

HOCKEY: Women beat Team USA 2-0 in the final



ANDRE FORGET QMI AGENCY

Team Canada shows off their gold medals after beating their biggest rival, Team USA, 2-0 at Canada Hockey Place in Vancouver on Thursday night.

Canada's golden girls

STEVE BUFFERY
QMI Agency

VANCOUVER — The U.S. and Canada in women's ice hockey is a great rivalry.

But so is Bud and Bud Lite.

And neither belongs in the Olympic Games.

Nothing has changed in the 12 years women's ice hockey has been part of the Olympic program.

Preliminary round games are a slaughter. Women's hockey is a dual meet disguised as a full-blown Olympic event, added to the program in 1998 to balance the gender numbers. IOC presi-

dent Jacques Rogge said prior to Thursday's gold medal game that the sport has to improve, or else.

"We cannot continue without improvement," he said.

Still, whenever the two North American teams meet, there's intensity and magic and even some hatred. It's become one of the great rivalries in sport.

And for one day, every four years, all is forgiven. And that day was Thursday at Canada Hockey Place, as Canada captured its third straight Olympic Games gold medal, on the back of goaltender Shannon Szabados, who made a number of huge glove

saves in the first two periods to keep the Americans at bay. Marie-Philip Poulin, an 18-year-old from Beauceville, Que., sparked the attack with two first-period goals as Canada prevailed 2-0.

Another key was special teams, as Canada killed off a pair of two-man advantages for the U.S.

But in the days leading up to the gold medal final, as the Yanks and Canucks steam-rolled over shell-shocked Europeans and Chinese, whispers began to build that the IOC is going to seriously examine the viability of the event, with Rogge finally

speaking out. When the sport was added in 1998, officials promised that gradually the rest of the world would catch up.

But clearly it hasn't. In fact, there's evidence that it's gone the other way and the gap between the North Americans and the few other countries that can even field a team is growing.

The Vancouver organizing committee's computer lists the top 28 scoring leaders from the tournament and, prior to Thursday's medal games, they were all from the two teams.

The U.S. and Canada have outscored their opponents by 40-2 and 36-2 respectively.

Coincidence or not, the men's hockey statistics are placed outside the press tribute at GM Place for easy access by the media. But to get the women's statistics, the press has to wander to the computer station and print their own copies.

But all of that doesn't make games between Canada and the U.S. any less heated.

American forward Jenny Potter called it "an intense dislike" between the players, which goes back to the first Olympic tournament in Nagano, 12 years ago.

steve.buffery@sunmedia.ca