

# No three-peat for Couture at Deaflympics

*Letdown against pesky Americans costs veteran defenceman and Team Canada another gold*

By Steve LeBlanc  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Had Mark Couture been sporting a fishing rod rather than a hockey stick, he might have viewed it as the one that got away.

Instead, Milton's 37-year-old defenceman was simply left with the lingering sting of a close-but-no-cigar three-peat bid at the recent Deaflympics in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Enjoying a three-goal cushion over their arch-rival Americans in game three of a tournament format where medals are decided solely on round-robin results, rather than with a traditional semifinal and final, Couture and Team Canada looked poised to prevail in their biggest test and go on to secure a third straight gold medal.

But fate — and the U.S. — had other ideas. Unwilling to play bridesmaid to the Canadians once again, the Americans delivered a huge turnaround to eclipse the two-time defending champs 4-3.

Couture and company would win their last two games and edge Russia out of silver — capping a 3-1-1 round-robin campaign with a 6-0 whitewash of Finland — but needless to say, finishing second was at best bittersweet.

"It (loss to U.S.) was heartbreaking," said the seasoned assistant captain,

who's now been part of five straight Deaflympics.

After jumping out to a strong start against the U.S., Canada simply imploded — giving up a whopping 23 shots in the third period en route to its biggest defeat in recent memory. But as Couture stresses, the loss had more to do with poor strategy than poor defence.

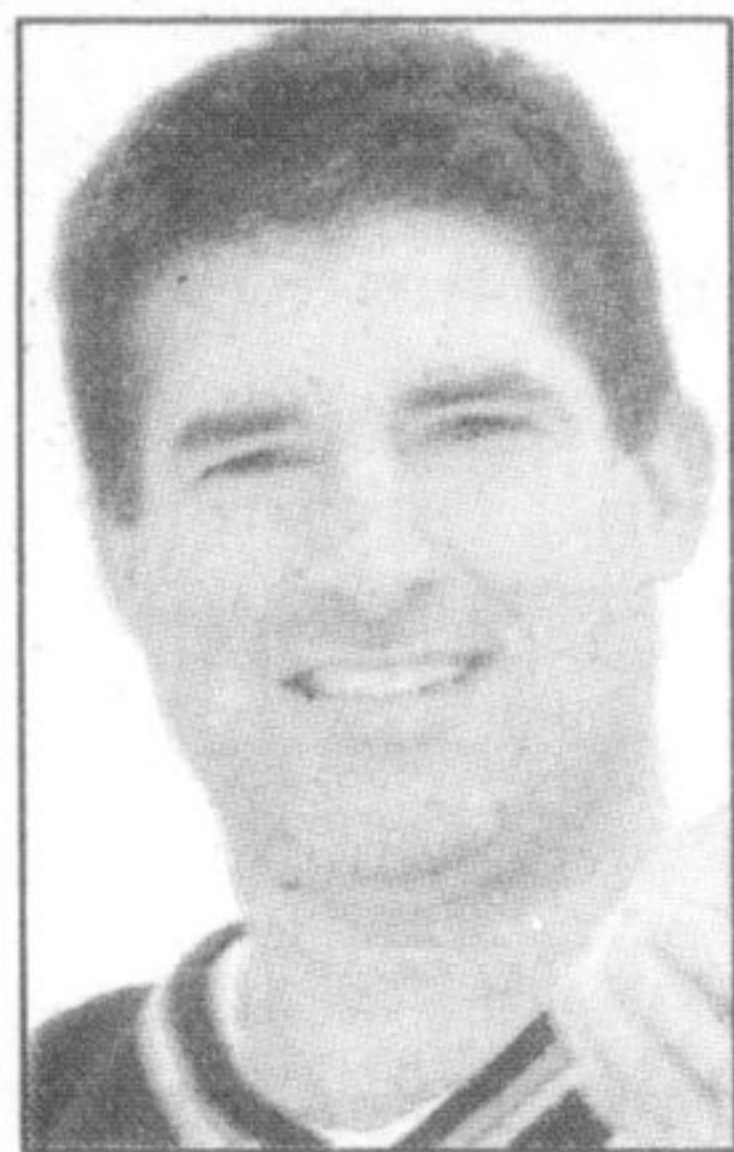
"The defensive team broke down for the simple reason that the same players were on the ice shift after shift. Our team had seven defencemen and only three or four were played," he frustratingly recalled. "By the time the third

period started they were exhausted." Team Canada's blueline unit and goaltending were practically unbeatable throughout the rest of the tournament — with cakewalks over Germany (17-0) and Sweden (9-0) to go along with their blanking of Finland.

A 2-2 tie with Russia in round two saw the Canadians sink a third-period equalizer to dodge an early bullet.

While seeing significantly less ice time than in 2003 — when he assisted on the game winner in a 5-2 gold-medal clinching win over the U.S. — Couture did get on the score-sheet with a couple of assists against Germany.

So will Milton's Team Canada veteran make it six straight Deaflympics in four years?



Mark Couture

"I may be back in the 2011 in Slovakia, where we WILL take the gold," he offered non-committedly.

Fellow Miltonian Norm Brownell has also been a longtime member of Canada's Deaf hockey team, serving as both an equipment manager and fund-

raiser organizer.

Said Couture, "I've got to thank Norm for all his hard work before, during and after each Deaflympics, and to also thank his family for making the trip to Salt Lake City to support him in his journey."

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