It took just 30 ticks for Martin Brodeur to mishandle a puck behind his net and 11 more for him to needlessly go paddle-down on a routine Brian Rafalski slap shot. A tiny redirection sent the puck just over Brodeur's blocker and like a sudden slap in the face, Team USA struck first for an early 1-0 lead in both team's final preliminary game.

From the moment the game started, it was painfully obvious that Brodeur was over-handling the puck in an effort to get into some kind of rhythm. Four of his first seven touches were either unsuccessful or turned over, including when he swatted a puck out of mid-air with his stick 10:45 into the first period. Unfortunately Brodeur shanked it and a shot was quickly fired back

on goal with enough velocity to slide under his desperate and futile two-pad stack.

Combined with those moments were a few more that revealed Brodeur's shocking uneasiness in the game. It was a furious pace and for some reason he was clearly one step behind. Brodeur did gain some confidence back in the second frame, but unfocused energy would result in another costly goal against when he stretched out to shove David Backes. A few seconds later, Brodeur was on his stomach trying to knock away a loose puck. But he missed completely and then failed to cover it up before it finally landed on Chris Drury's stick and then the back of the net.

The rest, as they say, is history. Or as thousands of USA fans have been calling it: A Millercle. As for me, I'll just say right now that, in my humble opinion, and as a goalie scout and a coach, Team Canada may have made a terrible mistake with their goaltending plan.

Roberto Luongo played the first preliminary game and despite the reasons why I expected it to be Brodeur (See last week's School of Block), Canada made a good choice. Luongo was extremely sharp and poised when called upon, stopping all 15 shots he faced for the shutout. He played with confidence in front of his home crowd and ignited his slightly rusty team with some big saves early in the first period.

Despite Luongo's shutout, it was Brodeur who was given the start in Game 2 against Switzerland. Although it was an iffy performance for Brodeur and a massive scare for Canada,

he redeemed himself in the shootout. When he was announced as the starter against Team USA, a message was sent that he had the opportunity to take control of the crease all the way through to the Gold Medal game. It was pretty much Brodeur's job, and his glory, to lose.

So I ask this next question rhetorically, and also with a severe level of seriousness. How could Team Canada have possibly expected Brodeur to play at his best in only his SECOND start?? Every other player prepared for their third game, but Brodeur was a clear step behind. And I don't think the fact it was just his second game was a coincidence.

Just look at all the NHL goalies in the Olympics that played all three preliminary games. How did they perform in that final game? For the most part (except Hiller), it was pretty admirably. But look at the NHL goalies that played just two games. Thomas Greiss was sharp in his first game, but terrible against Belarus on Saturday night. Then you have Miikka Kiprusoff's minutes being disturbed by a Backstrom shutout and the ensuing result was not positive.

Brodeur is a different breed, we all know that. He wants to play 82 games every year because he relies on a certain rhythm to be effective. How Team Canada thought it would be a good thing to take away from Brodeur's rhythm by giving him LESS minutes than possible is absolutely shocking. Either give Luongo all three games or give them all to Brodeur - but don't hinder both by splitting up minutes. It's just not fair to either one.

This may seem unrelated to what caused Brodeur to struggle in this single game, but you can't

walk away from it without recognizing the terrible decisions he made with the puck early in the game. He was not ready for the game's speed and pace and his feet were rarely set on shots that included any lateral movement. His rebound control was not sharp and simply put, he struggled to execute and even turned pucks over to help fuel Team USA's fire.

So how you feel about Luongo getting the first start and its impact on Brodeur's subsequent play is up to you, but I'm pretty sure it played a role in the momentum and opportunities it gave Team USA. There was a decided edge in shots for Canada, but a decided edge in goal for Team USA. And I'm sure you know which one ultimately leads to an upset.

Not lost in the game, of course, was Ryan Miller's 42 sensational, heroic saves. It was a performance that goes down as one of the most clutch in Team USA's history. His glove hand was extremely strong and he did a great job of absorbing shots, scrambling with energy and controlling his emotions despite a few turnovers bad turnovers of his own. It included a strong display of sheer will in the final five minutes of the game, as some of his most impressive and important saves even came after Ryan Kesler scored the empty-net goal.

When the game was over and Brodeur shamefully skated up to the handshake line, he looked to me like a Wild West killer walking slowly to the Gallows. He was surrounded by people who only wanted him dead, all of them shouting for his head, just waiting for that thick, twisted rope to be placed around his neck.

As Brodeur approached Miller, It was like he was forced to face the judge that sentenced him. And when they both exchanged the memorable handshake, I think I saw it in Miller's eyes, the look, "Team Canada…you're mine."

So as the playoff round begins, it's Miller that has all of the confidence in the world as Team USA awaits their next opponent. He's played all three games and was extremely focused in all of them. His ability to make timely saves has been at the forefront of his play and the visual eye attachment has been exceptional as well. Beating him in the playoffs is now considered a monumental task whether it happens to be Russia, Finland, or dare I say it, Canada.

Ultimately, the victory for Team USA will have many themes, many angles and many sub-plots for everyone to reflect upon. But for me, I'll always remember Brodeur's demeanor and reaction when the game ended. I have to think that being on that ice as the loser, in his home country, was just like walking to the gallows, walking to his untimely death.

Like a thirsty, dizzy horse trudging through the desert, I'm starting to sense that Brodeur's is slowly drying up. The long arm of time is close to touching his shoulder. I'm sure he can continue to play, but how long until his style is no longer effective? It remains to be seen if he will have a chance to fight back in this tournament, but after this loss to Team USA, I'd have to think it will most likely be Luongo's team from here on out. And how Brodeur reacts once the NHL resumes play will only be determined by his ability to shake off a horrific loss and re-focus on the Stanley Cup.

A few days ago, a shootout hero. Today, a victim of a fierce attack. Such is the life of an NHL goaltender.

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Live Chat Replay
from the USA/CAN game for a live scouting report I did for both goalies.