

# Inside Hockey

by Michael Farber



## A New Wave

A generation of fresh faces is emerging to replace the stars who carried the U.S. for a decade

**T**HE GRAYING of the red, white and blue in international hockey is over. After leaning on USA Hockey's greatest generation for so long, the U.S. will enter the world championship, which starts this Saturday in Austria, with a roster dotted with players who were still being driven to rinks by their parents when the 1996 World Cup team played the highest-caliber hockey America has ever produced—and that includes the 1980 Miracle on Ice.

No global hockey power needed a face-lift for this event more desperately than the U.S. With 13 holdovers from 1996 on its World Cup roster last fall, Team AARP failed to beat Finland in the semifinals in St. Paul, a harsh reminder that last call has come and gone for stalwarts like Chris Chelios, Brett Hull and Brian Leetch.

"If you look at our '96 team and then the Olympic teams that followed . . . some of those [roster] choices were made on rep-

utation," says Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello, who headed the '96 World Cup champs and the '98 Olympic squad that failed to earn a medal.

The average age on the U.S. world championship roster has dipped to 28, a youth movement given that two thirds of the 2004 World Cuppers were 31 or older. Centers Mike Modano and Doug Weight remain as leaders, but they will be supported by promising NHL forwards who are hardly big names: Erik Cole, Brian Gionta and Richard Park. This transitional U.S. team has back-end skill in defensemen Jordan Leopold and John-Michael Liles and front-end speed—a combination that is ideal for playing on the wide international ice surface.

Just as Canada went through a relatively fallow period in the early- and mid-1990s, the U.S. has been mired in a talent-producing slump. Since 1996 the best American to emerge has been Scott Gomez, a sweet-passing cen-



### VIENNA WAITS FOR THEM

Park (far left), Gionta (top) and Leopold (4) are key to U.S. medal hopes in Austria.

ter but not the impact player Hull, Keith Tkachuk and John LeClair were. (Gomez, who broke a bone in his pelvis last week during a game with the ECHL's Alaska Aces, will not play in the worlds.) Can this new generation—which will soon include talented-but-raw youngsters such as 17-year-old wunderkind forward Phil Kessel and 20-year-old forward Zach Parise—revitalize USA Hockey? "We won't know until we play an event like this," says Ron Wilson, who coached two World Cup teams and the '98 Olympic squad. "One group of

players carried USA Hockey for a long time. It's hard to replace guys like that."

### SWEDES IN TURMOIL






## They're Just Saying No

After the 2002 Olympics, in which Sweden's vaunted torpedo-system sank with the ship after Belarus's soft goal against Toramy Salo, the Swedish tabloid *Expressen* ran mug shots of the players with the headline GUILTY: THEY BETRAYED THEIR COUNTRY. As a recruiting poster, it's not exactly UNCLE SVEN WANTS YOU!

In trying to cobble together a medal contender for the worlds, Sweden has been turned down more times than the dorky kid at the dance. Declining invitations were Mats Sundin, Nicklas Lidstrom, Marcus Ragnarsson and Dick Tarnstrom. Forward Markus Naslund, brilliant in the NHL but a disaster in Sweden's Elite League, won't play. Sublime center Peter Forsberg is out with a broken wrist and a concussion. Forward Kristian Huselius, involved in a sex scandal, also will stay home. There's a feeling among Swedish players that being on a disappointing team run by a federation under fire from fans is not worth the grief. Last month Calle Johansson, an ex-NHL defenseman and captain of the 1998 Olympic team, said, "It's not an honor to play for your country anymore. The club teams are better run than the national team." □

## Who'll Rule the Worlds?

A look at how the other medal contenders shape up

-  **CANADA** Has added Rick Nash, a 41-goal scorer for the Blue Jackets in 2003-04, to a stocked lineup. Unmatched depth.
-  **CZECH REPUBLIC** When they're on, look out; and bellwether star Jaromir Jagr recently tore up Russia's Superleague.
-  **RUSSIA** Great firepower (Ilya Kovalchuk, Alexei Kovalev, Alexander Ovechkin) but has trouble spreading the puck around.
-  **SLOVAKIA** A poor man's Russia (dazzling forwards Marian Hossa and Marian Gaborik) with better teamwork. Weak in net.
-  **FINLAND** Notable absences in Saku Koivu and goalie Miikka Kiprusoff, but the Finns play as doggedly as anyone.

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Choose the best possible answer for the following multiple choice questions.

1. Who headed the USA Team in '96 World Cup?  
A.) Rick Nash B.) Erik Cole C.) Lou Lamoriello D.) Jordan Leopold
  
2. What fraction of the 2004 World Cup Team was 31 or older?  
A.)  $\frac{1}{2}$  B.)  $\frac{1}{3}$  C.)  $\frac{1}{4}$  D.)  $\frac{2}{3}$
  
3. What player did Canada add to their roster?  
A.) Rick Nash B.) Chris Chelios C.) Brett Hull D.) Jordan Leopold
  
4. Which of the following players are forwards on the USA Team?  
A.) Erik Cole B.) Brian Gionta C.) Richard Park D.) All of the above
  
5. Which of these players will not play for Sweden?  
A.) Mats Sundin B.) Mike Modano C.) Erik Cole D.) All of the above
  
6. What team does Jaromir Jagr play for?  
A.) Canada B.) Russia C.) Finland D.) Czech Rep.
  
7. Who was captain of the Sweden team in 1998?  
A.) Calle Johannsson B.) Nick Lindstrom C.) Mats Sundin D.) Dick Tarnstrom
  
8. What team does Saku Koivu play for?  
A.) USA B.) Finland C.) Canada D.) Slovakia
  
9. Which team is known as "A poor man's Russia with better teamwork."  
A.) Slovakia B.) Canada C.) USA D.) Finland
  
10. Which USA player broke a bone in his pelvis and will not play?  
A.) Brett Hull B.) Scott Gomez C.) Doug Weight D.) Erik Cole