

# Sweden breaks women's hockey monopoly

## U.S. falls to non-Canadian team for first time

By GREG BEACHAM  
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### TURIN, Italy

The U.S. women's hockey players gathered in a circle at center ice, raised their sticks and waved them to their fans in one sweeping arc over their heads.

It was a routine repeated game after game after game in these Olympics and before, but this time was different. You could see it in their eyes, red with tears and looking at anything but the giant group hug being staged by the exuberant, giggling heap of yellow jerseys behind them.

The Americans had been beaten, and for the first time since women's hockey went international in 1990, by someone besides Canada. The North American monopoly had been broken.

Sweden won 3-2 in a shootout in the Olympic semifinals and will play Canada, a 6-0 winner against Finland in the other semifinal,

for the gold medal on Monday. "This has been a long time in the making for our game," said American defenseman Angela Ruggiero, a three-time Olympian. "They say there's no parity in women's hockey. Well, now you know better. It doesn't make me happy, but that's hockey."

The architect of the Swedish upset was 19-year-old Kim Martin, a cool, 5-foot-4 wisp of a goalie with a brick fortress painted on her mask.

She stopped everything the Americans shot at her in the final 48:56 of regulation and overtime, finishing with 37 saves, and then turned away all four American attempts in a shootout.

Maria Rooth, whose four years at Minnesota-Duluth paved the way for dozens of other European players to the world's best training grounds, had both regulation scores in a 3½-minute span and the clinching shootout goal.

When she was only 15, Martin

led the Swedes to the bronze medal in Salt Lake City. On Friday, she was the difference in a watershed win that decisively proves women's hockey is growing under North America's considerable shadow.

"This is the greatest thing to happen to women's hockey in Sweden and everywhere around," Martin said. "We knew we were getting better and better all the time. We needed to beat the U.S. or Canada to show it."

The Americans often seemed to be begging for their first loss to Sweden in 26 meetings, playing carelessly and tentatively despite a heavy advantage in shots. Both of Rooth's goals were gifts on U.S. giveaways, leaving goalie Chanda Gunn helpless.

For at least one evening, Sweden definitely had a better team than the United States. That's another bit of international progress the Americans were hoping wouldn't arrive until after the gold-medal match.



United States players, from left, Jenny Potter, Pam Dreyer, Jamie Hagerman, Katie King and Courtney Kennedy look on as Sweden celebrates after winning a 2006 Winter Olympics women's ice hockey semifinal game Friday.

# Flourish to the finish: Too much too soon

### BARDONECCHIA, Italy

There was nothing dishonorable in what Lindsey Jacobellis tried to do. A nod to the crowd with a flourish at the finish is the stuff of real champions.

But woe unto the one who fails to seal the deal.

Think about how much ridicule Michael Jordan risked when he struck the pose, his right hand frozen in salute even before his game-winning shot dropped in the closing seconds and sucked the life out of the Utah Jazz in Game 6 of the 1998 NBA Finals.

Or how about the iconic photo of Muhammad Ali standing over a fallen Sonny Liston? Before that fight 40 years ago, some people feared Liston might exact revenge for his loss in their first match by trying to kill his brash young opponent. But Ali dropped him and then, instead of heading for a neutral corner to pray that Liston wouldn't get up, he stood there, right fist cocked defiantly and screamed, "Get up and fight, sucker!"

That's what Jacobellis tried to do in the Olympic women's snowboardcross Friday.

It's known as showing off, showboating, throwing down, flaunting, taunting, hot-dogging and a dozen other names. In this case, Jacobellis' final big-air bonanza was intended as a parting gift, something for all those people who sat, whistled and stomped their feet in a shivering grandstand for hours to remember her and her sport by.

It's just that after failing to pull it off, Jacobellis wouldn't admit even trying.

One moment, the 20-year-old star was on her way to a gold medal, well clear of her three rivals, taking off on the next-to-last jump in the sport's first-ever Olympic final. And in the next moment, Jacobellis lay sprawled in the snow, one of those "this-can't-be-happening!" moments that occur only once in a lifetime.



Gold medalist Tanja Frieden of Switzerland, above, and American Lindsey Jacobellis take a turn in the final of the Women's snowboardcross competition on Friday. Jacobellis, who led most of the race, crashed in sight of the finish and took a silver medal. Dominique Maltais of Canada took bronze.

The question she answered over and over Friday, to nobody's satisfaction ultimately but her own, is what happened in between.

"I was trying to, you know, keep my board under me, but after a while, you know, your legs get so tired. I just tried to grab it to keep my body stabilized. But," Jacobellis added, finally gathering herself, "it didn't work out."

She went a little further a few hours later during a conference call. "I was having fun, and that's what snowboarding is," Jacobellis said but still wouldn't fess up.

Some stories are more about the loser than the winner. Hers is one of those. Victory didn't simply slip from Jacobellis' grasp Friday. She drop-kicked it.

Attempting what's called a "backside method" on that next-to-last jump, Jacobellis reached back to grab her board, tugged too hard and pulled it too far behind her. Upon landing, she caught an edge and tumbled, then scrambled back to her feet and made it to the finish line in just enough time to win a silver.

Looking on from just behind the finish line, Seth Wescott, the U.S. men's team snowboardcrosser who won the gold just a day earlier, was wrestling with mixed emotions. His girlfriend just happens to be Switzerland's Tanja Frieden, who sped past Jacobellis for the gold.

Asked whether there was a chance she made the fateful move almost reflexively, he paused. "Sometimes it's subconscious," he said, "but that was putting on a show."

Nearby, his teammate, Jayson Hale, was making his way back toward the team cabin on crutches.

"It's kind of a little victory thing," he said. "When you've got that much of a lead at the end, it's something you throw in for the crowd."

Asked if he had ever seen anything like what happened to Jacobellis before, Hale, too, paused. "It happens, just not at the Olympics," Hale said, "and not when you've got a gold medal in your hand."

But by the time Jacobellis popped up in the interview room alongside Frieden and bronze medalist Dominique Maltais, the



Jim Litke

spinning had already started.

Wescott suddenly couldn't remember watching the jump and Jacobellis insisted she hadn't tried anything special. Frieden recalled the time in an X Games race several seasons ago when she stood up too soon and got nipped at the line by Jacobellis.

"I don't feel bad or sad about it," she said. "One day it's me, it's her the next."

A few moments later, in a corner of the same room, U.S. coach Peter Foley sounded like he had done his apprenticeship in the NFL. He couldn't say yes or no on the jump, Foley said, until he had a chance to look at the film.

"I'm not inside her head," he protested.

But another few minutes after that, Foley wandered over and looked at a frame-by-frame breakdown shot by Associated Press photos.

"She didn't need to bring it across that far," he said. "She was trying to style it."

Say this much about snowboarding: It may be the most wild-and-wooly thing on snow at these Games, but the camaraderie is never fake. After competitors slug it out, they hug it out, and what matters to most of them at the end of the day is whether they've done it all with style.

That's the code that Jacobellis was trying to honor. The only shame is that she couldn't bring herself to say so.

Jim Litke is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Send comments to jlitke@ap.org.

## FRIDAY'S ROUNDUP

### Italy, U.S. earn men's curling wins

Upstart Italy thrilled the home crowd at the curling venue on Friday, beating New Zealand 6-5 in 11 ends to improve to 3-3.

New Zealand is now 0-6.

As skip Joel Retornaz grabbed the final rock and crouched in the hack, the chants of "I-TAL-IA!" came to a stop and the crowd hushed. He released the stone, and it slid around a guard into the target area, knocking away a Kiwi rock and settling in for the score.

Also Friday, Finland beat Canada 8-7, leaving both teams tied with the United States at 4-2. The Americans earned a 7-3 win against Switzerland (3-3).

Britain has sole possession of first place after beating Sweden 8-2 in seven ends.

### Women's curling medal hopes fade

The sights, the sounds — and not nearly enough wins. That's what the U.S. women's curling team will take away from the Olympics.

The Americans lost 8-7 in extra ends to Russia on Friday, ending any real chance they had of reaching the medal round. Although Cassie Johnson's team failed to make good on the promise they showed in winning a silver medal at the world championships, they hope the spotlight they put on their quirky sport will help it grow in their homeland.

The Americans had the youngest team in either the men's or women's Olympic field for the 500-year-old sport, without a single player older than 25.

### Americans slip in compulsory dance

Italians Barbara Fusar Poli and Maurizio Margaglio brought some sizzle to figure skating's sleepest event Friday night, delighting the home crowd with a triumphant return from retirement. And by waltzing their way back to the top of the standings, the 2001 world champions let everyone know there's going to be some grit to go with the glitter in this year's Olympic ice dancing competition.

"We are in front," Margaglio said, "and the others must do better."

Pretty strong words coming from people wearing neon orange, black, gold and lime green outfits. But Fusar Poli and Margaglio wowed the judges with their impeccable timing and interpretation of the "Ravensburger Waltz," finishing with 38.78 points, a half-point ahead of two-time world champions Tatiana Navka and Roman Kostomarov.

Tanith Belbin and Ben Agosto looked more like typical American also-rans than the medal contenders everyone expected, finishing a surprisingly low sixth with 37.36 points. But the silver medalists at last year's world championships were only 1.42 points out of first place, hardly insurmountable.

### Veerpalu defends cross-country title

Andrus Veerpalu took a celebratory bow on the podium, his right hand still grasping the gold medal around his neck. He smiled and waved to his

supporters from home cheering and waving flags in the stands.

Oh, what an Olympics this has been for Estonia.

The Estonians, not the Norwegians or Germans, are dominating these games in cross-country, and Veerpalu's sensational skiing in tough conditions Friday made it three gold medals overall for this tiny Baltic nation of 1.3 million people.

Veerpalu defended his Olympic 15-kilometer classical title from Salt Lake City a day after countrywoman Kristina Smigun won her second gold of the Turin Games in the women's 10km classical race. She also won the 15km pursuit Sunday.

### Injuries, illness dog female skiers

Women's Alpine skiing at these Olympics is looking like a medical clinic.

Defending champion Janica Kostelic, who missed the downhill because of illness, positioned herself for a gold medal showdown with rival Anja Paerson in the Alpine combined event, only to say she might be too sick to start today's downhill portion.

And American Lindsey Kildow endured another painful fall, though this time she was able to walk away.

The Croatian Kostelic finally made her Turin Games debut Friday, though she later made it sound like her appearance might be more of a cameo.

Skiing on a flood-lit slope, Kostelic had the second-fastest time over two runs. Paerson, the two-time defending World Cup champion from Sweden, was fourth.

### Biathlete suspended for doping

Russian biathlon star Olga Pyleva, already tossed from the Turin Games and stripped of her silver medal for a positive drug test, was banned for two years Friday and will be investigated under Italy's criminal anti-doping law.

The 30-year-old Pyleva tested positive for the stimulant carphedon and was expelled Thursday from the games, the first athlete caught in the tightest drug net in Winter Olympics history. She attended a meeting of the International Biathlon Union in a Turin suburb Friday, where the two-year ban was announced.

"It was not a difficult case," said Anders Besseberg, president of the IBU. "It's a positive doping case."

The IOC threw Pyleva out of the Olympics on Thursday and has turned over documents to Italian magistrates in accordance with Italian law, said Mario Pescante, IOC member and government supervisor for the games. She was scheduled to fly back to Russia later in the day, said Russian biathlon team doctor Andrey Dmytriev.

"Like every foreigner who commits a crime in Italy, she can go back to her country because the criminal process against her hasn't begun yet," Pescante said. He said she could still be called in to testify at some point.

## • Woods

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

That changed Friday when Sweden beat the United States 3-2. In case Janet Gretzky was wondering, the U.S. team was a prohibitive 4½-goal favorite.

**Best wipeouts:** There's a reason they keep a medical helicopter next to the downhill course. It's the same reason television loves the race. People like to watch other people crash and, between the downhill and the luge, there was more flopping on ice this week than in a Seattle fish market.

**Best new sport:** Snowboardcross by a wipeout. It's NASCAR on ice, motocross on boards. Better yet, there's no judging, which means first one to the finish really does win.

**Biggest bust:** Bode Miller takes this one, his first win of the week. This guy was on more magazine covers than Britney Spears in the weeks leading up to the games but so far has been

shut out in two events. Give Miller some style points, though, for being seen pounding down shots and beers up in the mountains between races.

Placing second here were the Curl Girls, the American curlers who had a great name but, as it turns out, not much game.

**Worst new sport:** Team pursuit. What were the game inventors thinking when they met in a secret room deep inside IOC headquarters to dream up this speedskating sport? You win if your third place guy crosses the line before their third place guy? And you do it on opposite sides of the track? Goofy.

**Best challenge to "American Idol":** NBC is paying more than \$600 million to televise the games and still it gets squashed by amateurs trying to sing. Here's a suggestion: Bring Yoko Ono back for a few nights and have her loudly screech something about imagining peace again like she did in the opening ceremony. Give her a trip to Hollywood if she does it well enough. It seems to work on that other network.

**Best teammates not to have:** Speedskater Shani Davis refused to skate in the team pursuit and ruined Chad Hedrick's chances at five medals. Todd Lodwick went one better, blasting teammate Carl Van Loan's performance in the Nordic combined, where the United States finished seventh.

"We've got one guy way out of shape and picked for the team," Lodwick said. "(Van Loan's) the weakest link."

Oh, yeah, well take this, sniffed Van Loan: "Todd is not a team player and never has been. He has threatened not to ski this event because of selfish reasons."

**Best reason to stay in a hotel:** Johnny Weir thought his bed in the athletes' village was too hard, and his floor too dirty. Worse yet, there was no room service and no concierge to read the bus schedule. Weir couldn't do it himself and said it cost him a figure skating medal. Still, he learned something from his first Olympics: "I learned I definitely want to stay in a hotel," he said.

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