

Union College

Cold War and the Olympics: An Athlete's Perspective

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When President Jimmy Carter decided to boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow, it was the largest act of political interference in the history of the Olympics. It began in December of 1979 when Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. Carter was having a difficult time getting the hostages back so in response to the invasion of Afghanistan Carter gave the Soviets one month to withdraw their troops or the United States would boycott their Olympics. Since the Soviets did not respect the demands of the President, Carter stuck to his threat and the United States did not participate in the 1980 Moscow games as well as 65 other nations. Although this was not the President's decision to make, overwhelming support from the public as well as pressure from Congress made the United States Olympic Committee respect the government's actions and officially boycotted the 1980 Olympics. This was an extreme case of Cold War politics.¹

In response to the US boycott of the Moscow Games, the Soviet Union countered by boycotting the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. The Soviets led a communist-bloc boycott as retaliation for the Americans boycotting their Olympics. The Soviet government claimed they boycotted the Los Angeles games because they felt their athletes would not be safe from anti-communist protests and hysteria but that was just an excuse. The American public as well as the athletes in the games had no problem with Soviet athletes, just their government's actions.

¹ "Carter Announces Olympic Boycott," history.com.

President Ronald Reagan stated that the Soviet boycott was, “a blatant political decision for which there was no real justification.”² The Soviet protest did not have much as an effect because only 13 other communist nations joined but it was a way for them to put their foot down and send their own political message.

Both protests failed. The US boycotted to pressure the Soviets into withdrawing from Afghanistan but the Soviets refused and the war lasted ten years. The Soviet boycott was retaliation, which really accomplished nothing. The only thing the boycotts accomplished was that they penalized their athletes who live for the Olympics. If any American athlete chose to go to the Moscow Olympics as an individual participating under the Olympic flag would be penalized by stripping them of their passport. Twenty-five American athletes protested the boycott but obviously lost the case.³ All these athletes did was train to be Olympians. By boycotting and not letting these athletes compete, the governments of both countries were taking everything away from them because of politics. The Olympics should be a place where sport is above politics but in these cases, political messages were sent as well as played out on the court and on the ice.

When the Olympics were reborn in the same place where they originated, Athens, the purpose was to place sports above politics and remove corruption. The 1896 Summer Olympics in Athens was the birth of the modern Olympics where athletes from 14 countries came to compete.⁴ The idea to revive the Olympic games

² “Soviets Announce Boycott of 1984 Olympics,” history.com.

³ “Carter Announces Olympic Boycott,” history.com.

⁴ “First Modern Olympics is Held,” history.com

came from French educator Baron Pierre de Coubertin. He met with international sports leaders from nine countries, which included the United States and Soviet Union, and his proposition was eagerly received. The original games held back in the golden age of Greece were religious festivals honoring the Gods. The victors would thank the Gods, revered as heroes, and received gifts. However, even back then, winning and their benefits corrupted the original purpose of the games.⁵ Coubertin was a founding member of the IOC and served as president from 1896 to 1925. Coubertin's goal in reviving the Olympics resided in "a focus on the liberal democratic and character-building properties of school sport."⁶ He exhausted all of his time and energy to get this done because he wanted "the pursuit of peace and intercultural communication through international sport."⁷ That was the purpose of the modern games, to celebrate sport.

The 1980 and 1984 boycotts were two of the most commonly known boycotts but it was not the first time politics interfered to this magnitude. In fact, Olympic boycotts were not all that uncommon. Back in 1956, Western European governments boycotted the Melbourne games because of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, similar to the US reasons in 1980. Also, in 1976, almost all of Sub-Saharan Africa boycotted the Montreal games to protest the attendance of New Zealand over a rugby match against a team from apartheid South Africa. Many political messages have been sent through the games; however, it only hurts the athletes. The Olympic

⁵ "1896 Olympics" factmonster.com

⁶ John J. MacAloon, "Pierre, baron de Coubertin: French Educator," britannica.com.

⁷ MacAloon, "Pierre, baron de Coubertin: French Educator," britannica.com.

ideal is to place sport above politics.⁸ The goals and purposes of the games that Coubertin instilled and fought so hard to bring to life eventually were corrupted by politics. Although the Olympics were supposed to be a celebration of sport, politics crept in and played a big role in the modern Olympic games.

This paper examines the surrogate Cold War arena between the United States and the Soviet Union, mainly focusing on the 1972 Summer Games in Munich where a more mature Soviet team upset a dominant American team in basketball and the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid where a United States team full of young college kids completed the “Miracle On Ice” by defeating the Soviet Union, who were considered the greatest team in the world. The Cold War played a big role in both of these games, but it was escalated by outside factors such as the fans and media. The context of the games was very political but the players simply were playing for each other no matter what the circumstances were outside the court or rink. The players had a mutual respect for each other that superseded politics.

Many scholars argue that, in one way or another, politics play a part in the Olympic games. The discussion between whether it is necessarily politics or just nationalism can be a blurry line. The difference between the two is vague; politics are the activities of the government associated with a certain country while nationalism is a patriotic feeling or efforts with no relation to the country’s government. Nationalism advocates the necessity of political independence, which

⁸ “Carter Announces Olympic Boycott,” history.com.

Maynard Brichford chose to investigate in the Olympics. Brichford's assessment is that American nationalism has always been present in the Olympics. By promoting nationalism, politics are unavoidably at center stage for the games. However, Brichford argues that there needs to be a balance between politics and national pride. Similar to Brichford, Allen Guttman believes that the increasing involvement of politics has surpassed the overall importance of the games, which should be the praising of athletes displaying their physical gifts. Athletes work vigorously for their whole lives to make it to the Olympic stage and the glooming cloud of politics should not over shadow that. Inevitably, politics defeat the overall purpose of the games.

Books about the Cold War and sports, or more specifically the United States and Soviet Union, are not always deeply engulfed with politics. Some of the books are inspirational narratives that take a look at the events from the standpoint of the game itself. Several authors chose to step away from the politics to write celebratory books about the United States' victories in the Olympics. Wayne Coffee takes this route as he wrote his book on the 1980 Men's Olympic Ice Hockey Team. He takes the reader on a journey through the many different aspects and actions that went on in making the "Miracle On Ice." He briefly described how Cold War tensions brought American hopes down, but used that as a way to further enhance the story of how one amateur hockey team, made up of a bunch of college kids, gave an entire country hope. Comparably, the documentary "Do You Believe in Miracles?" takes this same route. The documentary, written by Bernard Goldberg, hyped up the improbable odds of the United States beating the Soviet Union. The documentary

recapped the chilling moments leading up to the “Miracle On Ice” as well as the hardships it took to make it there. This film does use Cold War undertones to set the stage for the Americans miraculous victory. AL Michaels, narrator of the film, said that it was a piece of the Cold War played out on ice that became a symbol of national pride.

Interestingly enough, Harvey Shapiro believes there was a “Miracle On Ice” before the 1980 Olympic games. Twenty years earlier in Squaw Valley, California, the Winter Olympics were shaping up to be another disappointment for the United States Hockey Team. During the height of the Cold War with the Iron Curtain going up, Americans were not concerned with sport until the 1960 Olympic hockey team shifted the attention of the country to the game of hockey between two super powers competing for the gold medal. Similar to the 1980 team, the feat seemed impossible but the Americans ended up upsetting the Soviets to take home the gold. In this sense, Harvey Shapiro argued that without the 1960 “Miracle at Squaw Valley”, the 1980 “Miracle On Ice” would not have happened. The documentary, “Forgotten Miracle,” encapsulated the forgotten story of the first United States Hockey Team to ever win a gold medal. They have been over looked since the day they won. It seemed as though they were ahead of their time and American hockey started at Lake Placid in 1980. Not many people picked the United States to win because the Canadians dominated the sport at this point. However, the Soviets came into the Olympics in 1956 and shocked the world by winning the gold in their Olympic debut and became a hockey power. The escalation of the Cold War arms

race played a huge part in the rivalry of the two national powers. The film takes us behind the iron curtain to catch a glimpse of life in the Soviet Union. The film started with the 1959 World Championships and took the viewer through all the events leading up to the 1960 gold medal in Squaw Valley.

While certain scholars choose to lionize United States Olympic victories, other scholars scorn Soviet triumphs. United States literature tends to lament defeat of the Soviet Union in the games. Taps Gallagher and Mike Brewster gave a narrative of the 1972 Men's Olympic Basketball game where the United States glory was stolen by the Soviet Union. The book encapsulates one of the most controversial sporting events in Olympic history when the Soviets were given three different chances to win with just 3 seconds on the clock. The authors tracked personal stories and players as well as the background of both nations basketball programs. The Americans felt cheated and believed the gold medal was stolen from them. Kevin B. Witherspoon further investigated this controversial game to find out that the United States deserved to feel cheated obviously, but they should not have been surprised about the close game. Witherspoon looked back at the United States and Soviet Union basketball competitions between the years 1958 and 1972 and found evidence that the United States superiority on the court was slowly diminishing. The Soviets relied on big experience players whereas the United States replace their team every year with youthful talent. Witherspoon affirmed that the change from youth to bigger, stronger, and tougher players was a way to defend American masculinity.

The glorification of American triumphs and that feeling of being cheated is in itself part of international politics. Coffee and Shapiro remove themselves from the main issue of politics in sports and focus on the United States' victories on the ice. They do a great job of making these victories more than just a game by characterizing them both as "miracles" over the powerful Soviet Union. These stories give the reader that sense of patriotism such that the United States can do anything or overcome any odds. It is a source of propaganda that the United States is the better country and the superior power. Even when United States teams lose to the Soviet Union, scholars such as Taps Gallagher and Mike Brewster make the narrative negative toward the opposing nation. These authors stake the claim that the Americans were cheated out of the gold medal symbolizing that it was not the United States' fault, but a lack of proper officiating. Although Witherspoon concluded that the loss should not have been a surprise to the Americans, the people of this nation want to believe they were cheated because they do not accept defeat, especially in the sport of basketball.

The way we, as Americans, choose to remember the Soviet Union is usually in a negative way because of the Cold War. The Soviet Union has always been seen as the evil red army, especially in the Olympics. However, American film director Gabe Polsky chose to investigate what life was really like for athletes under the Soviet regime, which creates sympathy toward the players. The Red Army documentary is a behind the scenes look about the Soviet Union hockey team. The film follows captain Slava Fetisov who tells the story of the most dominant hockey team through

his eyes. The film links sports and politics, explaining how players on the Soviet national team were members of the Red Army and how they were not allowed to leave. The individual had no say in the Soviet Union. They were under the control of the government and watched over by the KGB at all times. The film captures how they became a super power team under coach Viktor Tikhonov, who enforced strict, training regiments plus extremely cruel conditions but was not widely liked by many of his players. It was more than just a game for the Soviets; it was political, it was propaganda, it was warfare.

The Olympics cannot be, and never will be, free of politics. Nationalism and politics go hand in hand with each other because in the Olympics, they both serve as a way to reinforce the country's identity with victory over a competing nation. Bill Shaikin explains that the Olympics are not a symbol of world peace and celebration, but a political battleground. Shaikin traces this political manifestation all the way back to the first Olympiad in Greece. It is too hard to separate the world of politics in the Olympics. It is too big of a stage to ignore an opportunity to express your country's dominance. Phillip A. D'Agati agrees with Shaikin's position by describing the Olympic games as a series of Soviet-American surrogate battles fought during the Cold War. The two world powers never directly fought each other, but used the Olympics to prove to the rest of the world who the superior country was politically, economically, and socially. Katherine Jay picks up on the Cold War tensions in arenas during the 1980s and has similar claims to D'Agati. She also saw these US-Soviet conflicts as alternate grounds for fighting that were used to symbolize

their nation's political superiority. Jay points out that the Olympics were much more than just a game to the country as well as the athletes who were competing in them.

The contest between the Soviet Union and the United States was evident in the Olympic games. There were different tactics used to further push their country's superiority. Tony C. Rider argued that the Soviet Union was the first to use the Olympics as a vehicle for international communism and the United State then had to engage in a propaganda war to stop the Soviet influence. In doing so, Rider uncovered the secret roles that the United States government played in international sports, such as manipulating the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and seizing Olympic bids to be the host country, which was another way to draw attention to the United States and help promote the American way of life. Stephen Wagg agreed that this was a time for aggressive advancements in ideological superiority. He also highlighted how the United States government had to keep up with Soviet efforts to make their athletes elite.

The Western sphere did not support their athletics as much as the East did. Wagg emphasized the need for the United States to keep up with their eastern counterparts. Comparable to Wagg, Jeffrey Montez de Oca examines this fear of a muscle gap. He explains that the Soviet Union had dominated the United States in the Olympic games and there was a necessity for Americans to change this pattern. Montez de Oca pointed out that the United States government was challenging their notions of freedom by increasing their efforts to beat the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union tried to find ways to hurt the United States in any way they could, especially if

the US was contradicting their nation's beliefs. Montez De Oca pointed out one feature where the United States was close to disproving its own system, but Damion L. Thomas found another aspect where the United States was criticized for its insincerity. The United States promoted themselves as a free, democratic nation in the Olympic games but the reality was African Americans were being treated very poorly back home in the midst of the Civil rights movement. The Soviets tried to exploit the United States hypocrisy so the world could see the flaws in their system, which would help promote as well as adopt communism as the superior system.

Scholars suggest that the Olympic boycotts were the ultimate expression of politics in the Cold War games. Toby C. Rider finds that while the Soviet Union used the Olympics to promote international communism, the United States had to counter by endorsing democracy during the Cold War era. Rider then investigates how each country's government chose to impact the games. The Soviet Union was widely open to using the Olympic games as their vehicle from international communism, but the United States was more discrete in their efforts. Rider shows that the United States was proud with the way they represented themselves such that the public did not know they were politically involved in the Olympics. Rider uncovers how the United States used private organizations that were secretly funded by the government to free countries under Soviet control, thus sabotaging the spread of communism. This was an effective way for the United States to go about Olympic interference because it left them out of detection as well as kept their image as a nation whose traditions were against such interference.

Rider records how the United States seized Olympic bids to be the host country, which was another way to help promote the American political and economic systems. By seizing Olympic bids, the United States was able to boost democracy through the Olympics without necessarily interfering with the games. However, the International Olympic Committee has to go through a process in deciding which country will be host for the Olympics, which got heated during the Cold War era. Politics have always played a huge part in this aspect of the games but there is nothing the IOC can do to stop it. According to John Hoberman, the Soviets wanted the Olympic Bid for the 1976 games that were later given to Montreal and were very angry with the IOC after losing the vote. Hoberman stated that the only reason the 1980 Olympic games were awarded to Moscow was because they threatened to leave the IOC for good when they lost the bid for the 1976 games.

John Hoberman stated that the IOC turned the 1980 Moscow games from a threat to an opportunity. The IOC saw the games as an exclusive opportunity for westerners to experience a totalitarian society, but the United States was reluctant to go. According to Brichford, the United States protested the Moscow games because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which was to force communism on Islamic forces. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was a problem for the United States because it showed that the communist had the power to take control over an independent group of people and control the oil supply. Hoberman noted that the Carter administration felt that their status as an international power was at stake after the Soviet invasion so they had to act quickly. On January 20,

1980, U.S. President Jimmy Carter gave the Soviet Union one-month to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan or the United States would not participate in their Olympics. Since the Soviet Union did not change their international situation, Allen Guttman confirmed President Carter's position on the boycott and that he pressured other NATO countries to join. Ultimately, the Carter administration got 64 countries to boycott the Moscow Olympics. Nicholas Evan Saratakes concludes that the boycott was a weapon of the Cold War and represented an effective protest against communism as well as the invasion of Afghanistan.

President Carter went to great lengths to sabotage the Moscow Olympics. Rider explains that the President's acts were very extreme looking at the past. This was the first time in United States history where the President had bullied the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) to do what they said and made sure it got done. Rider reveals that the USOC allowed the President to control them for the first time since their existence. On top of the boycott, Carter tried other means to hurt the Moscow Games. Rider found that the Carter administration tried to create an alternative to the games as well as sought to postpone, cancel or move the Moscow games to Greece. However, the International Olympic Committee declined all of President Carter's requests because they refused to be manipulated.

Brichford knew the boycott would be a good symbol of protest against the Soviet Union, but also noted that the United States was the financial engine of the Olympic Movement. According to Brichford, the United States has been the driving force of the Olympic games because of commercial advertising and sponsorship.

Thus, when the United States, and 64 other countries, boycotted the Moscow Olympics, it would financially hurt the Soviet Union more than it did the United States. D'Agati declared that the United States was financially smart with their Olympic bids whereas the Soviet Union was more concerned about spending money to impress other countries. The United States chose Lake Placid for the 1980 Winter Olympics because of the healthy, realistic financial plan that came along with it. Lake Placid had previously hosted the games in 1932 so the facilities were there but just needed some updates and a bit of expansion. Additionally, a privatization strategy implemented in Lake Placid made the games even more cost effective. This strategy was later used in Los Angeles to make it a good spot for the Olympic games.

While the United States were due to host the 1984 Summer Olympic in Los Angeles, many scholars acknowledge that a Soviet Union boycott was inevitable. Guttman and Hoberman both agree that the Soviet boycott was a direct response to the Carter Administration's boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games. According to these men, the Soviets announced that they were boycotting the 1984 Olympics because they cited security issues and their athletes would not be safe. Contrary, D'Agati believes there was more to the boycott than just retaliation from four years earlier. He argues that there was a series of complicated considerations that went into the boycott and the surrogate war between the United States and Soviet Union were at the center of it. D'Agati supports the claim that the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) made the games a private and profitable enterprise. By doing this, the state and federal government of the United States were not directly

involved with the games, which conflicts with the Soviet accusation that the United States is using the games for political aims. D'Agati proclaims that the goal of the Los Angeles games was to make it separate from the state and federal government and turn it into the ultimate commercialization to promote the American way. According to D'Agati, the Soviet boycott was an attempt to ruin the capitalist games but it was quite unsuccessful. This failure marked a victory for capitalism and motioned the collapse of the Soviet ideological system.

Similar to D'Agati, Allen Guttman saw the Soviet boycott was more than just mere retaliation and that Soviet reasons for not coming were fabricated. He also explained the aftermath of the Soviet boycott. First, he explained, there were no serious incidents at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics that would have put the Soviets in any danger. Olympic spectators were actually wildly enthusiastic with eastern countries that did show up like Romania. They were greeted and cheered as loud as any other nation. Next, the success of the Los Angeles Olympics was used as a source of propaganda that the capitalist nation is superior. Like D'Agati said, the LAOOC made the games a private enterprise that would epitomize the capitalist system. Guttman reported that with the use of television and numerous corporate sponsors, the LAOOC made a profit of \$200 million. This allowed for propagandists to flaunt American success all over the world as well as let the Soviet Union know that their boycott was less than effective. Guttman concluded with the condemning of both the Soviet Union and United States for their political intrusion in the Olympics. William E. Simon, president of the USOC, was against political interference and believed that

the Olympic games would not survive if these government invasions continued.

What makes this paper different is I capture the perspective from the athletes. All of these scholars say that Olympics and politics are synonymous with each other. They argue that sports and politics cannot be separate. Well, they are not necessarily wrong, but they have not quite gotten to the bottom of it. The media and fans hype up politics in sport when they do not really need to be involved. With all the outside sources fueling the fire, it is easy to make a sporting event a Cold War affair. The fact of the matter was the players were more concerned about winning the game for themselves and their teammates more than pleasing their governments. I focus on the player's reactions to the wins and losses to see how much politics played a role in their Olympic experiences.

The two chapters further explore the greater parts of iconic moments in the Olympic Cold War story. Chapter 2, United States Cheated of Gold, explains the hysteria behind the gold medal basketball game between the United States and Soviet Union in 1972 as well as the many different angles in which the game was seen. During a time where Cold War tensions were softened, an alarming series of events caused uproar in the gold medal game of the 1972 Olympics. This chapter answers the questions as to why more time was put on the clock and who ordered the time to be put back on the clock. Chapter 3, The Miracle on Ice, describes the varying perspectives for which the game was played, the fans standpoint versus the players. It was a very political time in American history and this game captured both

ends of the spectrum. The chapter will go in depth about the game, some of the players, and the coach to give context to why the game was so important to the team.

Chapter 2: United States Cheated of Gold

It was over. The Americans had done it again, another gold. They had flooded the court in celebration along with American fans that were so proud of their men for continuing their reign as Olympic champions, at least that is what we thought happened. After the court was cleared the referees went to the scoring table to figure out what was going on. There was a disturbance on the court, caused by the Russians that resulted in official Renato Righetto of Brazil, to blow the whistle, stopping the game. The whistle was blown with one second left, but Williams Jones of England, signaled to have three seconds put back on the clock. However, for some reason there was one second on the clock, the Soviets inbounded, time expired again, and the Americans celebrated for the second time as they thought they had won the game. But because the clock was not correctly set, the Americans once again had to clear the court and wait for the officials to clear up the confusion. Finally, the clock had been set to three seconds and the whistle blew to resume the game. The Soviets inbounded with a long pass down the court to forward, Aleksander Belov, who made the basket with two American defenders on him as time expired to beat the almighty Americans at their game of basketball. The Soviets had upset the Americans.⁹

The chapter begins with the United States winning the gold medal but then

⁹ "Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver." *St. Petersburg Time*, September 11, 1972.

goes into detail describing what happened and why they did not. Next, the chapter surveys the game in full. The Soviets actually played a great game and were deserving of the gold medal but controversy raised suspicion. The United States then appealed the decision to the International Olympic Committee and conspiracy seemed to over rule the Americans appeal. The United States blamed William Jones for the loss so a segment is dedicated to his background. A section about the Cold War comes into play because this game occurred during “détente,” which was a time of relaxed tension between the United States and Soviet Union. The reasoning is to explain that relations between the two countries were good but this game certainly did not help the cause. Lastly, the chapter analyzes the reactions of both the United States players and the Soviet players to give some insight about how the players felt during this time.

The game itself was gut wrenching from the opening tip off. The Soviets jumped ahead early by giving themselves a 10 point lead off the start. It seemed as though the Americans were not ready for such a good game against this Soviet team. At half the score was 26-21 in favor of the Soviets. The Americans were stunned. The second half was similar to the first such that the Soviets came out strong and went on a 10-0 run to give them a big lead. The Americans were being outplayed the whole game. They trailed the Soviets for 39 minutes and 54 seconds out of the 40 minutes of game time. Every four years the Americans brought in youthful, talented players to the Olympics but this was a bigger, stronger, more mature Soviet team that controlled the game, which gave the Americans a very difficult time.

Although the Americans struggled with this Soviet team, they stuck with it throughout the game and kept it close. The Americans were the favorite to win but this Soviet team gave them more trouble than expected. However, the Americans were only down five at the half and battled all night to give themselves a fighting chance to win the game down the stretch. The Americans finally took the lead when Doug Collins, of Illinois State and star of the team, made a great play to steal the ball, sprint down the court but was fouled hard as he went for a layup. Collins shook it off, sank both of his free throws under incredible pressure to give the Americans their first lead of the game, 50-49 with only three seconds remaining. The Americans played strong defense and the Soviets did not even get a shot off in those final seconds, which ended the game in a miraculous fashion since the Americans did not have a lead all night. This was the first ending.¹⁰

Head official Renato Righetto recalled there was a disturbance on the court that caused him to blow the whistle before time expired leaving only one second on the clock. FIBA jury explained it later as, “disturbing effects and misunderstandings, which influenced the normal flow of play.”¹¹ Because of these “disturbing effects” that were caused by the Soviet players, time was supposed to be put back on the clock. Righetto was under the impression there should only be one second left to play because when he blew the whistle that was how much time he saw on the clock. However, the timekeepers did not clearly understand what was going on and the

¹⁰ “U.S. Cagers Won’t Take Silver Medals for Losers.” *The Telegraph-Herald*, September 11, 1972.

¹¹ “U.S. Cagers Won’t Take Silver Medals for Losers.”

clock had not been properly reset back to three seconds. Righetto declared, “If interpreters had been put at the scorers desk, the timekeeper could have told the referees what was going on.”¹² Righetto continued to explain that he spoke Portuguese while his referee partner spoke Bulgarian and the timekeepers were from Munich and only spoke fluent German. William Jones, Secretary General of FIBA, referred to the situation as “an escalation of stupid incidents.”¹³ So, the clock remained at one second and the Soviets were stopped as they inbounded the ball and threw up a low quality shot. The game had ended for the second time with the final score of 50-49 in favor of the Americans. This was the second ending to an otherwise disaster of a game.

The third ending started off furiously as one could imagine after winning the gold medal twice now. Hans Tenschert, of West Germany and official timekeeper for the game was quoted saying, “It is true that when Righetto came to the scoring table that he said only one second remained on the clock.”¹⁴ So if the head official, Renato Righetto, and the official timekeeper, Hans Tenschert, were on the same page, what is the confusion? Mr. William Jones of England and Secretary General of FIBA, for some reason came down to the scoring table to settle this perplexed situation. Tenschert described this by saying, “But there was a sign of three seconds held up by a person not on the scoring table, by Mr. William Jones. Righetto had no choice but to rule the clock back to three seconds.”¹⁵ Although Jones is the secretary

¹² “Olympic Referee Rips U.S. Cage Loss.” *Ellensburg Daily Record*, October 24, 1972.

¹³ “U.S. Cagers Won’t Take Silver Medals for Losers.”

¹⁴ “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

¹⁵ “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

general of FIBA, he had did not have the authority to make that call but the referees had to do something so they went with what Jones ordered. Herb Mols, trainer for the American team, said, "The decision rested on whether those men (the officials and timekeepers) wanted to risk retribution from Jones for over ruling his decision."

¹⁶ So, essentially with no choice, the referees and timekeepers illegitimately put three seconds back on the clock. Played then continued and Ivan Edeshko of the Soviet Union hurled the ball all the way down court to the American's end. The ball was caught by 6 foot 7 teammate Aleksander Belov who fought off two American defenders, Kevin Joyce and Jim Forbes, to score the final basket as time expired. The Russians won 51-50 and rushed the court to celebrate. They had beaten the Americans and won their first gold medal in Olympic basketball.¹⁷

Although the Americans felt as if they were cheated, they did not deserve to win the gold medal. The Americans deservedly so should have felt ripped off by the sequence of events that had occurred, such as the shaky calls and the disturbances of the Soviets, but those who watched the game and those who knew anything about basketball understood that the Soviets were clearly the better team that night. The Soviets held a lead all night up until Doug Collins made his two free throws with 3 seconds remaining. With all the controversy that occurred, Russian coach Vladimir Kondrashkin proudly stated, "We deserved the victory no matter what the circumstances. We had them puzzled from the start since we used a different lineup

¹⁶ "Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver."

¹⁷ "U.S. Cagers Won't Take Silver Medals for Losers."

to confuse them at the beginning.”¹⁸ Coach Kondrashkin was certainly not wrong with what he had said postgame. It was just difficult for the Americans to absorb at the time but the Soviets earned the 1972 gold medal. Coach Iba, of the United States, was asked why he returned to the court after supposedly winning the game, he said, “The official told me there was time left in the ball game, and if the official tells me that I’ve got to believe him. I’ve never seen anything like this in my life.”¹⁹ One second the Americans are celebrating their victory but with a blink of an eye, the Soviets are flooding the court, triumphantly celebrating. The officials made the decisions and both teams had to follow their instructions. What would have happened if the Americas refused to go back on the court after winning twice? Doug Collins said, “We were told that if we left we would forfeit so we were pushed out on the court.”²⁰ It just so happened that the officials’ final decisions favored the Soviet Union more so than the Americans, which was why they ended up feeling cheated when the game was over.

After everything that had transpired, it was obvious that the Americans would not accept this fate and they were going to protest this fiasco. However, Arthur Lentz, executive director of the U.S. Olympic Committee mentioned, “History is against us...but we hope to prove a point for the good of future competition.”²¹ First and foremost, the Americans brought their objection to FIBA’s jury of appeals.

¹⁸ “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

¹⁹ “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

²⁰ Sean Ingle. “50 Stunning Olympic Moments No1: USA v USSR, Basketball Final, 1972.” *theguardian.com*.

²¹ “U.S. Proceeding With Basketball Protest.” *Eugene Register-Guard*, October 26, 1972.

FIBA, which was led by William Jones, hand picked a five-man committee that would over see the appeal. The committee consisted of Ferenc Hepp of West Germany, who had close ties with William Jones, Claudio Coccia of Italy, Rafael Lopez of Puerto Rico, Andres Keiser of Cuba, and Adam Baglajewski of Poland.²² These five men would hear the appeal then vote by secret ballot. What raised suspicion was that there were three communist nations and only two western nations so it did not look good for the Americans. When the decision was made, it looked like votes were cast based on ideological lines and the Americans lost their appeal to a vote of 3-2. It was final; the Soviets won gold.²³ Arthur Lentz was extremely displeased with the decision and claimed FIBA and its secretary general William Jones should be suspended from their duties until it was proven that “all nations are getting a fair shake.”²⁴ Lentz clearly thought FIBA was corrupt and needed a change.

After the decision was made, the Americans were reluctant to accept the result. When American guard Kevin Joyce heard the verdict of the appeal he said, “Why should we accept the silver medal? We won gold. What’s a medal anyway? It’s just something to show your buddies.”²⁵ This is interesting because Joyce made it seem like winning a medal means nothing to him. If he had won the gold, he probably does not say, “It’s just something to show your buddies.” Because the Americans lost in such a way to a team that they rival, players like Joyce downplay the whole significance of a medal. Many Olympians would be happy with silver, but

²² “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

²³ Dave Kindred, “We Will Never Accept Silver” sportsonearth.com

²⁴ “U.S. Proceeding With Basketball Protest.”

²⁵ “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

because the Americans lost to the Soviets they are not willing to accept it. It is understandable to feel like they deserved gold because of the officials, but they were outplayed and were lucky to even be in the game.

Furthermore, American Olympic Basketball Committee president, K. "Bill" Summers followed up the Committee's decision by defending his team's feelings and said to Hepp, "The Russian basketball team played an excellent game but I regret we cannot accept this decision. Our team will not be present for the awarding of the silver medal," Summers continued with, "We do not wish this to be misconstrued. We respect your integrity. We regret all this confusion has come about."²⁶ Consequently, the Americans did not show up to the medal ceremony and the number two platform was empty nearly twenty-four hours after the defeat. While the Americans were absent, William Jones handed out the gold medals to the Soviets and was quoted after the ceremony saying, "They [the Americans] have to learn how to lose, for once."²⁷ There was clearly a great deal of tension between FIBA and the American Olympic Basketball Committee after the events of the game.

Looking through the appeal process, the United States certainly had good reasons to reject their silver medals because there was evidence that supported their claims. There were two occurrences that stemmed controversy. First, what was the disturbance on the sidelines that caused official Righetto to blow his whistle? Second, why and who put three seconds back on the clock? The first order of business during the appeal to FIBA was that the Americans wanted to clear up the

²⁶ "Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver."

²⁷ "U.S. Cagers Won't Take Silver Medals for Losers."

reasoning for the whistle that was blown when the Americans won the first time. The Russians apparently wanted to call a time out after Collins made his two free throws but they were too late as the Soviets inbounded the ball to resume the game. They got to half court with two seconds remaining and then came the mysterious whistles right before the game ended.²⁸ Righetto, who was in charge of the game, took ownership saying, “[he] saw a disturbance on the sideline which made the normal flow of the game impossible,” so he blew the whistle with one second left. Herb Mols, assistant trainer for the American team, recalled the whole situation in the appeal, “The disturbance on the sidelines was caused by the Russians. They were jumping up on the floor. Why should an American team be penalized for the Actions of the Russians?”²⁹ Ferenc Hepp, member of the FIBA Central Board and chairman of the five-man committee who ruled against the US protest countered Mols’ claim by stating, “The referee has a right to stop the action when he sees a disturbance.”³⁰ Hepp left his rebuttal very vague, which infuriated the Americans so they countered back by recalling since the Russians were causing a disturbance trying to call a timeout, which they were not entitled to. FIBA officials did not have the authority to put another three seconds of “overtime” on the clock.³¹

When it comes to the question of who order the three seconds to be put on the clock, all fingers pointed to secretary general of FIBA, William Jones. The next

²⁸ “Olympic Referee Rips U.S. Cage Loss.”

²⁹ “Wrong Basketball Team Won: Americans Refuse to Accept Medals.” *Lodi News-Sentinel*, September 11, 1972.

³⁰ “Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver.”

³¹ “U.S. Cagers Won’t Take Silver Medals for Losers.”

question that arose was why Jones ordered the three seconds to be put back on the clock. Although he is the secretary general of FIBA he has no control over the game. All decisions during the games are supposed to be made by the officials with consultation from the scorekeepers. No outside sources should have played a part in this decision to put time back on the clock. Jones was sitting in the stands watching the gold medal game when all of the craziness emerged. As confusion progressed, Jones felt it was necessary to step in and make a decision so he went down to the scorer's table and held up three seconds. According to the Americans, Jones made an incorrect and illegal decision by ordering Righetto to put three seconds back on the clock.³² American's claim Righetto really had no choice but to listen to Jones, but he could have rejected Jones' orders and stuck with what he believed, which was to put one second on the clock. However, he ultimately listened to the hand that fed him and put the three seconds on the clock. Righetto, talked about the events that went on at the table by stating that the ruling was, "completely irregular and outside the rules of the game of basketball."³³ Righetto later joined the American's defense that blamed Jones for the incidents that occurred that night. Righetto was just trying to do his job but was interfered by a higher power. Hans Tenschert of West Germany, the game's official scorekeeper, also came to the defense of the Americans by saying, "Under FIBA rules the United States won."³⁴

Because William Jones was blamed for stealing the Americans gold medal

³² "Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver."

³³ "Olympic Referee Rips U.S. Cage Loss."

³⁴ "Wrong Basketball Team Won: Americans Refuse to Accept Medals."

from them, conspiracies arose that he was against the Americans, which fueled this Cold War backdrop. Who was William Jones and why did he do this to the Americans? William Jones' vision for basketball started long before any of these controversial interventions; it started with his upbringing. William Jones was born the son of a British father and Italian mother in 1906. He assumed British citizenship and later came to the United States for college. He essentially grew up from western world and attended Springfield College in Massachusetts. Springfield was where James Naismith had invented basketball in 1891 and because Jones was around that area, he fell in love with the game. Through college, he became extremely involved in the game of basketball and saw a vision for it. Once Jones graduated in 1928, he attended schools throughout Europe including Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland from 1929 to 1932, introducing basketball to these foreign countries. Jones was so intrigued by the game that he became one of the founding fathers of the International Basketball Federation in 1932, which was a governing body over international basketball, including the Olympics. By 1936, Jones became the secretary general of FIBA who held had a tremendous amount of power that he used in his advantage, thus the supposed manipulation of games to help the spread of basketball.³⁵

Before Jones help configure FIBA and become the secretary general of basketball in 1936, international basketball was not a popular sport. When FIBA was founded in Geneva in June of 1932, their goal was "to develop and promote the

³⁵ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "R. William Jones: British Sports Organizer."britannica.com.

game of basketball, uniting the wider basketball community.”³⁶ The organization only had eight teams that were considered their founding members, which included: Argentina, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Switzerland.

³⁷ When the United States joined FIBA as a member in 1934, their early dominance caused problems for the rest of the world. When the Olympics first opened up to basketball during the 1936 games in Berlin, the United States walked away with a 5-0 record and cruised to an easy gold medal. From 1936 up until 1968, the United States won six Olympic tournaments, compiling a 63-0 Olympic record with amateur players that were to become future NBA all-stars and hall of famers. The Americans were playing within the rules of FIBA, but they were just so much better than everyone and Jones felt it was hurting international basketball. Although the United States dominated the sport, countries consistently joined FIBA, which meant international basketball was certainly spreading; they just were no match for the Americans. There is no evidence that the 1972 “upset” had any impact on the spread of basketball but Jones believed that any American loss helped.

Since Jones was accused of aiding opposing teams to beat the Americans and spread international basketball, we must take a look back to prior incidents to see if these accusations hold any truth. There have actually been multiple other incidents where Jones had intervened in big games that he had no business in just like the 1972 Olympics. In the 1951 European Championship, the Soviets were playing Czechoslovakia and the referees disagreed on a free throw that was made because

³⁶ “Presentation,” fiba.com.

³⁷ “History,” fiba.com.

the Soviet player supposedly stepped on the line. Because the officials were split and did not know which way to call it, Jones intervened and forced the refs to count the basket, which gave the title to the Soviets. Another instance in the 1967 World Championship, Jones intervened again in a game between the US and Soviets but ruled in favor of the US this time. In all cases, he had no right to make any of these decisions but his authority in FIBA made technicians comply. Jones himself appointed the officials for these games and they are supposed to have the final say in any and all decisions, not him.³⁸

Although Jones' past history does not quite point toward collusion, numerous observers were led to believe that he was out to get the Americans to spread basketball internationally. US Captain Ken Davis said, "William Jones felt it was stifling international basketball for the Americans to keep winning," Davis continued to say, "And supposedly he made the statement that if he ever had the chance then he would maybe affect the outcome and obviously he saw his chance and that's what happened."³⁹ It is easy believe that Jones was a corrupt leader but he was trying to advocate this idea that international basketball was stifling because the Americans won every year. Jones wanted to boost expansion and if the Americans lost, that would help tremendously. Daniel Golden of Bloomberg News agreed with US captain Ken Davis and said Jones "was an advocate for globalization of the game who believed that a Soviet Union victory could be a catalyst for the movement."⁴⁰ Jones

³⁸ "The Unknown William Jones," last3seconds.com.

³⁹ Sean Ingle. "50 Stunning Olympic Moments No1: USA v USSR, Basketball Final, 1972." theguardian.com.

⁴⁰ Kindred, "We Will Never Accept Silver." sportsonearth.com.

saw a dilemma, made a decision, and the Americans unfortunately lost. Although Jones believed an American loss would help international basketball, he was not necessarily “out to get the Americans.” The fact of the matter was that International basketball was extremely stagnant because of the American dominance and because the Americans lost, it gave other European countries hope. They witnessed a giant defeat and now they believed it could be done, which theoretically would help spread the growth of basketball in Europe.

Whatever Jones’ intentions were, they were not favorable to the Americans. For that, the Americans felt cheated and never accepted the silver medals. The public and players saw all of the shady things Jones did to promote international basketball and it was all at the expense of the Americans, which left them with a bitter taste. Throughout the process, Jones stayed out of the newspapers and avoided being interrogated to keep his status as Secretary General of FIBA protected. He was a paramount figure in FIBA and clearly did not want to his image being tainted so he stayed out of the picture as much as he could. Coaches, players, officials, timekeepers, and the public all knew what kind of person/leader William Jones was but Jones remained silent in all of the mess as well as deny most of the accusations that were thrown his way.

Many years after the controversial game, suspicion about William Jones and the game once again rose. A retired Central Intelligence Agent, whose name remains anonymous, released a statement suggesting the Americans did not lose but was conspired against. This accusation adds to the idea that this was part of the Cold

War. Jones was seen as a Soviet sympathizer because of his ties to the Eastern Bloc and was believed to receive illegal gifts from the Soviets due to the close relationship they had. Although the gifts to Williams were not necessarily uncommon because he was such a high figure in the world of basketball and people wanted to treat him nicely, it still raised red flags. Also, according to the CIA source, they believed to have sustainable information about second official, Bulgarian referee Arsenik Arabadjan. He was a sixteen-year veteran referee who had been widely renowned for his great officiating and essentially incorruptible. He was not considered to be a supporter of the Soviets nor an advocate to end American dominance but he was reportedly in on the fix because the KGB had threatened to kidnap and murder his family if the Soviets had lost the game. The Soviets basically controlled Bulgaria so Arabadjan had no choice but to save his family.⁴¹

Because of the accusations brought forth about Arabadjan, we look back to see how much influence he had over the game. Throughout the game, Arabadjan was not criticized for his officiating. The Soviets controlled the game so he did not really have to interfere. However, in the final 3:30 of the game, seven fouls were called, five of which were on the Americans. Of the five fouls called, Arabadjan was responsible for four on the Americans, which all resulted in free throws for the Soviets. Also, Arabadjan helped revive the Soviets at the end of the game as he agreed with Jones' three-second plea, which would ultimately give the Soviets the win. Very subtly, after the three seconds were decided to go on the clock, he allowed

⁴¹Brian Tuohy, "An Olympic Cover-Up?" sportsonearth.com.

an illegal substitution for Edeshko to return to the game and inbound the ball. Furthermore, Arabadjan ordered American center McMillen to back off of Edeshko because the first time McMillen guarded Edeshko, the Soviets could not seem to find an opening and threw up a low quality shot, which was a failed attempt giving the Americans the win. American head coach Frank Iba told his players to comply with the official because he felt like they were looking for any excuse to make a call. Lastly, Arabadjan was quick to sign the game's official scorebook, he said few words about the game, and did not participate in the appeal. It looked like he tried to get out of there in a hurry and make sure his family was safe. When these allegations were brought to the CIA in an attempt to prove the claims made, the CIA could neither confirm nor deny the existence or nonexistence of any record concerning or relating to the gold medal game.⁴²

Everything about this game pointed toward Cold War tensions and politics. However, this game occurred during a period of détente. Détente is a French word meaning release from tension, which was exactly what this period of the Cold War was starting in 1971. The United States and Soviet Union improved relations in 1972 when President Richard M. Nixon and secretary general of the Soviet Communist party, Leonid I. Brezhnev met in Moscow to confirm this promise. Nuclear tensions were at an all time high during the 60s, beginning with the Cuban Missile Crisis, which created a huge scare throughout America and coined the phrase "duck and cover" to help yourself survive a nuclear attack. However, this

⁴² Tuohy, "An Olympic Cover-Up?" sportsonearth.com.

period of tension was not beneficial to either country because trade was at a stand still, which caused a decline in the economy. Also, Nixon was strengthening his relationship with China who was a rival of the Soviet Union so Brezhnev felt détente would be a good idea so the United States and China did not turn against the Soviet Union.⁴³

Détente did many things to clean up foreign affairs and create a time of relaxed tensions between the Soviet Union and United States. Nixon and Brezhnev signed many different agreements, which covered prevention of military clashes, arms control, and cooperative research in areas such as space exploration and commerce. The *salt* (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) treaty was approved by congress in the summer of 1972, which was another arms control arrangement that signified more strides toward peace between the two countries.⁴⁴ With all of these peace treaties being signed, the last thing these two countries wanted or needed with a dispute over a basketball game.

Détente was so important because both countries took humongous steps by opening up to each other in order to create a more peaceful and cooperative relationship. Political and economic relations were significantly better during this period of time than they had been in years. However, when this game ended the way it did, tensions were no longer relaxed. Controversy, conspiracy, and suspicion all caused problems for détente. The Americans felt like they were the victims of some sort of cheating scandal and the Soviets saw the Americans as a bunch of

⁴³ "Détente," history.com.

⁴⁴ "Détente," history.com.

complainers because they lost for the first time in 63 games. All this game did was stir the pot and rekindle old hatred. After the games was all said and done, the players and public had completely forgotten about détente and let their emotions fuel their reactions toward the game.

The Americans' reaction to Jones and his engagements were obviously negative as they felt they were cheated and Jones did not help his cause when he spoke to the press about the subject. When the Americans first appealed their loss, Jones was quoted saying, "The Americans have to learn how to lose, even when they think they are right."⁴⁵ Naturally, that would irritate any American, but it seemed like Jones never had a good relationship with USA basketball, which fueled the American's accusations. Daniel Golden of the Bloomberg news said of Jones: '... he feuded with some American basketball coaches and executives, who considered him a tyrant and Communist sympathizer.'⁴⁶ Losing to the Soviets was one thing during a time of Cold War tensions, but to lose in the fashion they did led many Americans to believe Jones was a communist trying to hurt the Americans. Americans really had no evidence that he was a Communist sympathizer, Jones simply did not rule in the American's favor, which caused angry people to make him the scapegoat. Golden also quoted a veteran German referee, Willy Bestgen, who refereed seven games at the Munich Olympics: "He was god of the rules. He said on Saturday, red is red, and on Sunday red is blue. He told me always, "The last I said is correct,"⁴⁷ talking about

⁴⁵ Alex Dimond, "Controversial Refereeing Decisions in Sport," en.espn.co.uk.

⁴⁶ Kindred, "We Will Never Accept Silver." sportsonearth.com.

⁴⁷ Kindred, "We Will Never Accept Silver." sportsonearth.com.

William Jones. Not only did he rule with complete authority but also he was overstepping his boundaries by changing rules and intervening to supposedly help the game. This only raised red flags, especially if you're a dominant American team that had a target on your back. Lastly, during the appeal, Herb Mols said, "He is the dictator of FIBA and he rules it with an iron hand. He made a mistake in calling for three more seconds and does not want to back down."⁴⁸ Once Jones made a decision, it was final and no one could change it because he was in charge.

The Americans had every right to feel cheated after the acts that Jones pulled and they never quite got over it. According to Bill Summers, chairman of the US Olympic committee and manager of the team, during the 1972 Olympics, he said, "We do not feel like accepting the silver medal because we feel we are worth the gold."⁴⁹ Even though the Americans did get outplayed, it is easy to understand why they did not accept the silver medals. The Americans essentially won twice and got it ripped out from under them due to human errors. Mike Bantom, an American player, explained their feelings even deeper, "If we had gotten beat, I would be proud to display my silver medal. But we didn't get beat, we got cheated."⁵⁰ After the decision was made to uphold the Soviet victory, US spokesman Kenny Davis said, "it was a stunning blow," and players then voted to not accept the silver medals.⁵¹ The

⁴⁸ "Russian Cage Gold Upheld: U.S. Turns Down Silver."

⁴⁹ Ingle, "50 Stunning Olympic Moments No1: USA v USSR, Basketball Final, 1972." theguardian.com.

⁵⁰ Ingle, "50 Stunning Olympic Moments No1: USA v USSR, Basketball Final, 1972." theguardian.com.

⁵¹ Ingle, "50 Stunning Olympic Moments No1: USA v USSR, Basketball Final, 1972." theguardian.com.

whole United States basketball organization felt cheated and did not see it any other way.

Contrary, Soviet players felt like they rightfully so deserved the victory and the United States wanted to feel cheated to avoid the embarrassment. It was Soviet forward Ivan Edeshko, the Soviet player who threw the game-winning pass who had the greatest insight: he said, "The American team was offended, and it wasn't right. It was the Cold War. Americans, out of their own natural pride and love of country, didn't want to lose and admit loss. They didn't want to lose in anything, especially basketball."⁵² This was precisely it! If the Americans had lost to any other team it would not have been such a big deal, but because it was to the Soviets, it became a Cold War affair blown way out of proportion because of outside sources manipulating the media. All of the newspapers headlined "US Refuses Silver" or "US Cheated of Gold," which was seen throughout the world. There were no newspapers that had a headline of "Soviet Union Wins Gold" because no one believed that was the case or otherwise no one wanted to believe the Americans lost fairly.

The Americans simply felt sorry for themselves. They could not bear the thought of actually losing to the Soviets fairly so they stuck to this notion that they were cheated. As we know, the Soviet team did out play the Americans and earned themselves that gold medal. However, because of the mysterious whistles and questionable calls, the Americans have reasons to not accept their silver medals. The Americans to this day never admit to the loss, they stand by being cheated of gold.

⁵² Ingle, "50 Stunning Olympic Moments No1: USA v USSR, Basketball Final, 1972." theguardian.com.

They believed that there was corruption within the system that caused them to lose to the Soviets. Corruption was not far fetched because it happens a lot in international sports. Just look at what happened to FIFA a few years back in 2015. Fourteen of FIFA's highest officials and executives including their President, Sepp Blatter, were arrested on racketeering charges, wire fraud, and money laundering over the course of twenty four years.⁵³ Corruption was happening for many years in their organization and similar accusations were pointed to FIBA after the 1972 gold medal fiasco. The Soviet Union was seen as a corrupt nation because it was communist and that it bullied other nations. They had the power to manipulate people like Bulgarian referee Arseniy Arshakov so they could have the upper hand. Because of all this, Jones was seen as a Communist sympathizer and forever will be in the eyes of the American people.

The Americans dominated in the Olympics when it came to basketball. They were the perennial powerhouse that never lost. It was not until the gold medal game of the 1972 Olympic games when the United States lost and felt cheated of their gold medal. This game is still one of the most controversial games in Olympic history. Basketball became an Olympic sport in 1963 and this uncanny loss to the Soviet Union had broken the American's 63 game unbeaten streak.⁵⁴ The emotions that went through the American's that day were obviously very upsetting as they thought they had won the game 50-49 then to eventually lose the game 51-50 on a

⁵³ Leon Sciliano and Sophie Jamieson, "Fifa: A Timeline of Corruption," *The Telegraph*. telegraph.co.uk.

⁵⁴ "U.S. Cagers Won't Take Silver Medals for Losers."

couple of questionable calls. This game is an illustration of the underlining meaning of the Olympics, which should be good competition, versus the politicization of the games. The 1972 Olympics were not necessarily a cold war affair. It was the way the American's lost plus the outside sources that manipulated the games that made the gold medal match such a political event.

Chapter 3: The Miracle on Ice 1980

When Winthrop Massachusetts native Mike Eruzione scored the go ahead goal late in the third period to put the United States up 4-3 against the Soviet Union, the arena in Lake Placid nearly erupted. Fittingly, Eruzione means “eruption” in Italian, and that goal he scored sent repercussions nationwide. Al Michaels, who was the announcer for the game, recalls that you could feel the sound in the building like there was an earthquake.⁵⁵ All the US players jumped the bench to celebrate with Eruzione after he scored, which is very uncharacteristic and could have led to a delay of game penalty but the referees let it go. It was a magical moment that captured the hearts of many Americans.

The general public had deep interest in the game because of everything that was going on with Afghanistan and the American hostages that were taken in Iran. American morale was down as they felt powerless during this time but the public rallied together as one, supporting the boys, as if they were taking down the totalitarian government themselves. There are many heart-warming stories where people were at the game, listening in on the game, or watching it on television and broke down into tears as they listened to the excitement in Al Michaels voice as he counted down the remaining seconds and shouted, “Do you believe in Miracles? Yes!” Brooks gave a tremendous amount of credit to all the fans that supported them along the way. Brooks stated, “The crowd was an unbelievable big help to us. The

⁵⁵ E.M. Swift, “The Golden Goal.” *Sports Illustrated*, March 3, 1980.

fans displayed excellent sportsmanship, even though we have different ways of life and different governments. There was no politics on behalf of the Russians and no politics by us. I don't think the fans were an ugly lot. They were positive."⁵⁶ Having the Olympics on American soil, with the massive support from the fans, along with everything that was going on over seas, it seemed like this was meant to happen.

The 1980 Winter Olympics are one that will always be remembered because of the "Miracle On Ice." The chapter takes the reader through the captivating events of the Olympic tournament leading up to the miracle as well as examine the unorthodox coaching style of Herb Brooks that allowed his team to accomplish something no one thought was possible. It then travels back in time to 1960 to when the United States won their first gold medal in ice hockey to give contrast it to the 1980 games. Lastly, the chapter contrasts the different perspectives of the games concerning the public versus the players.

Brooks pushed his players to their limits because he knew how to beat the Soviets; he just needed the right players to do so. The right players, according to Brooks, were not "ignorant, self-centered people who don't want to expand their thoughts."⁵⁷ Brooks wanted young, educated men who would be willing to accept new challenges and throw out old stereotypes about how they should play the game of hockey. He wanted open minded kids who could skate.⁵⁸ The Soviets played a

⁵⁶ Dave Kindred, "Born to Be Players, Born to the Moment." *Washington Post*, February 23, 1980.

⁵⁷ E.M. Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be." *Sports Illustrated*, December 22, 1980.

⁵⁸ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

much different style of play than the Americans and what Brooks wanted to do is take the Soviet game and shove it right back down their throat or otherwise adopt a hybrid style of play. The Soviets played the game fast, hard, and smart. They were constantly moving and created space for each other by crisscrossing or moving the puck to another person or even open space because they knew their teammate would be there. They rarely made any mistakes with the puck and capitalized on sloppy play by their opponents with relentless defense. It was truly a nightmare for any team because no one could skate with them for the entire game.

Brooks knew very well whom he wanted on this team well before the United States Hockey Association hosted tryouts in the spring of 1979. He studied these players throughout their college careers, talked to their coaches and scouts about these players. He was the Head Coach at the University of Minnesota who had won three national championships during his time there. He knew the college players very well and picked each of his players for a specific reason, or in his words, “the right players.” Once he picked the team, Brook had to find out who would be able to handle the intense training and mental stress that came along with it by handing out a psychological test that composed of 300 questions that he himself, Herb Brooks, prepared for his players. Brooks wanted to make sure he had the right players to achieve the ultimate goal of beating the Soviets and this was just another way for him to make sure he did not miss anything.⁵⁹ All but one player, eventual hero in the game Against the Soviets, goaltender Jim Craig, did not take the test because he

⁵⁹ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

thought it was useless and did not believe in sports psychology. However, Brooks responded to Craig furiously to let him know he had just taken the test and told him (Brooks) everything he needed to know plus he failed. The next day Craig took the test and the rest was history.⁶⁰

The reason he had the players take the test is to see how hard he could push each guy. Brooks knew what his team was capable of accomplishing so after his team tied team Norway in the fall of 1979, he lost his mind because he felt his team began to slack; there was a moment of truth. In the locker room, Brooks expressed his dissatisfaction about the game and told the boys they were going to skate and sent them right back onto the ice.⁶¹ US forward Dave Silk recalls that there were some Norwegian fans left in the stands and stayed to watch as if the US team was coming back on the ice to put on a skating demonstration. After a few “herbies,” a miserable skating drill named after Herb Brooks, the fans got bored, booed, and the workers turned off the lights to go home.⁶² Although the lights were off, Brooks kept skating the boys for a long time. None of the players recall how many “herbies” they actually did, but they knew it was the turning point of their journey. After that night in Norway, they were not as cocky and did not see themselves as an all-star team because all-star teams fail due to the fact that they rely solely on talent, which Brooks knew, would not work against the Soviets. They did not have enough talent to rely on talent alone. They had to rely on their skating and hard work. That

⁶⁰ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁶¹ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁶² Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

memorable night in Norway made the players realize they were in this thing together and wanted to accomplish the impossible for each other.

Every person has a different boiling point as well as a limit on how hard they can work and it is the coach's job to figure that out and approach each guy differently. Brooks did precisely that. After that treacherous skate in the dark up in Norway, Mark Johnson, who was the team's smartest player and hardest worker, broke his stick over the boards in frustration. Brooks never had to yell at Johnson until then and he screamed at him and the rest of the team saying "If I ever see a kid hit a stick on the boards again, I'll skate you until you die!"⁶³ Obviously, the team believed him and was petrified of him. Silk said, "I can remember times when I was so mad at him I tried to skate so hard I'd collapse, so I could say to him, 'See what you did?'"⁶⁴ That was exactly what Brooks wanted. John Harrington, forward for the US team, said "He [Brooks] knew exactly where to quit," and continued by saying, "He'd push you right to the limit where you were ready to say, 'I've had it, I'm throwing it in'-and then he'd back off."⁶⁵ He wanted his players to hate him. Brooks said, "It was a lonely year by design."⁶⁶ If the players hated him, it would allow them to come together as one. This was Brooks' philosophy on team unity.

Brooks' plan for this team had been brewing for twenty years. Brooks was the last cut from the 1960 United States Olympic hockey team that was the first American team to win gold in the sport of hockey. A week before the games, Coach

⁶³ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

⁶⁴ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

⁶⁵ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

⁶⁶ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

Riley cut him and Brooks sat at home as his team took the gold medal. When Brooks got the head-coaching job for the 1980 team, there was nothing that would stop him from winning a gold medal. By Brooks having these kids take the psychology test and learning about his players, he was able to get the very best out of them..

However, no one was safe from being cut just like Brooks was no safe a week before the games. Brooks wanted Eruzione to be captain and vouched for him in front of the team. The team voted for him anyway but two weeks before they were to leave for Lake Placid, Brooks pulled him aside to let him know he was not playing well and if he did not pick it up, he would be going to the games as an assistant coach instead of a player.⁶⁷ Just like Brooks was cut last minute, the captain was not even safe.

However, after that little meeting, Eruzione turned his game on and scored five goals in the last three exhibition games to solidify his spot on the team. Brooks did the same thing to Jim Craig and Craig was furious. He would not let the net be taken from him and elevated his game to another level as well.

Another incident happened during the first period of the first game against Sweden. Top forward, Rob McClanahan, got a bad charley horse and the trainer told him to take off his equipment and ice it up for the night; he was done. Brooks thought otherwise. After being down 1-0 after the first, Brooks went storming into the locker room and yelled to McClanahan, "You gutless son of a bitch! Nobody's going belly-up now!"⁶⁸ Brooks knew he needed McClanahan to play and screaming at McClanahan was Brooks' way of firing him up so he would go out there and once

⁶⁷ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

⁶⁸ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

again prove him (Brooks) wrong. McClanahan, with a chip on his shoulder, ended up being one of the top scorers for the US as he scored five times in the tournament.⁶⁹

That is what coaching is all about, knowing your players well enough to get them to raise their game to the highest standard. Push them to be the best because you can always be better. They went to Lake Placid with a purpose, to prove to Brooks that they could win gold. After all the torture Brooks put them through, twenty young kids were united and still eager prove themselves to Brooks.⁷⁰ Brooks was always mean to the players and never let them get complacent. Buzz Schneider, who played for Brooks for three years at the University of Minnesota, recalled, “He pats you on the back but always let you know he has a knife in the other hand.”⁷¹ With every compliment, Brooks always had some sort of criticism that he could throw at a player to keep him level headed and make him better. The thing about Brooks was he never let his players get complacent. When the team was doing well he believed they could be better. Brooks was never satisfied until the team accomplished what he had set them up to do.

Going into the Winter Olympics, no one had high hopes for the Americans. They were seeded seventh and had to play Sweden and Czechoslovakia who were ranked second and third behind the Soviets. To make matters even worse, a week before the games the United States lost to the Soviet Union at Madison Square Garden by a score of 10-3.⁷² Although it was a humiliating loss on American soil, it

⁶⁹ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁷⁰ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁷¹ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁷² Leonard Shapiro, “U.S. Shocks Soviets in Ice Hockey 4-3.” *Washington Post*,

seemed as though that game helped the United States understand what they were up against, and on the other hand, it made the Soviets a little cockier. The Soviets were without a doubt the best team in the world and were rolling into the Olympics looking to grab their fifth straight gold medal. Herb Brooks watched countless hours of game film on the Soviets day in and day out and noticed something very interesting: “they were lethargic changing lines, their passes had lost their crispness...The Russians were ripe. The time was right.”⁷³ Brooks knew if they got their chance, they would have a fighting chance at beating them, which was why he was so intense with his coaching.

The road to the medal rounds was no easy task for the Americans. In the first game of Olympic play, the Americans had to play a heavily favored Sweden team. The team played extremely well against the Swedes and earned themselves a dramatic tie. The Americans pulled their goalie for the extra attacker and Bill Baker scored a huge goal to tie the game and give the team a much-needed point. Next, the Americans had to play third ranked Czechoslovakia. The Americans found another gear and blew the Czechs out 7-3, which raised awareness nationally. The Americans then went on to beat Norway by another 4-goal margin with a score of 5-1. As the tournament went on, the excitement grew greater. The Americans took care of business against a weak Romanian squad by a score of 7-2 and grinded out a 4-2 win against West Germany. With their stellar round robin record, the Americans qualified for the medal round, however, because the Swedes won the tie breaker,

February 23, 1980.

⁷³ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

they were awarded the top seed in their bracket so the Americans would have to play the Soviet Union in the semi-final game.⁷⁴

Although the Americans had an embarrassing loss to the Soviets just thirteen days before the semi-final, they put that game behind them and felt as though they were a completely different team. Their confidence was high as they were on a roll going 4-0-1 in round robin play. The Americans came out strong against the Soviet, which caused the Soviets to make uncharacteristic mistakes. The Soviets stroke first but the Americans were used to playing behind because they have been doing it all tournament long. A goal from Buzz Schneider tied the game but the Soviets answered quickly with a goal from Sergei Makarov. Down 2-1, the Americans started heading to the locker room as the first period was winding down but a careless, mental mistake by the whole soviet team allowed Mark Johnson to sneak past two Soviet defenders and tie the game 2-2 with 1 second remaining. This was a huge goal for the Americans end the first period tied with the best team in the world. It gave them a sense of hope that they could do it.

The Soviets were extremely sloppy in the first period, which pushed Soviet head coach Viktor Tikhonov to replace goaltender Vladislav Tretiak, the best goalie in the world, for Vladimir Myshkin because Tretiak let in two goals. The first goal was a long slap shot by Buzz Scnieder from a sharp angle just inside the blue line, which was very uncharacteristic of Tretiak to give up. The second goal came with one second to play in the period and it was just a sloppy play by all of the Soviets

⁷⁴ Official Report of the XIII Winter Olympic Games.

because they thought the period was over. Dave Christian took a shot from the red line as time was winding down, but both Soviet defenders allowed Mark Johnson to come screaming through the middle while Tretiak left a juicy rebound out front to allow Johnson to make a deke and tie the game before time expired. Brooks was certainly right when he said the Soviets were ripe and playing lethargic. It was very unexpected to see and the Americans were capitalizing on the mistakes. However, the Soviets came out firing in the second period outshooting the Americans 12-2 and dominating the play but only scored one goal to put them ahead 3-2. After the second period ended, Brooks settled his team down and told them to break the third period into four, five-minute segments. He emphasized that there was plenty of time to tie the game, just stay with them and make them skate.⁷⁵

Brooks' word remained true as the Americans came out of the locker room looking as though they had the fresher legs. They scored in their second five-minute segment, 8:39 into the third. Mark Johnson snuck one five hole on the power play, which was a broken play that landed on his stick like it was meant to be. Just like that the game was tied. Only a minute and twenty-one seconds later, the unimaginable happened. Mike Eruzione got the puck in the slot from a feed from Mark Pavelich and Eruzione snapped a wrist shot past Myshkin for the go ahead goal and the players flooded the ice. However, it was not like the game was over. The arena in Lake Placid roared, which created so much energy for the players but there was still 10 minutes remaining in the game and the Americans were playing against

⁷⁵ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

the greatest hockey team in the world. There was a great deal of work that needed to be done to complete this “miracle.”

The American players knew the Soviets could score plenty of goals in ten minutes and some American players thought that was too much time to hold of the Soviets. Shift after shift they would look at the clock and it seemed like no time was ticking off. It seemed like time was just standing still as the Soviets peppered goal tender Jimmy Craig with shots, desperate to tie the game. For those ten minutes, no one seemed to remember much except that the clock took forever to wind down.⁷⁶ Brooks remained calm through the soviet onslaught and ordered for short shifts to keep their legs fresh. The players remember Brooks walking up and down the bench, constantly saying, “Play your game.” The only ones who panicked were the Soviets. They had never been in that position before and frankly; they did not know what to do. They did not even pull their goalie to put an extra skater on the ice, which would have made it nearly impossible for the Americans to hang on. The Americans played desperation defense sacrificing their bodies to block shots and get pucks out of the zone while goaltender Jimmy Craig stopped all shots that came his way. Then, the horn sounded and it was over. The scenes of triumph are considered the most memorable of the twentieth century.

Throughout those ten minutes, when the Americans had the lead, the crowd at Lake Placid continually chanted “U.S.A! U.S.A!” As the clock slowly winded down, the crowd got louder and louder in excitement. The American players were the only

⁷⁶ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

team that was able to have a lead and go the distance with the Soviets. No team before was able to skate with the Soviets for a full 60 minutes, which was why the Soviets were so dominant. As the final seconds started to wind down the crowd started to count them down and then came Al Michaels' famous call, "Do you believe in miracles? Yes!" At that moment, the country burst into euphoria. Nothing like this had ever been provoked by a sporting event. The game triggered emotions all throughout the country. It gave people a reason to be patriotic and gave them a reason to be proud.

The reactions that players had as well as the country were sincerely a testament to what this game meant to them. The players truly did not believe they could do it except for Herb Brooks. Brooks told his team before the game, 'You were born to be a player. You were meant to be here at this moment. You were meant to be here at this game. Let's have the poise and possession of the puck.'⁷⁷ Even after the Americans won, they were in disbelief in what they had just accomplished. US back up goalie Janaszak recalls the locker room being "absolutely quiet." He continued by saying, "Some guys were crying a little. You got the impression that the game wasn't over yet, because no one is ever up a goal on the Russians when the game is over. No one believed it."⁷⁸

After the win, there is footage of Herb Brooks celebrating with coaches, raising his arms in triumph, and then immediately heading into the tunnel. The team was wondering where he went as they finished celebrating with each other on the

⁷⁷ Kindred, "Born to Be Players, Born to the Moment."

⁷⁸ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

ice and then shook hands with the Soviet players. Brooks was in the bathroom because he did not want to ruin the team's celebration; he wanted to hide his emotions like he always had. Brooks explained, "I almost started to cry...it was probably the most emotional moment I'd ever seen. Finally I snuck into the hall, and the state troopers were all standing there crying."⁷⁹ Emotions were pouring all over after the game but the task was not completed yet.

In order to complete the "Miracle On Ice," the Americans still needed to beat Finland to capture the gold medal. Before the game, Coach Brooks came into the locker room and told his players, "If you lose this game, you will take it to your fucking grave," and began to walk out of the locker room but turned around at the door to repeat, "to your fucking grave."⁸⁰ Brooks was simply reminding his players that they have come too far to lose now. The Americans came out of the gates hot outshooting the Fins 14-7 but the Fins were able to net the first goal. However, the Americans scratched and clawed to score when Steve Cristoff netted a back handed. But only two minutes later Mikko Leinonen of Finland score a power play goal to put the Fins up 2-1. The game was shaping up to be another dramatic finish. The Americans owned the third periods outscoring their opponents 16-3. This dominance goes back to the fact that they were the best-conditioned team in the tournament and could skate with anybody for 60 full minutes. Yet again, the Americans came from behind and scored three unanswered goals in the third to win

⁷⁹ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

⁸⁰ *Do You Believe in Miracles?: The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team*, written by Bernard Goldberg (2002; U.S. and Canada: HBO Home Video, January 8, 2002, DVD).

the game 4-2 as well as win their first gold medal in ice hockey since the 1960 winter Olympics in Squaw Valley.⁸¹

Twenty years before the 1980 Miracle On Ice, there was a similar occurrence that transpired in Squaw Valley that is very rarely even acknowledged or remembered. In the 1960 Winter Olympics, the United States men's hockey team surprised the world when they defeated a number of tough competitors such as Sweden, Czechoslovakia, and Germany but no one ever expected them to beat Canada or Soviet Russia, who were the favorites to win it. Experts predicted the Soviet Union to take home the gold after their dominance at the 1956 Winter Olympics in Cortina, Italy where they won all seven games with a scoring margin of forty to nine.⁸² This was impressive due to the fact they only entered international play in 1954. The Soviets seemed to do everything well which makes them hard to beat. They play fast such that they skate at high speeds and move the puck very well so it is very difficult to defend them. They are strong on defense with Genrikh Sidorenkov and Nikolai Sologubov who are both big, aggressive, skilled and quick defensemen. Lastly, their goalie, Nikolai Puchkov, is the backbone of the team who plays his angles extremely well, leaving the opposing team nothing to shoot at.⁸³ With the depth and skill that the Soviets had, it seemed as though they would not be defeated once again.

Little to no attention was given to the Americans, who were coached by Jack

⁸¹ Lawrie Mifflin. "U.S. Hockey Team Completes the Miracle On Ice with 4-2 Win Over Finland for Olympic Gold," *New York Daily News*, February 25, 1980.

⁸² "Ice Hockey," *Sports Illustrated*, February 15, 1960.

⁸³ "Ice Hockey,"

Riley. It seemed like he was the only person who had any confidence in his team saying, "Ours is the strongest squad it is possible to get together in this country, and we will be up among the top three."⁸⁴ This was a pretty lofty goal seeing as though the American team consisted of a soldier, a fireman, some carpenters, a couple of insurance peddlers, and a television-advertising salesman.⁸⁵ To finish in the top three with this rag tag group of amateurs seemed nearly impossible with the amount of talent the other countries had, especially the Soviet Union and Canada. However, the Americans pulled together a number of upsets beating Sweden, Germany, Russia, and Australia in the first four games. Even with the string of wins, there was still no belief that the Americans could keep up with the high scoring Canadians or compete against the tough defense of the Soviets. When the Soviets tied the Swedes conceding a point in the standings, it gave the Americans hope as well as an opportunity to contend for a medal but they would have to get past Canada first.

With a chance at a medal, the Americans played very well against the Canadians. The first period went in favor to the Americans as insurance salesman from Massachusetts, Bob Clearly, netted a goal, which got the crowd into it early. Then Minnesota native, Paul Johnson found the back of the net to put the Americans up 2-0 going into the third period. The Canadians were quite stunned because they did not expect such a tough game against these nobodies. The Canadians were

⁸⁴ "Ice Hockey,"

⁸⁵ William Leggett, "Our Never-Say-Die Hockeymen," *Sports Illustrated*, March 7, 1960.

amateurs as well but dominated international play until the Soviet Union came into the picture in 1954. However, the Canadians were a resilient and experienced bunch who pushed back to cut the lead in half, scoring with six minutes remaining in the game. By that time, it was too late. The Americans were dictating the play and held off the Canadians to upset them 2-1. When the final buzzer sounded, 8,500 fans seated in the rink were on their feet in complete jubilation but the moment was brief. The United States had one day of rest before they had to play the Soviets who were seeking blood after that dreaded tie with Sweden.⁸⁶

After a big win against Canada, the Americans were ready to take on the favored Soviet team. At the start of the first period, the Americans came out firing, scoring the first goal but the Soviets countered quickly and scored two goals five minutes later to take the crowd out of it. Coach Jack Riley was furious after the first period because he knew that his team could bat the Soviets. After the first period, down 2-1, Coach Riley stated, "Everyone in the nation is counting on you guys. There are millions watching you on television."⁸⁷ Essentially, he was telling his players that they were embarrassing their country by the way they responded after the Soviets took the lead. Coach Riley would not let his team roll over and die so he needed to spark his boys and he did. The Americans tied the game in the second with a goal from carpenter, Bill Christian. Christian scored again in the third period to give the Americans the lead, which would ultimately be the game winner. The Americans held off the Canadians then the Soviets in back to back games, which no one thought

⁸⁶ Leggett, "Our Never-Say-Die Hockeymen."

⁸⁷ Leggett, "Our Never-Say-Die Hockeymen,"

was possible, except for Coach Riley.⁸⁸

The Americans had to face Czechoslovakia in the gold medal game, who was a tough team and similar to the Russians in their style of play. Once again, not an easy task considering the Czechs were expected to finish third behind the Soviets and Canadians.⁸⁹ However, the Americans had their eyes on their first gold medal and would not let a Czech team stand in the way after beating the two biggest hockey powerhouses back to back. The game against the Czechs was a thrilling back and forth game, which was in favor of the Czechs 4-3 after two periods of play. While the Americans rested up for the third period, Soviet captain Nik Sologubov came in the Americans locker room with some advice. He spoke no English but signaled for them to take oxygen before the third period because it would help them recover faster and perform better at the high altitudes.⁹⁰ But why would a Soviet player want to help an American? The relationship between the US and Soviets was not bad, it was that the Soviets did not want one of their satellite countries to win a gold medal.⁹¹ Also, if the Czechs won, the Soviets would not have even medaled so they needed the Americans to win for two reasons. Some of the Americans took the oxygen while others did not. Either way the Americans stormed to score six goals in the third to beat the Czechs 9-4, winning their first gold medal in hockey.

What this team of American blue collared workers did to win their first

⁸⁸ Leggett, "Our Never-Say-Die Hockeymen,"

⁸⁹ "Ice Hockey."

⁹⁰ "Russian Tip Helps U.S. Win Olympic Hockey." *New York Times*, February 29, 1960.

⁹¹ *Forgotten Miracle: The Story of the 1960 Gold Medal Team*, directed by Tommy Haines and Andrew Sherburne (2009; U.S. and Canada: Golden Puck Productions, December 7, 2009), DVD.

Olympic gold medal is something that has been forgotten. They were the first miracle on ice but have been considered the forgotten miracle because no one ever talks about them. American goaltender, Jack McCartan, explained the feeling as “quiet pride.” Winning the gold and being the first American team to do so is enough for those players. After the eight days of Olympic play, the members of the team went back to their homes and were back to work on Monday like nothing even happened. There was no parade or fame. It was over with a blink of an eye, but what they accomplished will forever be in the record books. The American public heard about the win and there was excitement but there was only jubilation within the hockey community.⁹²

The reason why the 1960 team and what they accomplished has been so overlooked is because of what emerged in Lake Placid in 1980. Before the 1960 games, the Soviets were just coming into the international stage and won the World⁹³ Championship in 1954, upsetting the Canadians. Other than that, they were known to be a solid team but still inferior to Canadians. That all changed when the Soviets and Canadians decided to see once and for all who the better team was by organizing a series of 8 games, four across Canada and four across Soviet Russia known as the 72’ Summit Series. However, the Canadian team was not a bunch of amateurs this time around, it was some of hockey’s all-time greats competing against this Soviet squad such as Phil Esposito, Bobby Clark, Ken Dryden, and Paul Henderson. The Soviets lost the series by going 3-4-1 but even that was a more than

⁹² *Forgotten Miracle: The Story of the 1960 Gold Medal Team,*

⁹³

impressive feat going against Canada's best. On the international stage, the Soviets won four gold medals after losing in 1960, which included 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976. The Soviets did not lose a single game in their stretch of 4 consecutive gold medals and they were looking to make it five entering Lake Placid in 1980.

The Soviets were able to compete against Canada's best as well as dominate on the international level because the country had their lives and careers under their control. The players on the Soviet team were technically part of the red army but never performed any military duty. Their duty was to be completely devoted to the game of hockey. They were not allowed to leave their country to pursue dreams of playing in the NHL and making money, which kept their status as amateur. While everyone on the international stage is playing their top amateur players, the Soviets were putting out their country's best players, who had proven themselves against Hall of Fame Canadians. Essentially, the Soviets were not playing as amateurs. They were as good or if not better than many NHL players, but their country kept them in the Soviet Union to beat everyone. Their country made them sacrifice everything to be disciplined to the game of hockey because for them, every game had political undertones. Their only goal was represent their country with honor and place first.

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The 1980 "Miracle on Ice" was truly the biggest upset in sports history. Everything about the game was so much bigger because of what the Soviet team had accomplished leading up to Lake Placid. The stage was much brighter and there was

⁹⁴ *Do You Believe in Miracles?: The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team*

a tremendous amount of hype. The Soviets had not lost an Olympic game in almost two decades. The American team was by far the youngest and most inexperienced team at the Olympic, which made them a long shot to even make it to the medal round. It was set up to be this David versus Goliath story. Not to say the 1980 team was any better than the 1960 team, the 1960 team was just a little ahead for its time. A major factor in the reason why the 1980 game had a bigger impact than the 1960 game was that the 1980 Americans never should have pulled that off because the Soviets were the most dominant sports team of their era and maybe in the history of hockey.

Also, looking at the games from a political angle, the United States and the Cold War was in two completely different positions when these games occurred. In late February of 1960, when the United States was making their historic run, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had the country on the right path. The American economy was booming and the nation was very powerful. The Cold War was kind of at stand still at the end of the 1950s going into 1960 so there was not much for the country to worry about. The American's only concern was communist rebel leader Fidel Castro who became premier of Cuba in 1959, but things did not escalate into the Cuban Missile Crisis and Bay of Pigs until after the game.⁹⁵ All in all, the 1960 game did not hold much weight throughout the nation. The country did not need this defeat over the Soviets because the country was already powerful. The game was simply just a game, which was why it was considered the "forgotten miracle."

⁹⁵ Dr. Quitard Taylor, Jr. "United States History: Timeline: Cold War." University of Washington. faculty.washington.edu.

On the other hand, the 1980 game occurred during a time when Americans began to doubt themselves and feel powerless. International tensions were high when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and American hostages were taken in Iran. The United States felt vulnerable because there was nothing they could do. President Carter could not get their hostages back nor get the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. American morale at this point was quite weak to say the least. It was a tough time to be an American. All of these events leading up to the Olympics made the game against the Soviets that much greater. It was a piece of the Cold War played out on ice in Lake Placid; it was freedom versus communism, us versus them.

⁹⁶ The magnitude of that game was so great that there can never be anything like it again. A group of young college kids revived a nation by beating the world's best hockey team.

The country needed this win against the Soviets. It was more than just a game to the American people unlike the 1960 game. Once the Americans beat the best team in the world, the country went into full celebration. Although the team knew what the game meant to a lot of the public, they never realized how far the feelings for this game traveled. Shortly after the game ended, Coach Brooks got a phone call from the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter. According to Brooks, President Carter said that the American people are very proud and that Brooks, as well as his team, reflected what the west stood for.⁹⁷ Clearly, this game took on a much bigger meaning if the President of the United States is personally

⁹⁶ *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team*

⁹⁷ Kindred, "Born to Be Players, Born to the Moment."

calling Brooks to emphasize how proud they are as a country. It was something positive that the country needed when everything seemed to be falling apart.

Because the victory over the Soviets meant so much to the American people, they started chanting “We beat the Russians!” Any big sports fan who has passion for their home town team will answer the question, “How’d the team do?” with a, “We won or we lost.” The point is we associate ourselves with our team. The same thing goes for this miraculous team. They were America’s team and America’s boys. The people did not just feel like they were spectators, they were part of it and took it personal. When the team won, it was obvious that crowds were chanting, “WE BEAT THE RUSSIANS!” and referring to them as “Our boys.”⁹⁸ There is a story of a man who listened to the game as he was driving home through a thunderstorm. His excitement got so intense that he pulled over as he listened to the final count down. When the horn sounded to end the game, he roared with triumph. He got out of his car in the pouring rain to celebrate some more as well as ten other cars and drivers who were doing the exact same thing. They were perfect strangers coming together as one to shout, “We beat the Russians!”⁹⁹ It is those types of things that make sporting events so great. They have the ability to bring together people, or in this case, an entire nation, and make them feel something special.

The American people were not heavily invested in the Olympics at first because they did not believe in the team. It was only after they began to prove themselves, such as tying the Swedes and beating the Czechs when people started to

⁹⁸ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

⁹⁹ Swift, “A Reminder of What We Can Be.”

take interest. American citizens, who had no clue about hockey, started tuning into games and sending letters to the team. One of the reasons the boys were so under the radar was because Brooks would not allow them to do post game interviews because it was a team game. Twenty players go out together and accomplish a goal, not two or three players that the press wanted to talk to because they may have had good games. It was a way to keep the press from giving the players big heads and making them out to be all-stars. Brooks was looking at the bigger picture, the team. Without the pressure of the press on the players, the team was able to focus solely on the games and stay loose. Brooks wanted no outside sources to screw up the team dynamic and the players respected that.¹⁰⁰

The emotions that went through the players and coaches after the improbable victory over the Soviets signified that this game meant everything to them but not in the same way that it meant to the general public. According to Mark Pavelich, one of the forwards for the US team said that the game against the Soviet Union had no political significance for them. Pavelich stated, "If people want to think that performance was for our country, that's fine. But the truth of the matter is, it was just a hockey game. There was enough to worry about without worrying about Afghanistan or winning it for the pride and glory of the United States. We wanted to win it for ourselves."¹⁰¹ Understandably, he knew that this game had deeper roots to many people. They heard the news and were aware of the current situation over in Afghanistan, but Pavelich wanted the people to appreciate that as an athlete who

¹⁰⁰ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

¹⁰¹ Swift, "A Reminder of What We Can Be."

trained for months on end with this group of guys that he considers family did it for each other and for themselves. All the hard work that they put in individually to become an Olympian as well as all the hardships they had to overcome as a team to become the best hockey team in the world took a lot of sacrifice, a lot of mental toughness, and a lot of heart. Similarly, Head Coach Herb Brooks stated, "It was just a hockey game for the players."¹⁰² This group of players took a tremendous amount of pride in doing it for themselves. They came from all over the country with numerous different backgrounds, but Brooks shaped them into becoming a team. And because of that solidarity, they wanted to achieve this so-called impossible feat for each other.

The Soviet's reactions to the game were astonishing. When one talks about the Soviets during their reign, they say they have no emotion. Once they score a goal, they do not celebrate or even crack a grin. They line up for the next face-off and continue to bury their opponent.¹⁰³ It was crazy to see after watching the Americans celebrate every goal like they have just won the gold medal. After the game ended, the Americans stormed the ice and tackled each other in absolute bliss. When the camera panned over to see the Soviet's reaction, they were all lined up near their blue line, some of them with their chins resting on the top of their stick, looking at the Americans with a puzzled or confused look on their faces, kind of like they were enjoying watching the Americans celebrate like that.¹⁰⁴ One Soviet player said, "We

¹⁰² Kindred, "Born to be Players, Born to the Moment."

¹⁰³ *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team,*

¹⁰⁴ *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team,*

won so often, we no longer felt the thrill that the Americans showed. In one hand it was great to see their emotions, but for us, it was very bitter.”¹⁰⁵ As for the public of the Soviet Union, it was even worse. The game aired later in the Soviet Union, many people of the country did not even believe it. There was a tremendous amount of embarrassment because they not only lost to the Americans on American soil, but they lost to a bunch of college kids. It was extremely political for the Soviet public because of the Cold War tensions, but it was just a political for the players because they were playing for their country in exchange for not serving in the army.¹⁰⁶

When talking about the emotionless Soviets and the triumphant Americans in this game, it is easy to relate these characteristics to the movie Rocky IV. The movie came out in 1985 and emulates the 1980 game in multiple ways. First and foremost it was a symbol of the Cold War by having the Soviets fight the Americans, which they never did directly during the Cold War, hence the name. Secondly, the Soviet fighter Drago was a monster of a man who was undefeated while the American fighter Rocky was a small, gritty, blue-collar fighter. The idea that the Soviets were emotionless robots was shown in the movie during Drago’s training regiment versus Rocky’s. Drago was training with top of the line technology with wires connected all over his body as if he was a robot while Rocky was out in the middle of no where in a cabin training the old-fashioned way. The movie even throws daggers at the Soviets for doping when they show Drago being injected with steroids. Nevertheless, the fight was just like the hockey game. Drago was punishing

¹⁰⁵ *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team,*

¹⁰⁶ *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team,*

Rocky through the first few rounds of the fight but the American stuck with him and kept getting up, which deflated Drago a little each time he knocked Rocky down. Rocky stuck with the Soviet all the way until the end where he was able to tire him out enough to knock him out, which no one has ever done, just like the hockey game. The best part about the movie is the fight was in Moscow and the fans began to admire Rocky as the fight went on. They saw the heart and willingness of the American and began to chant his name in the stadium. This can go back to the idea that athletes have this tremendous respect for each other and that the fans should share that connection whether or not they agree with the opponents political stance.

The country and the players definitely had contrasting views over the game and what it truly meant but no one really seemed to care too much about it. The country took the victory over the Soviets and the gold medal that came along with it as an uplifting moment, a victory over communism. Contrary, the players, a group of young college guys, came together to achieve something great for each other and just saw it as a game. No matter which way one looks at it, the "Miracle on ice" was the greatest sports moment of the twentieth century. Captain Mike Eruzione was speechless when asked about the Soviet game but what he said was the epitome of what Brooks wanted his team to become, "I don't think you can put it into words. It was 20 guys pulling for each other, never quitting, 60 minutes of good hockey. I don't think we kicked their butts. We just won."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Leonard Shapiro, "U.S. Shocks Soviets in Ice Hockey, 4-3." *Washington Post*, February 23, 1980.

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