



# A TOUGH LOSS, BUT A GREAT TOURNAMENT

They battled back from a seemingly impossible 6-1 **deficit** and nearly tied up the game. They showed backbone, **perseverance** and the third period proved to be a real nail-biter. But in the end, it wasn't enough. On January 3, at Calgary's Saddledome Arena, Canada's World Junior Hockey (WJH) team lost 6-5 to long-time rival, Russia.

The result? Team Canada would have to challenge Finland for a third-place bronze medal. Yet for true lovers of ice hockey, the contest against Russia was so exhilarating, it hardly mattered that the gold medal was out of reach.

"Oh boy! What a night and what a way to come up just a fraction short," enthused sports reporter Eric Duhatschek said. "For anyone wondering what makes the [World Junior Hockey] tournament so compelling, this game was exhibits A to Z!"

## THE BEST UNDER 20

His reaction was a common one. Many hockey fans consider the annual World Junior Hockey Tournament to be one of the most exciting displays of the sport.

Canada hosted and Edmonton and Calgary provided arenas for the 2012 tournament, which is always held in late December and early January. The contest is so eagerly followed that tickets for all 31 games were gone in a matter of days as soon as they went on sale in January 2011 – a full year in advance of the action.

What's the draw? In part, the competition's formal name says it all. Officially called the International Ice Hockey Federation World Under 20 Championship (IIHFWU20), it features the best players from around the globe who are still in their teens. Young athletes tend to play their hearts out in the WJH contest because they stand an excellent chance of being drafted into the **National Hockey League** (NHL) if they show the right stuff.

## ROUND-ROBIN FORMAT

The main event features amateur teams from the top-ten hockey nations of the world. The round-robin tournament divides the teams into two groups of five. Each team plays all other teams within the group.

The first-place team from each group advances directly to the semifinal. Second and third-place teams from each group cross over to play quarterfinal games. Quarterfinal winners advance to the semifinals, where they play the first-place teams.

Semifinal winners meet in the gold medal game. Semifinal losers play the bronze medal game.

"Every game after the round robin . . . is a win-or-go-home scenario," said Mr. Duhatschek. "[It] can fuel such an extraordinary adrenalin rush. With everything on the line and the pressure cranked up . . . the Canadian players played with a passion that left nothing on the table."

## FIERCE RIVALRIES

No question, the level of play is superb. But also sparking fan interest is the longstanding rivalry among the tournament's top two teams. That has been the case from the time the competition started informally in 1974. When the **International Ice Hockey Federation** (IIHF) took charge of the contest in 1977, that rivalry just intensified. No wonder. In the 37-year history of the tournament, Canada has come out on top 15 times, compared to a combined 14 times for Russia and its **predecessor**, the **Soviet Union**. Together, the two teams have dominated the standings, with occasional challenges from Sweden, Finland and the United States.

## THE FINAL STANDINGS

Canada ended up placing third in the tournament after defeating Finland 4-0. Sweden finished first, winning the gold medal game against Russia 1-0 in overtime.

## THERE'S ALWAYS NEXT YEAR

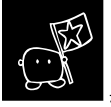
Team Canada was disappointed to lose out to the Russians, but coach Don Hay said it was a learning experience that will help the team focus when the contest is held next year in Ufa, Russia.

"I was really happy with the way we battled back," he said, "but when you get down 6-1, it's a long hole to come [out of]." ★

## DEFINITIONS

**DEFICIT:** an unfavorable condition or position; a disadvantage  
**INTERNATIONAL ICE HOCKEY FEDERATION:** an international group made up of national hockey associations  
**NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE:** a North American association of 30 professional ice hockey clubs

**PERSEVERANCE:** steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success  
**PREDECESSOR:** something that existed before  
**SOVIET UNION:** a former federal republic in Europe and Asia that disbanded in 1991



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## ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Where was the 2012 World Junior Hockey Championship held this year?

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2. What made the game between Canada and Russia so exciting?

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3. Which team did Canada battle for the bronze medal?

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4. Give two reasons to explain the popularity of the World Junior Hockey Tournament.

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5. Name and describe the format of the tournament.

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6. In 37 years of play, how many times has Canada won the tournament and how does that compare to Russia?

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7. Where will next year's tournament be held?

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