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Cold Upset: How the American 1980 Olympic Hockey Victory Restored Patriotism in America

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Certain events transpire that are so significant, that most people recall exactly where they were and what they were doing when those events happened. This can be said about the 1980 Olympic hockey game between the Soviet Union and the United States. This event, which Al Michaels and many others today refer to as a miracle, is considered to be one of, if not the greatest upset in sports history. Occurring about eleven years prior to the complete fall of the Soviet Union, this victory was more than just a hockey victory, it was a victory for America. This win helped bring back hope into the hearts of the Americans, which they were lacking during the 1970s. The energy crisis that brought gas lines around the block, the Iran hostage crisis that had everyday news coverage for months, and the presidents that created distrust among the American citizens had disheartened the American public. This matchup was basically seen as the communists against the capitalists, especially for those viewers who were not into sports. Being viewed as more than just a hockey game, this Olympic victory for the United States sparked the utmost pride in the hearts of Americans despite the recent adverse events of the 1970s.

Vietnam and Watergate

After the end of the Second World War, Americans embraced a new and bonding patriotism. The 1950s saw the nuclear family become the dominant focus for conservative values. Levittown suburbia began a growth in the affordable family home and being American was embraced as a blessing after coming out of World War II as a superpower. Unfortunately, this attitude only lasted a little over a decade. After President John F. Kennedy was shot in 1963, the country's morale went downhill. Conspiracy theories started to emerge about who murdered the beloved Camelot President. Some theories suggested that it was an agency within the government such as the FBI or the Secret Service. This put the American people on edge and in

shock that something of this caliber could have been possible. Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as president only hours after JFK was murdered. The Vietnam War escalated and Americans felt that it was an unwinnable war and a waste of life. The response was numerous protests and public outbursts, especially on college campuses. This was an example of the difference from the 1950s; teens became more involved and rebellious. Instead of helping out with the war like in the 1940s, riots and anti-war protests occurred throughout the United States. Johnson wanted to be known as the president that never lost a war. Unfortunately, his way of achieving that was through increasing military forces, and lying to the American public about what was really going on. Johnson decided not to run for office again in the 1968 election, and left the undeniable horror of Vietnam to the next commander in chief.

That next president had a difficult time with the American public just like his predecessor. Richard M. Nixon was left to deal with the horrors of Vietnam along with displeasure from the American people. Trying to end the war was difficult, and Nixon's right-hand man and national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, had to deal with the members of the North Vietnamese government. Kissinger met Le Duc Tho, the head of the Communist Party of Vietnam, a few times to discuss peace settlements in the early 1970s.¹ It seemed almost impossible to agree on any settlement, and the North Vietnamese were not ready to back down. Kissinger had to go through many negotiations before a settlement was agreed upon. After a Christmas day bombing ordered by President Nixon, the two sides reached a peace agreement a little less than a month later.² The U.S. was able to pull out, and the American people were able

¹ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 358-368.

² *Ibid.*, 370-371.

to take a breath after many years of angst.³ The war officially ended in 1975 after the fall of Saigon.

Before the official end of the war, Nixon resigned during to the infamous Watergate scandal. This scandal made Americans skeptical of the government from that moment on. After Nixon's exit, *Time* magazine described Watergate as: "America's most traumatic political experience of the century."⁴ The Vietnam War, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy and now Watergate, had all disheartened Americans and faith in politicians was now lost.⁵ Arguably the most popular and trusted individual in America at the time, news anchor Walter Cronkite stated that he wanted to scrub out the Oval Office with Lysol. Historian Richard Hofstadter referred to America at the time as "paranoid" during the mid-1970s. Hofstadter referred to Americans becoming more and more suspicious of the government and more conspiracies were arising about American politicians.⁶ In a negative connotation, the American public was worse than they were a decade ago, and it only got worse from there.

Middle Eastern Issues

As Jimmy Carter became the new president, foreign issues were still the main problem for the country. The Middle East came on the radar of the United States for the next couple of years. A hostage situation and an energy crisis became significant negative events towards the end of the decade. Not only did President Carter have to deal with those two events, but there was also economic inflation. The inflation raised prices on goods especially gasoline. The inflation was known as stagflation, because of the quick and high rise of the inflation

³ Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

percentage.⁷ The inflation price rose to a whopping fifteen percent in 1979 and gasoline was up fifty-five percent. Certain states limited how much gas cars could purchase and gas lines became massive. A very small number of the American people believed there was an actual oil issue; the majority blamed it on large oil companies and bureaucrats.⁸ At this point it was normal for the citizens to not exactly believe what was being told to them, considering what they had encountered in the last decade. It did not seem like President Carter was understanding the dilemma the American people faced. On one occasion, the domestic advisor to the president, Stuart Eisenstadt, had to wait forty-five minutes in line to get gas and arrived at the White House extremely frustrated.⁹ Many Americans acted the same way Eisenstadt did and were frankly fed up with the leadership in the U.S.

While this domestic issue was going on, a foreign issue began to make headlines. In early November of 1979, the American embassy was taken over in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The embassy was taken over by a group of Iranian students who were in support of the Iranian revolution, which started a year prior. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah, and the United States had a similar enemy in communism and the Iranian students were not supporters of the Shah. The students were supporters of the Ayatollah Khomeini who took control in March of 1979.¹⁰ Over fifty Americans from the U.S. embassy were held hostage for nearly 450 days (Appendix A). The American public did not take kindly to this and were not going to let their voices be unheard. Disc jockeys came out with tunes relating to the incident such as “Go to Hell Ayatollah,” and “Take your Oil and Shove it.”¹¹ College students chanted sayings that suggested

⁷ Ibid., 295.

⁸ Ibid., 299.

⁹ Ibid., 300.

¹⁰ David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.

¹¹ Ibid., 315.

America should bomb Iran to release the hostages. At Christmas time, yellow ribbons, bumper stickers, and American flags were seen as a caring notion for the crisis. With a daily reminder of how long this had been going on, the news informed the public about the situation that seemed like it would never end. Americans, however, were not ready to be ashamed again after Vietnam and the energy crisis.¹² The mission to retrieve the hostages safely was known as “Operation Eagle Claw.”¹³ Unfortunately, two aircraft crashed and killed eight servicemen. The press did not hold back as they printed a picture of a worn out, gray Carter on the front page that read, “a military, diplomatic and public fiasco.”¹⁴ As the days went on and the hostages were still in captivity, the American people began to lose hope and faith that the hostages would never make it back home. They were disappointed once again by another president and were completely fed up with the people involved in the government. Overseas in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union made things a lot tougher for the American people towards the end of the 1970s.

Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

In 1979 the Soviet Union did something that had not been done since the Second World War, which was invade another country. The Soviets took military and political control of the country. The idea of this invasion stemmed from a desire to expand communism in other parts of the world where the Soviets had not yet gained control. General Secretary of the Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev claimed, “it’ll be over in three to four weeks,” dismissing American concerns.¹⁵ Americans hearing this news, continued to be distraught by the idea that the Soviets were the better superpower. President Jimmy Carter gave a speech known as the “Crisis of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 405.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 61.

Confidence Speech.” President Carter gave this speech in the summer of 1979, after his popularity ratings had been dropping for a number of months. Americans believed that his administration had lost direction. This speech, which was his response to this crisis of confidence in his ability to lead the nation, further eroded popular support for the president. Carter stated: “It's clear that the true problems of our Nation are much deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or recession. We simply must have faith in each other, faith in our course. We simply must have faith in each other, faith in our ability to govern ourselves, and faith in the future of this Nation.”¹⁶ At this time, the dominant Soviet hockey team was getting ready for the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. As the United States was hosting the Olympics in the winter, interestingly enough, the summer Olympics was going to be held in Moscow. Carter made a decision to boycott the summer games in Moscow due to the invasion of Afghanistan.

Building a Team

Prior to the Olympics in Lake Placid, Minnesota and Boston were two places that would be talked about for the next several months. Herb Brooks was asked to coach the team due his experience coaching at the University of Minnesota. Brooks had been the last player cut from the 1960 U.S. Olympic hockey team, which won gold. This gave Brooks all the more reason to pick the best team that would have the greatest chance of winning the gold medal. Unlike the Olympics today, hockey players back then were not professional, they were mainly players from college hockey. This made the experience more authentic, and most of the fans watching would not know who the players on team were. Brooks was fresh off a national title win with his hockey team from the University of Minnesota. Brooks was not looking for the best players, he

¹⁶ “Crisis of Confidence” Speech, July 15, 1979, in Daniel Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of the 1970s* (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2005), 109-119.

was looking for the right ones. Interestingly enough, Brooks knew exactly who he wanted by June of 1979. Twelve of the twenty players selected for the Olympics were from Minnesota, and nine of them played under Brooks at the University of Minnesota.¹⁷ What would become the amazing story of the 1980 United States Olympic hockey team unfolded through an assortment of players, and a little bit of good luck, all put together by Herb Brooks.¹⁸ He was extremely thorough and focused on each player he invited to play in the 1979 National Sports Festival in Colorado Springs.¹⁹ Jim Craig, who later became the starting goalie of the team, was invited and showed Brooks he could be trusted in front of the net. This festival was put on in order to display the talents of each player. The players would engage in head to head competitions, and partake in high-level training. About seventy players were split into four teams. Before this festival, Brooks was a busy man. He was constantly calling family members of players, coaches, and even teachers to understand the players he was recruiting.²⁰ Brooks was determined to be straight and honest with the players who might have had alternatives if not chosen for the Olympic team. Some players had possible contracts with the National Hockey League.²¹ John Gilbert, was a reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune* at the time of the Olympics. He met with Brooks and wanted the inside scoop on the players he selected before Brooks publicly announced it. Gilbert guessed most of the players Brooks had selected and noticed the sizeable number of players from the University of Minnesota. Brooks thought it would cause some controversy, but he did not care and knew who he wanted on his team at Lake Placid.²²

¹⁷ Wayne Coffey, *The Boys of Winter: The Untold Story of a Coach, a Dream, and the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), viii.

¹⁸ John Gilbert, *Herb Brooks: The Inside Story of a Hockey Mastermind* (Minneapolis: MVP Books, 2008), 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

²² *Ibid.*

After many tryouts, Brooks found his squad. Brooks had seven months to work his team to their fullest potential. Team USA began to play exhibition games against different countries to prepare for the Olympic Games. One of those games was against the Soviet Union. Herb Brooks, similar to other Americans, was not a fan of the Soviet Union. Brooks would try to fire up his players by denouncing the Soviets. He would make fun of the players' faces, call them old, and say that their reign was over. American players were a little intimidated just to be on the ice with the Soviet players. Regarding the exhibition game against the Soviets on February 9, 1980, forward on the U.S. team, John Harrington, stated: "It was hard to even warm up. Kharlamov, Petrov, Mikhailov... they were the guys I saw beating the NHL All-Stars on TV."²³ The game was held at Madison Square Garden in New York City. The Soviets had won four gold medals prior to the 1980 Winter Olympics, so they were recognized by the viewers as the best team in the world. The Soviet players were a part of the Red Army, which meant they were soldiers, who happened to be extremely talented at hockey. Up until the semi-final game against the U.S., the Red Army endured vigorous training and complete devotion to the sport. The Red Army was about to show the world why they were multiple gold medal winners.

Over 11,000 fans attended the exhibition game between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Soviets were met with a polite applause when they skated onto the ice for warmups. The U.S. team was met with thunderous applause and the Star-Spangled Banner was sung by musical theatre performer, Ron Raines. Raines was emotional during the song. When he sang the words "land of the free," he raised his fist in the air, and the crowd roared loud enough to drown out the last few lyrics of the song.²⁴

²³ Coffey, *The Boys of Winter*, 26.

²⁴ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 178.

The Soviets started the game off intensely, displaying their astounding talents to the world. The Soviets scored four quick goals at the first intermission, and did not stop there. They would go on to score six more goals. The Soviets beat the U.S. by a score of 10-3.²⁵ That game exemplified the talent the Soviets had, and it seemed as though they were going home with their fifth straight gold medal.

The players knew how tough the Soviet team was and they were not too optimistic about their chances. Forward on the U.S. team, Mark Johnson, stated: “If you asked anyone on our team and they told you we could beat the Russians, they would’ve been lying.”²⁶ Brooks knew he had to change the style of play if he wanted his team to have any chance of defeating the Soviets. Brooks knew that the Soviets won numerous gold medals because they had a great team chemistry. They did not rely solely on the talent of each individual.

The team that Brooks had ready for the Olympics, was a team that was different than what the other nations had. Team USA consisted of college players. Well recognized names from the team were players such as Mike Eruzione, Jim Craig, Mark Johnson and Jack O’Callahan. Mark Johnson was the only player not from Massachusetts, and was one of two players from Wisconsin; the other being Bob Suter.²⁷ Eruzione, Craig and O’Callahan all attended Boston University. Eruzione was the second oldest on the team, a month younger than William Schneider.²⁸ Eruzione attended Berwick Academy in Maine, which was a skill school for hockey players. After leaving Berwick, Eruzione attended Boston University.²⁹ He had initially opted for

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁷ Ibid., viii.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Milton Richman, “Mike Eruzione: All He Does is Beat You,” *Ellensburg Daily Record*, February 26, 1980, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=CFhUAAAIBAJ&sjid=lo8DAAAIBAJ&pg=6769.3524363&dq=mike+eruzione&hl=en> (accessed October 26, 2017).

another school, but he switched to Boston after his coach forgot his name.³⁰ Eruzione, as well as Craig and O'Callahan, came from middle class families.³¹ Craig and O'Callahan helped Boston University win the collegiate hockey championship in 1978. These players were talented players that grew up around hockey, but were nowhere near the skill level of the Soviet players.

The Soviet players were professionals who played hockey since they were born. The Soviets top defenseman, Viacheslav Fetisov, joined the Red Army team at age sixteen.³² He would go on to play for that team for thirteen years. Fetisov became accustomed to their style of play and created a great team chemistry with the other players. This helped the team's dominance for decades. Like Fetisov, other members of the Red Army joined the team at a young age. Starting goalie of the Red Army, Vladislav Tretiak, played in his first competitive hockey game at the age of eleven.³³ He quickly drew the attention of Soviet hockey officials and at age fifteen he was allowed to practice with the Red Army club. Two years later he was added to the team's roster. He helped the team win three gold medals and ten world championships.³⁴ These players were dominant from a young age and were a force to be reckoned with in the 1980 Winter Olympics.

Brooks and his players tried not to get involved in the political realm, but to focus on the task at hand. However, the players were not living under a rock and knew exactly what the circumstances were before playing the game against the Soviets. A few days before the game, goalie Jim Craig stated: "I hate them. I don't hate their hockey players specifically, but I hate what they stand for. If I lose, I go back to St. Paul's Payne Avenue. If Tikhonov loses, he goes to

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kevin Shea, "One on One with Viacheslav Fetisov," *The Official Site of the Hockey Hall of Fame*, February 27, 2006, http://www.hhof.com/htmlSpotlight/spot_oneononep200101.shtml (accessed October 26, 2017).

³³ Parul Jain, "Biography of Vladislav Tretiak," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, September 25, 2012. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladislav-Tretiak> (accessed October 26, 2017).

³⁴ Ibid.

Siberia.”³⁵ There was a clear tension between the Soviet and American players, and both were aware of the differing ideologies that were in the public sector during the Cold War. In this Cold War climate, Americans were being reminded to stand tall in the face of perceived Communist threat. Athletic competition became a source for illustrating more effectively what was expected of a resolute, strong, and united nation.³⁶

The Games

Before playing the Soviets, the U.S. had to compete against other teams to even have a shot of facing the Soviets. Brooks introduced a new style of playing. The players were taught to weave in and out of lanes, creating a fluid and seamless web on the ice. Players had to be fast, they had to be creative, and most importantly, they had to buy into the strategy of Herb Brooks. The tactics, the mental games, the demanding practices, and his relentless pursuit of perfection clearly paid off.³⁷

The college boys dominated other teams before the semi-final game. Fans started to emerge after a big win against Czechoslovakia, part of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. After the conclusion of certain matchups, the players would line up at center ice and smile, many times saluting to the fans. They would hoist their sticks to the fans on one side of the rink, then they would turn around and hoist them to the other side.³⁸ The U.S. would play five games before the medal rounds in the Blue division and they did not lose one game. The only time the U.S. did not win was against Sweden which resulted in a tie. The Soviets, on the other hand, won five games

³⁵ Donald E. Abelson, "Politics on Ice: The United States, the Soviet Union, and a Hockey Game in Lake Placid," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40, no.1 (2010): 85.

³⁶ Joel Nathan Rosen, *The Erosion of American Sporting Ethos: Shifting Attitudes Towards Competition* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2007), 77.

³⁷ Abelson, "Politics on Ice," 72.

³⁸ E.M. Swift, "A Reminder Of What We Can Be: The 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team," *Sports Illustrated*, October 28, 2014, <https://www.si.com/olympic-ice-hockey/2014/10/28/reminder-what-we-can-be-1980-us-olympic-hockey-team-si-60> (accessed October 17, 2017).

and lost zero. The committee that made the schedule took great care in scheduling the Red division, which consisted of the Soviet Union. The committee knew that if the United States did well, they would face off against the Soviets in the semi-final game.³⁹

Team USA received hundreds of telegrams from all over the country inspiring the U.S. Team to crush the Soviets. The team understood that more was at stake than just a medal. Despite efforts of Herb Brooks to keep his players out of Cold War politics, the U.S. hockey Team had been propelled into the national and international spotlight. In a matter of time, the college kids became America's hope for reasserting the country's strength and skill.⁴⁰

The day before the U.S.-Soviet game, Brooks held a meeting after practice and told his players that the Russians were ripe; they were lethargic, and their passes had lost their crispness. Twenty-four hours before the game, they could see it. The timing was right. The boys chose to forget the pre-Olympic defeat.⁴¹

Americans were well aware of what was coming their way through the television screen on February 22. *Sports Illustrated* author E.M. Swift stated: “after all, during the Cold War, any major event that involved a matchup between the Soviets and Americans, whether it was a chess tournament or, in this case, a hockey game, was bound to be viewed as a... competition between two... sets of ideological beliefs.”⁴² Al Michaels, who was known for calling the semi-final game, summed up the viewers of the game. Michaels said that millions of Americans watching the U.S.-Soviet game probably: "don't know the difference between a blue line and a clothes

³⁹ Coffey, *The Boys of Winter*, 36.

⁴⁰ Abelson, “Politics on Ice,” 64.

⁴¹ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁴² *Ibid.*

line.”⁴³ Americans became captivated by the American story of a bunch of college kids squaring off against the greatest hockey team in the world.

The Semi-Final Game

The United States of America against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Capitalism against Communism. College kids against four straight gold medal winners. David versus Goliath part II. The game that was in the mind of Herb Brooks was to unfold in front of his eyes. The team that he practically became obsessed with was facing off against his team. The team that he studied thoroughly and wanted to play like, but most importantly, defeat. Prior to the game, ABC network requested that the game be rescheduled from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, so that it could be broadcast live in primetime hours. However, the request was declined by the Soviets. They complained it would cause the game to air at 4 a.m. Moscow Time. As a result, ABC decided not to broadcast the game live for the U.S. audience, and the tape delayed it for broadcast during its primetime block of Olympics coverage instead. Before the game aired, ABC's Olympics host Jim McKay openly stated that the game had already occurred, but that they had promised not to spoil its results.⁴⁴ The broadcasters for the game were well-known commentator Al Michaels, and former Montreal Canadiens goalie Ken Dryden. The face value of the tickets was priced at \$67 each.⁴⁵

Brooks energized his team in the locker room minutes before the team took the ice. Brooks gave a speech that the team would never forget and would go down as one of the best pregame speeches in sports history. Some of the lines that Brooks said were: “you were born to

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Richard Sandomir, “Miracle on Ice of 1980 Looks Different Today,” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/22/sports/tv-sports-miracle-on-ice-of-1980-looks-different-today.html? r=0>. (accessed October 17, 2017).

⁴⁵ Virgil Moody, “1980 Olympic Hockey USA vs USSR,” (Filmed February 22, 1980), YouTube Video, 1:52:11, Posted September 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR56GJ05IMs&t=83s> (accessed October 17, 2017).

be a hockey player. You were meant to be here. The moment is yours.”⁴⁶ Regarding the speech, forward Mark Johnson stated: “Herb’s pregame speech captured the moment. That’s why he is so successful. He had vision, he was the ultimate salesman. He sold us on what he was teaching, and we believed it.”⁴⁷ Other players talked about his amazing mental approach and how even though they were terrified to play, Coach Brooks always made them ready to win.⁴⁸

One of the main strategies of Coach Brooks was to attack the Soviets rather than defend. That is exactly what Team USA did. The Soviets scored early around the nine-minute mark. The United States answered back five minutes later with a goal by the forward from Minnesota William Schneider. At the fifteen-minute mark, the game was tied at one and there was already a different feeling in the air. Before the game, Jack O’Callahan observed: “We were more relaxed, and more focused.”⁴⁹ The team was no longer in awe of the Big Red Machine. In the practices leading up to the U.S.-Soviet game, Brooks repeatedly told his players that he had noticed something about how the Soviets were playing. “Herb kept telling us in practice if anybody can beat ‘em, you can,” Mike Eruzione stated. “They’re taking everybody for granted here. It’s not the same team. You can beat them.”⁵⁰ The Soviets did not look as dominant as they normally did and the U.S. was catching on. The Soviets took the lead with a couple minutes left in the first period with a goal by Sergie Makarov. When the clock was winding down in the first period, Mark Johnson jumped over the wall onto the ice, and scored with one second left in the first period to tie the game once again.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 210.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Abelson, “Politics on Ice,” 76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Moody, “1980 Olympic Hockey USA vs USSR.”

The game between the United States and Sweden, had drawn little media interest and even less fanfare. Over half the seats in the arena remained empty during that game. This game was different. The fans were cheering loud and the seats were filled. Chants of “USA USA” erupted in the stadium, especially when the U.S. scored a goal.⁵² The fans were well aware of the circumstances of the game, and they were not going to miss a historic moment in history.

The Soviets did something that they did not do the entire tournament. They put their top goalie, Vladislav Tretiak, the best goalie in the world, on the bench. The U.S. had to capitalize on that player switch. The Soviets scored at the beginning of the second period, and neither team scored for the rest of the period. The third period was all about team USA. Jim Craig allowed zero goals and the defense helped to only allow six shots on goal. The Soviets allowed less shots on goal, but the U.S. was able to score two out of those six shots.⁵³ The backup goalie for the Soviets, Vladimir Myshkin, allowed Mark Johnson to score for the second time of the game and then Captain Mike Eruzione to score two minutes later. The U.S. took advantage of a couple penalties suffered by the Soviet team. After each goal in the third period the stadium erupted. American flags were waving fiercely, people were taking photos, and the crowd was cheering together. Brooks and the U.S. bench would scream and fist pump and excite their team even more.⁵⁴ The fans and the team began to realize that this win was more and more of a possibility as the clock ran down.

The roar of the crowd amplified when Eruzione scored the goal that gave the U.S. the lead. The red light went on and Eruzione ran on his skates along the boards only to be joined by the rest of his team, who had cleared the bench to take part in the celebration. The realization

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Coffey, *The Boys of Winter*, 265.

⁵⁴ Moody, “1980 Olympic Hockey USA vs USSR.”

settled in that the U.S. was less than ten minutes from beating the Soviets. The U.S. had to play phenomenal defense to not allow the Soviets to tie the game. They did exactly that.

Brooks had worked his boys so much before the game, the team ended up outskating the Soviets in the end. They were the best conditioned team and that was an important factor in maintaining stamina throughout the whole game. The Soviets looked weary as the clock ran down. Al Michaels and the fans in the arena counted down the clock. Michaels, anxiously anticipating a U.S. victory, exclaimed his famous call, "Do you believe in miracles?" Yes!⁵⁵ The players rushed onto the ice hugging and cheering (Appendix B).

As the celebrations continued in the arena, news of the U.S. victory spread like wildfire through the village of Lake Placid. Cars honked their horns, people flooded the streets chanting USA and waving flags and banners in the air. Not too long after the clock hit zero, t-shirts depicting the U.S. win were for sale. Ironically, the results of the game had not been conveyed to viewers across the United States which, as noted, would be watching the event later that night.⁵⁶

The next day, word got out about the unbelievable victory in Lake Placid. A variety of newspapers displayed the U.S. team celebrating after the triumph. The next morning the *Washington Post's* headline read, "U.S. Shocks Soviets in Ice Hockey, 4-3." The article then talked about the next game against Finland for the gold, but that was not as important as defeating the communists. The *Washington Post* also stated: "The U.S. won on a 20-foot wrist shot by team captain Mike Eruzione, whose name means eruption in Italian, with 10 minutes remaining."⁵⁷ The *Daily News* also put out an article with a headline that read "Miracle on Ice!

⁵⁵ Abelson, "Politics on Ice," 80.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Leonard Shapiro, "U.S. Shocks Soviets in Ice Hockey, 4-3," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1980 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/sports/longterm/olympics1998/history/memories/80-hock.htm> (accessed October 17, 2017).

Mike Eruzione's goal, Jim Craig's heroics lead U.S. to stunning upset over the Russians in Lake Placid, 4-3.” The article stated: “Not since Jesse Owens ran for gold in Hitler's Germany in 1936 has an athletic triumph stirred such an outpouring of patriotic pride.”⁵⁸ The newspapers were excited just as the rest of the American people. Americans felt a breath of fresh air as their hockey team beat the Soviets and had a chance at the gold medal.

The Aftermath

Herb Brooks would receive a call from President Carter when the game was concluded. Brooks said: “He said we made the U.S. proud, and he invited us to the White House. My banker called, too. I don’t know what he wanted, but I’m afraid to call him back.”⁵⁹ Brooks was loose and laughing. He had a variety of emotions running through his body. Many reporters were charging through the snow in an attempt to get into the locker room. One reporter named Bill Barker stated: “I still can’t believe it. We were singing ‘God Bless America’... we had to teach a few of the guys the words.”⁶⁰ The team would go on to defeat Finland by a score of four to two after trailing behind once again. The United States hockey team were champions again. The U.S. team poured onto the ice in celebration for the last time. Watching the U.S. celebrate on the ice, a fan decided to throw Jim Craig an American flag, which he then draped around his shoulders like a cape.⁶¹ Vice President Walter Mondale visited the team in Lake Placid after the victory. When in the dressing room, Mondale asked, “How many of you are from Minnesota.”⁶² Comedic relief was now in the American atmosphere. Brooks responded with a poignant patriotic statement: “No one is from Minnesota, Mr. Vice President, we’re all from the USA.” The family of William

⁵⁸ Leonard Shapiro, “U.S. Shocks Soviets in Ice Hockey, 4-3.”

⁵⁹ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 218.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Schneider, who scored the first goal for the U.S. in the semi-final game, watched the medals ceremony at a bar forty miles outside of Lake Placid.⁶³ The bartender gave the family free drinks and cheered when he realized who they were.⁶⁴ Schneider's mother cried during the national anthem and when Mike Eruzione gathered everyone on the podium with him.⁶⁵

After the U.S. team received their gold medals, they headed to the White House for lunch. As the team bus made its way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the players were amazed to see hundreds of people in the streets welcoming them and the other U.S. Olympic athletes to the nation's capital. Very shortly, Brooks and his team realized the impact their victory had on the United States.⁶⁶ A sign read: "USA hockey team, best thing on ice since scotch."⁶⁷ At the White House, President Carter stated: "For me, as President of the United States of America, this is one of the proudest moments that I've ever experienced ... Their victory was one of the most breathtaking upsets not only in Olympic history but in the entire history of sport."⁶⁸ Due to the significance of the semi-final game victory, the rest of the athletes in the 1980 Winter Olympics became irrelevant.⁶⁹ The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research conducted a survey a month after the 1980 Games concluded. One question asked: "Now that the Winter Olympics are over, would you say they made you proud, or less proud...of your country.?"⁷⁰ Seventy-five percent said the team made them prouder of their country. This one victory overrode the pain that occurred in the 1970s. The victory demonstrated that the United States would forever remain a guiding light to all who value freedom and honor.⁷¹

⁶³ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 260.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Abelson, "Politics on Ice," 85.

⁶⁷ Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch*, 134.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷¹ Abelson, "Politics on Ice," 87.

On the other hand, the Soviets did not take kindly to receiving the silver medal. The team never turned the medals back in to have their names inscribed on them. Forward Sergei Makarov said that his medal was possibly in a garbage can in Lake Placid somewhere.⁷² Newspapers back in the Soviet Union did not mention anything about the loss to the United States. A janitor found over a hundred bottles of vodka in the Soviet locker room after the loss.⁷³ The players left New York in a swift manner. Some players began to argue on the way back to the Soviet Union and yell at each other about the poor performance. Right winger Boris Mikhailov told each of them, "This is your loss."⁷⁴ Players talked about the poor greeting they received when they returned to the Soviet Union. Makarov said: "The politicians wanted to kill us."⁷⁵ The loss was received as an utter disappointment and a failure in not capturing the gold medal.⁷⁶

The Soviet team was still a gifted team despite their loss to the United States. They would go on to win two consecutive gold medals after that.⁷⁷ Players began to seek hockey opportunities other than the Red Army. Players such as Viacheslav Fetisov and Vladislav Tretiak would go on to play in the National Hockey League.⁷⁸ The process of leaving Russia and moving to America to play professional hockey became an easier process once communism fell in 1991. The leaders involved in the Red Army club and politicians did not want the players to leave.⁷⁹ The higher ups in the Soviet Union felt it was disrespectful and treasonous to leave and play for the enemy.⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, the Soviet players figured they would live a better life in the United States.

⁷² Coffey, *The Boys of Winter*, 259.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁷⁶ "Red Army," directed by Gabe Polsky (Los Angeles: Sony Pictures Classic, 2014), Documentary, Netflix.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ "Red Army," directed by Gabe Polsky.

The impact of the semi-final victory was still felt years after that February night in Lake Placid. On the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet game, Sergei Makarov was in San Jose, California when Mike Eruzione was introduced before a Sharks game and got a prolonged standing ovation. Makarov stated: "I played twenty-four years of professional hockey, and I never hear noise like he hears twenty-years after one game."⁸¹ Thirteen players from the U.S. team went on to play in the National Hockey League.⁸² Eruzione was not one of them. His last goal was the fourth and final goal scored in the semi-final game. He retired a week after the Games, having no notion that he would still be talking about them twenty-five years later.⁸³

As for Herb Brooks, he would go on to coach Sweden and France in the Olympics in the 1990s.⁸⁴ He coached four NHL teams, one of them being the New York Rangers, coaching in a state where his Olympic team won the gold medal.⁸⁵ Brooks would coach the U.S. one more time in 2002. The U.S. team did well, but did not win the final game. They received the silver medal after losing to Canada.⁸⁶ Four months after winning the gold medal in Lake Placid, Brooks wrote each of his players a letter. Some of the words written were: "I feel respect is the greatest reward in the world of sport. I stayed away from close personal contacts with you. I did not want the U.S. Hockey Community to say that regionalism and/or favoritism entered into my final selections. This year was a challenge for all of us... Live and work as a unit... If there was any team I ever wanted to identify with on a personal basis, this was the team."⁸⁷ Realizing the

⁸¹ Coffey, *The Boys of Winter*, 261.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 262.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 281-282.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁸⁷ Coffey, *The Boys of Winter*, 263.

significance and the legacy of the victory, in 2005 Lake Placid decided to rename the Olympic Fieldhouse, Herb Brooks Arena.⁸⁸

To portray what happened that incredible night to the ones who might have missed it, films and documentaries came out over the years depicting the semi-final game. These include *Red Army*, *Of Miracles and Men*, and the most famous film, *Miracle*. The film does a respectable job of retelling the famous upset. One quote from the film that the film producers believed was the attitude during the Olympics was said by the General Manager of the Winter Olympics: “Think of what the reporters have had to write about. Afghanistan, hostages... your guys just kicked the crap out of Czechoslovakia. This is something that this country is ready for.”⁸⁹ The film represented patriotism and inspiration. The film made the audience feel as though they were there that momentous night in Lake Placid. Unfortunately, Herb Brooks died one year prior to the release of the film. He never saw the film, he lived it.

As for communism, the Berlin Wall in Germany would fall nine years after the Olympics in Lake Placid. The same year that the U.S. hockey team won gold, Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter by a landslide in the U.S. presidential election (Appendix C). The American people were clearly ready for a new confident president.⁹⁰ The hostages were released on the day of Ronald Reagan’s inauguration day, after being held hostage for 444 days. Capitalism prevailed and the victory of the 1980 semi-final game success lived on.

A few months before the Los Angeles Summer Olympics in 1984 began, the Soviets would boycott it, due to the U.S. decision to boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. Americans were in favor of the boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Americans understood and

⁸⁸ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 226.

⁸⁹ “Miracle,” directed by Gavin O’Connor (Los Angeles: Walt Disney Pictures, 2004), DVD.

⁹⁰ Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 343.

appreciated Carter's decision. Newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Boston Herald* had an over sixty percent approval rating for the Olympic boycott.⁹¹ A public opinion poll that the U.S. Olympic Committee commissioned showed that while the boycott still had public support, it was much weaker than at the beginning of the year.⁹² However, Carter's approval would decrease as the hostages were still in Iran, and the gas lines were still affecting Americans daily. The semi-final victory came against the background of never-ending chaos and embarrassment.⁹³ A joke circulated around the White House regarding the invasion and hostage situation. The joke was that the ghost of Theodore Roosevelt would be in the White House asking President Carter about the conflicts. When asked about the invasion in Afghanistan Carter would reply: "I am going to boycott the Olympics." When asked about the hostage situation Carter said: "We're using diplomatic restraint." Roosevelt jokingly said back to Carter's decisions on the matters: "next you're going to tell me you gave away the Panama Canal."⁹⁴ Americans felt that presidents before Carter would disapprove of his decisions and argue with him to take a stronger stance.

The 1980 semi-final game showed the impact sports can have on the American people. This game brought unity that was hiding behind aversion and anger during the 1970s. The game was meant to be treated as any regular sports game, but that was impossible considering the circumstances. If the U.S. hockey team won gold and did not have to go through the Soviets, people would not care as much. The fact that the U.S. beat the so-called enemy of the country made the victory all the more historic. The game was the sports story of the century.⁹⁵ In 2000

⁹¹ Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch*, 86.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹³ Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 321.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Gilbert, *Herb Brooks*, 302.

Sports Illustrated, named its choices for the top one hundred sports stories of the twentieth century. Team USA was number one.⁹⁶ After that choice, Wayne Gretsky, former Canadian hockey legend, said to Herb Brooks: “I’m happy for you, but this is the United States, and I didn’t think they’d pick a hockey game.” *Sports Illustrated* still recognized how important and remarkable that upset was. As for the American people, they were given an optimistic moment that will never be forgotten and will be etched in American sports history. As America watched a group of outstanding young men win the gold, the nation was given a chance for one night to once again, believe.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁹⁷ “Miracle,” directed by Gavin O’Connor (Los Angeles: Walt Disney Pictures, 2004), DVD.

APPENDICES

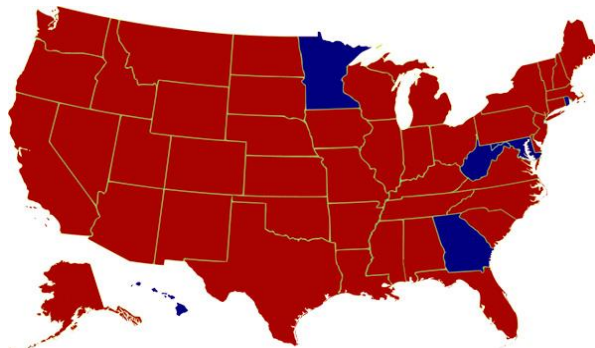
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