

EMOTION-DRIVEN CANADA COMPLETES GOLDEN QUEST



>> BY THERESA SMITH, LACROSSE MAGAZINE/LAXMAGAZINE.COM | PHOTOS: SCOTT MCCALL

AMID THE EUPHORIC HUGS of teammates with the strains of "O Canada" filtering down from fans from the stands, Canadian faceoff specialist Geoff Snider dedicated his team's gold medal victory to Kyle Miller and Chris Sanderson, former Team Canada goalkeepers who passed away within the past two years. Sanderson, a four-time World Championship team member, died of brain cancer in 2012, and Miller, who played on the 2006 gold medal team with Sanderson, died of bone cancer in 2013.

"It was really special winning this after losing two really close friends and two really big parts of the Canadian lacrosse program," Snider said. "We were just playing with them in our hearts and minds. We really miss Kyle and Chris and this is for them."

Emotion played a key role in the 8-5 victory over the favored Americans, who were increasingly flat as their top offensive stars, Paul Rabil and Rob Pannell, were off-target early, part of eight errant attempts in the first quarter. Meanwhile, Canada built a 2-0 lead, led 3-1 at halftime and pulled away with a four-goal third quarter. As Canada's lead grew, it increasingly milked the clock, leading 8-2 early in the fourth quarter before an inspired American team rallied with three goals. Behind a defense that caused two late turnovers and three of goalkeeper Dillon Ward's 10 saves, Canada held Team USA scoreless over the final 6 minutes, 24 seconds.

"They weren't shooting great, they were missing the cage and when they were on cage I was able to get pieces of them, so that is a



All-World goalie selection Dillon Ward made ten saves in the final, capping a monster tournament for Canada.



Canada rode a wave of emotion to its third world championship and second in the past three cycles with an 8-5 win over the United States.

testament to our defense that forced them to be uncomfortable," said Ward, who earned Most Valuable Player honors for the tournament and followed in Sanderson's footsteps as the All-World goalkeeper. "Winning this game is unbelievable; we are in the United States and they are obviously the home team, but our coaches put in a great game plan and our team played it to a T."

Randy Mearns led the Canadian effort, along with Matt Brown, Jason Levesque, Taylor Wray, and Hall-of-Famer Gary Gait, who fired laser shots at Ward prior to and at halftime of every game.

"To have Gary Gait warm me up every game is unbelievable, I am so thankful to him for getting me ready," Ward said.

Kevin Crowley led the offense with five goals, an explosion considering he tallied only three goals in six previous tournament games.

"It was a product of the whole offense working," Crowley said. "Coach Brown is one of the best coaches in the world offensively and he put us in a position where we could be successful. It is great winning with a whole bunch of Canadians. I love these guys and we're going to enjoy it tonight."

Although Crowley was a role player in previous games of the tournament, Brodie Merrill had an inkling that his teammate would break through.

"I could see it in his eyes before the game that he would have a big game," Merrill said. "And

he's just scratching the surface; he's a young guy one of the premier players in the game."

Merrill, who plays with Crowley in the National Lacrosse League, noted that the 25-year-old has matured quickly.

"It's funny, before the tournament I shot him a text that said, 'this is going to be your first championship,'" said Merrill, who was honored as an all-world defenseman along with linemate Kyle Rubisch.

For one night, the 6-foot-4 Crowley replaced any star power lost by the absence of Hall-of-Famer John Grant Jr. who was medically ineligible. He scored the first goal of the game, slipping backdoor behind his defender and catching a pass on the run from teammate Jordan Hall for an open look at the U.S. goal manned by Jesse Schwartzman.

Next, he moved toward the net surrounded by defenders who hacked away at his stick. Nonetheless, he was able to get off a shot that sailed past Schwartzman, who was screened. He scored his third goal by scooping up a ground ball in a scramble in front of the net and scoring with his back to the net. He scored his final goals on pick-and-roll plays with Cameron Holding and Jordan Hall, respectively. Holding, Mark Matthews, and Curtis Dickson, who waged frequent physical battles with powerful defensive star Tucker Durkin, also scored for Canada. Dickson managed to return to the game after being slashed, but was

injured again and sidelined for most of the second half.

Incredibly, Canada controlled possession for the last eight minutes of the third quarter, taking only one shot, retrieving the miss from the corner, and then stalling until the last two seconds when Jeremy Noble found Holding open on the left perimeter. With a full windup, Holding's high, hard shot sailed into the back of the net for a 7-2 advantage.

"It is so important to trust the game plan," Merrill said. "That's what we did and it paid off. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to play and represent my country. Any time I wear the red and white, I am so proud."

When the U.S. began to roar back with three consecutive goals to cut it to 8-5, the Canadians were concerned, yet composed.

"It is always scary because they are a high-potent offense," Ward said.

Defenseman Dan Coates was part of the solution with two key ground ball pickups late, part of a 35-22 Canadian dominance off the ground in what was probably the most telling stat of the contest.

Snider praised his teammates for their growth, following a 10-7 opening pool play loss to Team USA.

"We used this week to storm, form and norm," he said. "We brought everybody together and grew as a unit over the 10-day period and ultimately we became a championship team." **OLM**