

The Date: February 28, 2010. Canadians will remember it as the last day of the gold rush. Maybe that's the song Neil Young should have played at the Closing Ceremonies. No, we're not talking about the [Klondike gold rush](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klondike_Gold_Rush "Klondike Gold Rush") of 1896. This is the modern day Olympic gold rush. A record 14 gold medals in the Winter Olympics were mined by Canadians at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. Canada may not have [Owned The Podium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owned_The_Podium "Owned The Podium"), but they sure did [Own The Gold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Own_The_Gold "Own The Gold").

The final day of competition saw the Canadian men's hockey team defeat the United States 3 - 2 in overtime. It was only fitting that the beloved hockey team would get the last gold to set the record. They won't call it [Miracle On Ice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle_On_Ice "Miracle On Ice"). That won't be necessary, because to most Canadians, that hockey win wasn't a miracle, it was more of a birthright. No, Canadians will call it [The Day The Country Stood Still And Breathed A Collective Sigh Of Relief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Day_The_Country_Stayed_Still "The Day The Country Stood Still And Breathed A Collective Sigh Of Relief") or something similar. The movie title might have to be revised, of course. But hockey is only one part of this Olympic story - albeit a big one.

Why is all of this gold medal stuff so important to Canadians? Winning lots of medals is relatively commonplace in the United States. They won the most medals overall (37) at this Olympics. And besides, the stereotypical view of Canadians is the mild-mannered neighbors to the North that never utter a peep, always play second fiddle to the United States, and certainly don't ever sound nationalistic. Or proud. At least not in public. Oh, and they never talk about the War of 1812 - but that's another story.

But as [Bob Dylan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan "Bob Dylan") once said, maybe the times they are a changin'.

As I mentioned in a recent post, there was a long time when Canadians were quietly and almost apologetically proud. They certainly wouldn't have shouted it from the mountain, and if they did, and if there was an unfavorable response, I bet you'd get a [sorry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sorry "Sorry") thrown in there for good measure. In the Closing Ceremonies, comedian Catherine O'Hara noted, [we just like to say sorry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Just_Like_to_Say_Sorry "We just like to say sorry"). It's almost a national pastime.

But they can also laugh about it, and laugh at themselves. Canada has produced more than its share of comedians. From the beginning of the Closing Ceremonies, when they made fun of the hydraulic faux pas from the Opening Ceremonies (with [Catriona Le May Doan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catriona_Le_May_Doan "Catriona Le May Doan") playing along splendidly), Canadians did a fine job of making light of their Canadiana, making light of the stereotypes that have pervaded the world's perception of Canada for years.

But now, Canadians are different. [We Dream Big](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Dream_Big "We Dream Big") said William Shatner. And this Olympiad, they did. [Own The Podium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Own_The_Podium "Own The Podium") is what they called it. Win the medal count.

Well, such a gaudy goal was well, almost un-Canadian. But guess what? They owned the gold podium. Canada set an Olympic record for most gold medals in a Winter Olympics - 14 total. The best performance by a nation ever.

And the last gold medal they scored, the one that broke the record, was a spell-bounding, epic victory in men's hockey, in overtime, against the United States. The story line for Sunday's game was phenomenal. Canada goes up 2 - 0, the US ties it with 24 seconds remaining in the game. [Sidney Crosby](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidney_Crosby "Sidney Crosby"), Canada's heir apparent to [Wayne Gretzky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_Gretzky "Wayne Gretzky"), had been essentially AWOL for 3 full games - no points. But all it took was one shot at 7:40 of

overtime to make him a Canadian folk hero, a legend, a Paul-Henderson-shoots-and-scores-and-beats-the-Soviet-Union-in-1972 kind of hero. Yes, it made the movie script complete.

To put this into perspective, imagine, if you will, the first US dream team in men's basketball in 1992 losing in a gold medal match. Imagine the silver medal going to Michael Jordan, David Robinson, Patrick Ewing, Larry Bird, Scottie Pippen, Clyde Drexler, Karl Malone, John Stockton, Chris Mullin, Charles Barkley, Magic Johnson, and Christian Laettner. Or imagine it all coming down to Michael Jordan hitting a buzzer beater as time expires in order to win the game.

To understand a little more about why that particular gold medal meant so much, consider a few facts. Prior to 2002, it had been 50 years since Canada last won a gold medal. That is absolute heresy if you ask a Canadian. They invented the sport. Hockey is so important to Canadians that 4 million people tuned in to watch the official announcement of the Olympic team on TV. There were 18 million people over half the country sitting in front of their televisions to watch Canada play in the JUNIOR world championships. Oh, and 80% of the country watched the Olympic final.

But since 1998, when the Olympics formally allowed professionals to play, there have been 4 Olympics and Canada has gold in 2 of them. And that's just the men. The women? Simply dominant. A 2-0 gold medal win over the US is just the latest chapter. In 1998, the first year that women's hockey was in the Olympics, they finished with the silver. Since that time, they have won three gold medals in the last three Olympics.

A Canadian hockey gold medal is just the way it's supposed to be sorry.

But as I said, the past two weeks have been a tremendous effort from the whole Olympic team. The 2010 Vancouver Olympics brought the country together in many ways. There were athletes and medal winners from sea to shining sea, from Nova Scotia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. This amounts to 8 of 13 provinces and territories represented. The organizers put together a great two weeks of competition, even with a few glitches. And Canadians supported all nations throughout the Games. They even cheered U-S-A, U-S-A when the men's hockey team was awarded the silver medal.

The Olympics have a way of touching our emotions. There are always a large number of human interest stories - actually, there is one for every athlete at every venue. For each Olympian, there is a story of dedication, sacrifice, and desire - stories that simply transcend competition, that are bigger than life, that reflect the microcosm of life that is sport in general. The Olympics also remind us of the beauty and spirit of competition. They remind us of our human passions.

The Olympics remind us of the fragility of life - the death of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili. The death of Canadian figure skater Joannie Rochette's mother just days before her event. Rochette chose to compete to honor her mother, and put in some absolutely heart-wrenching performances. Having the ability to compete at all - in a time of great personal tragedy - is tough enough. To do so and to win a bronze medal in the process - amazing. I will forever remember watching her embrace her father afterwards, and the sound of commentator Scott Hamilton's voice breaking up after her performance.

For the Vancouver Olympics, Canadians dared to dream big. Canadians broke into Oh Canada not just because it was the start of the hockey game, but, well, just because. In the middle of a curling match. In the streets of Vancouver. Just because they are proud to be Canadian. And there's no reason to say sorry anymore. Be proud. And enjoy because hockey bragging rights belong to Canada until 2014!

Afterword: I would be remiss without making note of each and every one of these medalists that made these Winter Olympics so special for Canadians:

Gold:

Men's moguls

(*Bilodeau*); Women's snowboard cross (*Ricker*); Men's skeleton (*Montgomery*); Men's speed skating team pursuit (*Giroux, Makowsky, Morrison*); Women's speed skating 1000m (*Nesbitt*); Ice Dancing (*Moir, Virtue*); Men's hockey: (*Boyle, Brodeur, Crosby, Doughty, Fleury, Getzlaf, Heatley, Iginla, Keith, Luongo, Marleau, Morrow, Nash, Niedermayer, Perry, Pronger, Richards, Seabrook, Staal, Thornton, Toews, Weber, Bergeron*); Women's hockey (*Agosta, Apps, Bonhomme, Botterill, Hefford, Irwin, Johnston, Duke, Kingsbury, Labonte, Macleod, Mikkelson, Ouellette, Piper, Sostorics, St-Pierre, Szabados, Vaillancourt, Ward, Wickenheiser, Poulin-Nadeu*); Women's Bobsled (*Humphries, Moyses*); Men's curling (*Martin, Kennedy, Hebert, Morris, Enright*); Women's Ski Cross (*Mclvor*); Men's snowboard parallel giant slalom (*Anderson*); Men's short track 500m (*Hamelin*); Men's short track 5000m relay (*Hamelin, Jean, Hamelin, Bastille, Tremblay*)

Silver:

Women's Bobsled (*Upperton, Brown*); Women's curling (*Bernard, Bartel, Darbyshire, O'Connor, Moore*); Women's moguls (*Heil*); Men's snowboard cross (*Robertson*); Women's speed skating 1500m (*Groves*); Women's short track 500m (*St-Gelais*); Women's short track 3000m relay (*Vicent, St-Gelais, Gregg, Roberge*)

Bronze:

Men's bobsled (*Bissett, Brown, Le Bihan, Rush*); Women's Figure Skating (*Rochette*); Women's speed skating 3000m (*Groves*); Women's speed skating 5000m (*Hughes*); Men's short track 500m (*Tremblay*)

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