

Howran and Canadian team take silver at championship

By Tony Pearson

For the second year in a row, the United States defeated Canada in overtime to win the Under-18 Women's World Hockey Championship. This year, the U.S. scored at 1:47 of overtime to take the gold medal game 3-2 ? a great comeback after Canada had taken a 2-0 lead.

When I spoke to Bancroft's Tori Howran on Sunday after she got back from St. Catharines, she was quite philosophical about the outcome. In the dressing room before the game, she reported: ?We realized that we couldn't determine whether or not we would win the gold medal. All we could do was to give a gold medal-worthy performance.?

They did. The game had speed, finesse, and lots of end-to-end action. The American goalie, Alex Gulstene, was a real factor in their victory, according to Canadian coach Lisa Riley. In the first period she stopped an apparent goal with a last-minute slide across the net to make a pad save, and at a critical moment in the second period, produced a great stop on a Canadian breakaway.

Nonetheless, it came down to capitalizing on a bouncing puck, when the American Snodgrass buried her second chance after a rebound from a point shot. She said after the game: ?It was just a matter of being in the right place at the right time.?

But forward Emma Maltais spoke for the Canadian team when she declared: ?We're all proud of how we represented our country.?

Tori Howran, who played with an injured finger for most of the tournament, spoke about the excitement and pressure of playing before a home audience (in the final game, more than 5,500 watched in the arena ? a record audience for games at this level, and for the St. Catharines arena). ?We had to stay focused and play our game,? she reported. ?Before the tournament, we were told about methods of coping with the distractions of a world championship. And we did.? Howran feels that both the American and Canadian teams played their hearts out in the final: ?We both worked as hard as possible.?

Howran called the experience ?incredible.?

?I now have 22 new family members,? she stated, ?and we made lots of great memories. Just a couple of days later, there's still a lot to process. But it was always my dream to make the national team; that's a dream well worth having.?

As for her future, Howran has signed a letter of intent with the University of New Hampshire. Down the road, the goal is Canada's Under-22 national team.

Perhaps the most heartfelt comments came from Tori's mother, Melanie. ?The feeling isn't one that's easy to put into words,? she said. ?The arena was filled to capacity, and was super-loud and crazy. Sometimes we felt overwhelmed, but mostly we felt excited and exhilarated.?

Melanie looked back on more than two decades taking her kids to hockey and figure-skating; for a time the Howrans were at the rink six days a week. ?I was a figure-skating coach myself,? she recalled, ?and Tori started as a figure skater. Then another coach asked her to try hockey. We never dreamed at the time how far she was going to go.?

Looking back, Melanie says she wouldn't change a thing. ?The constant practices, all the driving, the motels, the packaged meals ? it's been worth it for what Tori has accomplished.?