebuyck's well-balanced goal chart, though 10 goals between the legs may seem like a lot for one of the world's best, especially given the negative stigma so often attached to pucks that go "through" a goalie. But at 11.2 percent, that total is slightly less than the 12.8 percent average for the more than 8,000 goals tracked for this project since 2017. It's also a product of the incredible patience that makes Hellebuyck special,

rarely defaulting prematurely to both knees. That said, he will use that patience to make old-school, one-pad-down, half-butterfly saves on open looks rather than dropping both knees to the ice, and that can create five-hole exposure, especially if a shooter can sell high and deliver low. Of course, that's easier said than done against a goalie who reads releases as well as any.

Traffic and tips: It's almost become cliché to talk about taking sightlines away from a hot goalie, especially during the playoffs, but with Hellebuyck's incredible ability to read and anticipate plays and shots, it's even more important. Screens have been a primary factor on 17 percent of the goals scored on Hellebuyck this season and were an even bigger part of the playoffs last season. Traffic was a factor on seven of 24 goals (29.1 percent) the Colorado Avalanche scored while eliminating Hellebuyck and the Jets in five games in the Western Conference First Round best-of-7 series last season. The number of deflection goals were also notable, with eight scored this season and three in that playoff series with Colorado, in part because Hellebuyck's conservative depth makes it harder for him to cut off pucks close to where they are being tipped.

Create chaos: Generating traffic isn't just about going to the net when a shot is coming. It can also make it harder to see and read passes and beat the puck to the next spot, all things Hellebuyck does as well as any goalie, and leads to more scrambles off pucks that hit legs, sticks and skates before making it to the goalie. Hellebuyck, whose side-to-side movements from his knees have more moving parts and slight delays simply because he has a slightly narrower butterfly than many of his peers, has given up 19 goals (21.3 percent) on those types of scrambles this season, higher than the tracked average of 14 percent. It also leads to more rebounds, which have accounted for 12 goals this season, and those can also force more of those lateral recoveries.

East-west attacks: Creating lateral plays across the middle of the ice was long considered an important way to attack a goalie considered by many to be the best in the NHL in straight lines, and Colorado scored seven of 24 goals (29.1 percent) this way, making those kind of down-low plays in the playoffs. Hellebuyck has given up 12 such goals and handled those plays well this season.

Jake Oettinger
Dallas Stars

With Hellebuyck the likely starter in a short tournament, we limited the breakdown on Stars No. 1 goalie Jake Oettinger to the last 50 goals given up this season.

Low laterals: The numbers along the ice outside a goalie's pads on these charts are often an indicator of backdoor tap-ins where the goalie had little chance, and that includes six of the nine low shots that have gone in on Oettinger's blocker side, some which are a result of getting stuck outside his posts on the other end of those low cross-ice passes.

Glove side: Seeing the biggest number over the glove might make it tempting to target, but the reality is, these numbers don't represent save percentages, and the 10 high-glove total is below the 23.6 percent tracked average. The glove side did become a trend last season, however, including several open looks among the 17 of 45 scored on that side in the playoffs, and his fingers-up glove position means shots just over the pad were also a popular target.

Active rebounds: Rebound goals (three) weren't a problem in this sample after giving up more than the tracked average last season, but it remains important for opponents to understand second chances will bounce harder and travel further off the Bauer leg pads used by Oettinger.

Jeremy Swayman
Boston Bruins

Like Oettinger, we only tracked the past 50 goals against Swayman.

East-west and up: Swayman's ability to hold his edges and still generate lateral push power even as he gets into a lower, wider stance has made him one of the NHL's top goalies when it comes to defending the increase in side-to-side attacks. But the reality of that lower stance and matching hand position is a greater exposure to high shots seen in the location totals, even if his 11 goals off east-west plays are right around the tracked average of 22.1 percent.

Get it off quick: One-timers accounted for 18 percent of the goals in this small sample, making it important to catch Swayman moving, even if he typically moves well.

Screens and deflections: Those two attack types account for 13 of the 50 goals, and Swayman's tendency to set up deeper in his crease behind traffic makes it harder to close down on tips.

The Athletic

<https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6130140/2025/02/11/4-nations-2026-olympics-lebrun/>

LeBrun: Players, execs all-in on 4 Nations — and what it means for 2026 Olympics

By Pierre LeBrun

MONTREAL — As he watched Team USA practice Tuesday, Bill Guerin pondered the question.

How does the Olympics, which begin in less than a year, loom over this 4 Nations tournament? The two are inextricably linked, of course, by the short amount of time in between the best-on-best events and the overlapping roster choices.

“Honestly, this is the bulk of the team that will be in the Olympics,” the United States’ GM for both events told The Athletic as he motioned to his players on the Bell Centre ice. “I don’t know if it’s going to be the whole team. Because there’s so many good players. There’s always injuries. There’s guys having off years. Guys having great years. There’s just a lot.

“Listen, the last week a lot has happened, a lot has changed. Never mind a whole year.”

Like losing No. 1 defenseman Quinn Hughes to injury.

“Right. So I know most of these players will be there (at the Olympics), but there could be some changes,” Guerin said.

So, yes, of course, Team USA wants to win the 4 Nations, but the overarching mission is to glean as much information as possible for Italy. It’s the only best-on-best, in-game information these four countries will have before the Olympics.

The balance will be determining how much to glean from this while not overreacting.

“It’s important, but it’s not the be-all and end-all,” Guerin said. “Body of work is still there. But I’m also looking for fit, the chemistry of the team, things like that. How are we playing together? See

the roles, who fits where, acceptance. They're all great players. It's the intangible part that I think is really important."

Team Canada Olympic GM Doug Armstrong was an assistant to GM Steve Yzerman on the 2010 and 2014 Olympic gold-medal teams and was GM for the victorious 2016 World Cup team.

But those events all had more spacing between them. That's what makes 4 Nations unique.

"It's different than any event I've been at because of how quickly the next event is coming," Armstrong told *The Athletic* on Tuesday.

Where Canada and the U.S. differed on approach is that Guerin is GM for both 4 Nations and the Olympics while Armstrong decided it would be best if Don Sweeney was Canada's GM for 4 Nations. And while Armstrong of course has been part of the management conversations preparing over the past year for this event, he really has made sure that he's stayed out of the way to some degree, saying that he's barely spoken with head coach Jon Cooper in the lead-up to 4 Nations, leaving that to Sweeney.

Still, whatever transpires at 4 Nations will loom large on what Armstrong focuses on leading into his Olympic decisions.

So while everyone here has made a point of saying they're focused on 4 Nations only at the moment, the much more important Olympic discussion is impossible to ignore.

"It's certainly a learning tool for the next event," Armstrong said. "The focus is on this event and these games here, but the benefit of having another tournament this quickly is that it's not like a four-year window where some guys are going to retire or younger are going to pop in — we're a year away. A lot of the names that are either on this team or that we're scouting will probably be the same names that we talk about when we debrief this event at our August (Olympics) meeting."

Finland GM Jere Lehtinen acknowledged the Olympic tie-in Tuesday but said the biggest thing for him is having his group playing a best-on-best event for the first time in eight and a half years.

"Players haven't played together here for a long time so they get to experience how they play as a team," he said. "Overall, it will help build for next year at the Olympics."

As a standalone event, you can't blame those hockey fans who are skeptical about why they should care about a made-up tournament called 4 Nations.

But when you understand all the strings tying it to Italy next year, it becomes more apparent how the players themselves care, especially now that everyone has arrived here this week and practiced with their respective teams.

"This is a good precursor for what's to come — assembling a group like this and seeing how everything works out, chemistry and everything," Team USA captain Auston Matthews said Tuesday. "I think everybody is still focused on the here and now and playing in this tournament and making sure that we're taking care of our business here, but I can't lie and say I'm not

looking forward at that opportunity to play in the Olympics, having missed them the last two. So just to have this best-on-best tournament and format is exciting.”

The Olympic part of it all is huge.

“One hundred percent,” Sweden captain Victor Hedman said. “And I think it’s an opportunity for us as well, you know, we don’t see Sam (Hallam) and the coaching staff that often. So for them to get the message across now and show how they want us to play hockey, I think that’s huge. We’ll be together for a week and a half or whatever it is. He has to give us as much information without it being too much. So I think it’s good having this not even a year from the Olympics, to have this competition and get everyone dialed in.”

All of which underlines why players have sounded so serious about the opportunity at hand over the next 10 days. For the critics who thought this might be a glorified All-Star Game, guess again.

“I mean, I think it’s being taken pretty seriously,” Mathews said. “A lot of pride playing for your country. Everybody that’s here is very competitive. I don’t expect it to be a glorified All-Star event, it’s going to be pretty intense.”

Don’t doubt the players’ buy-in.

“It’s going to be high,” Hedman said. “It’s going to be intense. All four countries want to win. That’s the bottom line. You’re going to see your (NHL) teammates that you play with for most of the year. You’ve just got to put that aside. We’re here to represent Sweden, and we want to make our fans proud. I’m sure everyone else feels the same way.

“It’s not a shinny hockey game. It’s going to be intense.”

Connor Hellebuyck perhaps said it best Tuesday when he reminded us that so many players from his generation weren’t sure if they would ever wear their national jersey in a best-on-best event.

“It’s one of those things that’s kind of escaped me throughout my career,” the Team USA star goalie said. “I had a couple of World Championships, but the NHL didn’t go to the last Olympics so we missed that opportunity. And then you never know. Are you going to get another shot? You’ve got to stay in your prime for when that opportunity comes.

“Being able to put that jersey on now, it’s one of those things that almost felt like it would never happen. Now that it has, it’s pretty surreal.”

There might be fans still holding out on this 4 Nations event. I get it. But the players here are all-in. The Olympics are just around the corner.

Calgary Herald

<https://calgaryherald.com/sports/hockey/nhl/team-canadas-roster-for-4-nations-face-off-features-four-calgarians>

'Awesome for the city': Team Canada's roster for 4 Nations Face-Off features four Calgarians

By Wes Gilbertson

It's the sort of stat that an entire city can be oh-so-proud of.

Team Canada's roster for the 4 Nations Face-Off includes four graduates of Calgary's minor hockey system — netminder Adin Hill, blue-liners Cale Makar and Josh Morrissey and forward Brayden Point.

Only the much larger Greater Toronto Area, which produced five players, provided more star-power for this much-anticipated return of best-on-best competition.

"I don't know if there's something in the water here ... " Makar beamed this past week when he visited the Saddledome with the Colorado Avalanche. "But it's pretty cool."

Pretty darn cool, indeed.

"I think it's a statement to our development program," said Kevin Kobelka, the executive director for Hockey Calgary. "These players have all come up through our organization, from both our community and our elite programs. And not only are they good players, but they're good leaders on each of their clubs, too. So as an organization, we're quite proud to have those four gentlemen representing Canada and representing Calgary."

Indeed, this latest edition of Team Canada runs on Alberta beef, and maybe the occasional milkshake from Peters' Drive-In or bag of mini donuts on the Stampede midway.

"There's obviously a lot of great hockey players that come out of Canada, and I think a lot of people probably look more toward Ontario or more toward the east to find those guys," said Calgary-raised Jake Bean, a defenceman for the Flames. "But there are a lot of guys that come out of the west and out of Calgary, and I think that probably speaks to the minor-hockey programs and all the different pipelines you can take to develop now.

"It's awesome for the city. And I'm really happy for all those guys. Every one of 'em is a hell of a player."

Before Makar was dazzling with the Avalanche, drawing comparisons to Bobby Orr and Paul Coffey and some of the all-time greats, he was zipping around the ice at Crowchild Twin Arena.

Morrissey, now the leading minute-man for the Winnipeg Jets, honed his skills in the Springbank system.

Point, who is the top centre for the Tampa Bay Lightning and one of only six NHLers to pot 30-plus goals so far this season, is a graduate of what was formerly known as Blackfoot and is now the Wolverines Hockey Club. Ditto for Hill, who tends twine for the Vegas Golden Knights.

When they hit the quadrant levels, Makar was a Flame, Morrissey was a Royal and Hill and Point were Buffaloes.

For local fans, the 4 Nations connections don't end there. Canada's Travis Sanheim toiled with the WHL's Hitmen, Sweden's Rasmus Andersson is a workhorse with the NHL's Flames and Jake Sanderson, who was a late addition to Team USA, was born in Montana but moved to Calgary when he was atom-aged and is another Springbank alum.

"And even Travis Konecny now lives in Calgary in the off-season," said Morrissey, adding yet another name to the list.

As Morrissey noted, some of these dudes go way, way back. Back to before they were driving themselves to the rink or even taping their own sticks.

"You know, I grew up going to Pointer's dad's skates," he recalled. "He had a Monday afternoon skate when we were six or seven years old. So I've known him the longest probably, and his family.

"Brayden and I won a world-junior gold together (in 2015), played different ages. So there are definitely lots of those little connections that make it that much more special."

Grant Point, proud father to Brayden and coach to countless others, has also been reminiscing about those back-in-the-day skill development sessions at Westside Recreation Centre.

"It was every Monday, right after school," he recalled. "We would have, like, 20 kids on the ice. We did a half-hour of skills and then a half-hour of three-on-three, and the kids loved it.

"Brayden was out there. Adin was out there. Josh was out there. To see how much work all those kids put into it, from working on their skating and doing different things, just all the way up, watching them rise, that is pretty special.

"It's just really amazing, when you think about it, for that many guys from that small of a network ... " Grant Point continued. "You know, sometimes I'm not sure as Calgarians if we take as much pride as we should in these kinds of things. It doesn't seem like we take those guys as our own so much. One guy is in Colorado, one in Winnipeg, one in Vegas, one in Tampa, so we don't always talk about them as homegrown guys.

"But I think if kids know that, if they know they were once just kids in Calgary themselves, just trying to get a little better, that might inspire somebody."

It should.

Since the 4 Nations Face-Off doubles as a sneak preview of the 2026 Olympics, there's a good chance that each of these local lads will be skating on an even bigger stage next February.

In 2014, the last time the NHL pushed pause for the Winter Games, there were no Calgarians on the Canadian men's hockey team.

At Vancouver 2010, best remembered for Sidney Crosby's golden goal, Dany Heatley was the lone roster rep from Cowtown.

But now?

“If we did a tournament of provinces, I feel like Alberta would be pretty far up there,” Makar said with the same smile that you see after a highlight-reel goal or gorgeous assist. “That would be fun to do.”

Something to consider, for sure.

But for the next week and change, they will be representing an entire country — one with lofty expectations whenever a puck is tossed onto a sheet of ice and bragging rights are at stake.

Canada will face Sweden in Wednesday’s tournament opener at Bell Centre in Montreal.

“I just got off the ice with a group right now and I was telling them, ‘For those players, the kids I know, lacing ’em up with Crosby, it’s going to feel surreal,’ ” Grant Point told Postmedia last week. “There are other guys too, I’m sure, but playing with Sid ... I mean, Brayden had a poster of Sid, so it’s pretty cool.

“When you see somebody that you idolize and now you’re a peer, it’s something else.”

What’s really cool is that youngsters are now idolizing them. Maybe they can join them in the big league someday, since all these guys are still in their 20s, plenty of prime seasons ahead.

You can bet that kids from their home city were taking notice when Point helped the Lightning to back-to-back Stanley Cup crowns in 2020 and 2021, when Makar was saluted as the Conn Smythe Trophy winner after the Avalanche claimed the NHL’s big prize in 2022 and when Hill backstopped the Golden Knights to a championship parade in 2023.

Maybe that’s a small part of the reason that Hockey Calgary’s enrolment remains so strong, with nearly 15,000 sign-ups this winter.

“I’m looking around my office and I have a Jordan Eberle jersey hanging here and a (Tyler) Myers jersey and a (Mike) Green,” Kobelka said. “I mean, we’ve had a lot of great players go through our system. But definitely having four on this team is a credit to our development program.

“Especially if you’re playing for the Buffs, you know that Point came through the Buffs. If you’re playing for Northwest, you know that Makar was a Northwest Flame. So I think there’s a real sense of following your idols.”

Want proof of the impact that can eventually have?

Just check Canada’s roster for the 4 Nations Face-Off.

“When I was growing up in Calgary, dreaming of playing in the NHL, guys on the Flames were my heroes, like Jarome Iginla, but also the Team Canada players,” Morrissey said. “Hopefully this iteration of Team Canada can inspire kids, as well.”