

CARROLL COLLEGE

LINE CHANGE:

HOW THE MIRACLE OLYMPIC HOCKEY TEAM OF 1980 SPARKED THE
RENEWAL OF AMERICAN NATIONALISM

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

BRIAN DICKSON

HELENA, MONTANA

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This thesis has been approved for honors recognition for the Department of History.

Robert Swartout
Robert Swartout, Doctor of History

April 10, 2008
Date

Joan Stottlemeyer
Joan Stottlemeyer

10 April 2008
Date

Elvira Roncalli
Elvira Roncalli, Doctor of Philosophy

14 April 2008
Date

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Introduction

Sporting events have often reflected the times in which they are played. At the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, African American Jesse Owens outran the team comprised of member of Adolf Hitler's "master race," dealing a blow to the Nazi leader's policy stance. The 1950 World Cup of Soccer witnessed perennial powerhouse England fall to the United States 1-0 at the same time the United States was surpassing Great Britain as the dominant power in Western foreign policy. In 1966, at the pinnacle of the Civil Rights Movement, the Texas Western University basketball team met the University of Kentucky in the college basketball championship game and became the first university to start any collegiate basketball game with an entirely African American squad.

The most memorable of these events is the meeting between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the hockey arena at Lake Placid, New York, during the 1980 Olympic Games. The Soviet team had dominated the international hockey world for twenty years, while the American team had been assembled only one year before. The hockey game reflected the state of the Cold War. The United States was reeling as a power. The citizens had become disheartened, much like the American team when they faced the Soviets at Madison Square Garden in an exhibition weeks prior to the Olympics. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was able to project its power on a global scale, attempting to fill power vacuums left by the weakening of America.

But when the American hockey team pulled off what is possibly the greatest upset in sports history, Americans felt their sense of patriotism rekindle, and the new president, Ronald Reagan, tended the flame until it became a bonfire. Within a few years, Reagan had the American people feeling that the United States was the most powerful nation in

the world. Continuously relating to the people, the Great Communicator rallied support for policies designed to defeat the Soviet Union and establish the United States as the most powerful country in the world.

By looking at the situation in each decade and by using the Miracle hockey game as the lens to view this emergence of a new patriotism, the sudden, drastic shift in public opinion becomes clear. America was looking for a victory to believe in, and they found it in the hockey rink at Lake Placid.

Chapter 1

“Crisis of Confidence”

Despite the apparent successes of diplomacy in the 1970s (détente with the Soviet Union, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Communist China, and the Camp David Accords), public support for the United States government at home was at one of its lowest points in American history. The 1970s was a decade of government scandals, gas lines, high inflation, and low national self-esteem; President Jimmy Carter described it as "a crisis of confidence."¹ The first major contributor to the plight was the Watergate scandal, which was sparked by the leaking of a series of documents, known collectively as the *Pentagon Papers*, to the press. The documents outlined the decision-making process of the Vietnam War and confirmed the belief held by many Americans that they had been misled by three of their presidents: John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon.² When Nixon found out about the leak, he was outraged. Moving quickly to prevent any further sensitive information from being leaked to the press, he sued for injunctions against several major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Sun Times*.³

Nixon also created the infamous group known as the Plumbers to fix leaks from within the administration itself. Nixon's paranoia about the security of information was, however, sated as his agents looked for evidence he could use against Daniel Ellsberg, who had leaked the documents. The situation got more out of hand when members of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP) broke into the Watergate Hotel trying to gather more subversive information, this time to use against the Democrats in the 1972 election. The president's administration was eventually tied to the break-in, and Nixon

watched his approval numbers fall dramatically.⁴ Nixon's administration was instantly flooded by investigations of the scandal. At each turn, Nixon swore to the public that he had no knowledge of the activities. There were several investigations proceeding congruent to one another, but the most damaging to Nixon was the one being run by Archibald Cox from the Justice Department. It was Cox's investigation that discovered that Nixon had taped most of the conversations that took place in the Oval Office, which could include conversations about the break-ins. Both sides battled in court, the Justice Department claiming that the tapes would reveal evidence about a conspiracy while Nixon arguing that the tapes were of discussions that contained information that needed to remain secret in the interest of national security.

Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that the investigators were entitled to hear the tapes. This decision, added to all the other issues Nixon had been addressing (battling pneumonia, dealing with the scandal surrounding his vice president, Spiro Agnew, and movements by Soviet troops, which caused Nixon to raise U. S. troops to "nuclear alert"), had many people concerned that Richard Nixon was beginning to buckle under the pressure.⁵ Nixon was also holding back the tapes, giving several excuses to the public, but each seemed only to enhance the image of a cover-up coming from the White House. First, tapes had not been replaced, and the discussions in question had not actually been recorded. Access to the tapes by several officials was not strict, which meant tapes had gone missing. As the excuses continued to come from the Oval Office, *The Detroit Free Press* declared, "Enough is enough."⁶ But the most damning evidence of a cover-up came when one of the tapes had an inexplicable 18.5-minute gap. To make matters worse for Nixon, the oil embargo had begun to affect gas prices, causing the term

“energy crisis” to become common place,⁷ and the Internal Revenue Service reported that Nixon had not been paying all of his income taxes, leading to the infamous phrase, “I am not a crook,” that would haunt Nixon in the following months.⁸

Following a set of dismissals by Nixon of executive employees, known as the Saturday Night Massacre, which included federal prosecutor Archibald Cox, Nixon attempted to thwart the demands from the new prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, to turn over the tapes by providing printed transcripts to the public. Nixon himself oversaw the final edit, deleting as much evidence and expletives as he could.⁹ The Supreme Court ruled that transcripts were not the same as the tapes; moreover, the public reacted harshly due to all the “explicative deleted” notations throughout the telephone-book-sized volume. Many politicians, including several conservative Republicans, went out of their way to denounce Nixon, and one conservative newspaper, *The Chicago Times*, wrote that, “Now in about 300,000 words we have seen the private man and we are appalled,” before calling for Nixon’s impeachment.¹⁰

Everything finally came to a head on June 6, 1974, when *The Los Angeles Times* reported that Richard M. Nixon, the President of the United States, had been named in the Watergate break-in as an unindicted co-conspirator. Normally, most people would not have understood what “unindicted co-conspirator” meant, but the published transcripts had told them. On the tape from April 17, 1973, Henry Petersen had informed Nixon, “For example, I am indicted [alongside H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman for the Watergate break-in]. You’re an unindicted coconspirator. You are just as guilty as I am. . . .”¹¹ The public now saw a trail of evidence and cover-ups that led back to the Oval Office. The man the people had trusted to lead their country had betrayed them.

The call for impeachment was loud, and it echoed in Congress. The week-long proceedings in Congress were televised, and on July 27, 1974, the vote on the first Article of Impeachment against President Richard M. Nixon was read before the cameras of all the major news agencies and was broadcast during primetime: "In all of this, Richard M. Nixon has acted in a manner contrary to his trust as President and subversive of constitutional government, to the great prejudice of the cause of law and justice and to the manifest injury of the people of the United States. Wherefore Richard M. Nixon, by such conduct, warrants impeachment and trial, and removal from office."¹² This charge of obstructing justice, along with two others, abuse of power and contempt of Congress, sealed Nixon's fate.

In the face of so much negative pressure, Nixon resigned from office on August 8, 1974. Then the new president, Gerald R. Ford, delivered yet another blow to the American public. One month after Nixon's resignation, Ford issued a sweeping pardon for anything the president had done or might have done while in office. Virtually overnight, President Ford watched his approval rating plummet from seventy-one percent to forty-nine percent.¹³ The people no longer trusted their government. Historian Jeanette Fregulia, a teenager at the time, summed up the emotions in a single word, "cynicism."¹⁴

The Watergate break-in was not the only way in which Richard Nixon betrayed the American people. Nixon had won his first term in office because he promised to reduce the number of American troops in Vietnam, but once sworn in, Nixon switched his position and stepped up missions in Vietnam as well as in neighboring Laos and Cambodia in order to force the North Vietnamese government in Hanoi to accept peace.

The administration of Nixon's predecessor, Lyndon Johnson, had been devastated by the Tet Offensive, which turned the course of the war in 1968 in favor of the North Vietnamese. But Nixon believed that the South Vietnamese government in Saigon could still survive if the United States withdrew ground troops gradually while expanding the air war and that the United States could force the North Vietnamese to accept peace on American terms.¹⁵

Nixon attempted to secure an "honorable peace" at talks in Paris in January 1973, but when they broke down, Nixon's approval rating dropped. Nixon resolved to end the war either by diplomacy or by force, but when his hard-line diplomacy failed to generate results, he combined Lyndon Johnson's Vietnamization plan with an escalation in military operations to bring the war to an end, a course of action suggested by the British counterinsurgency expert Sir Robert Thompson, who advised Nixon that South Vietnam would be able to hold its own against Communism within two years. Nixon addressed the public, telling it that a pullout would result in the bloody collapse of the South Vietnamese government and would create a lack of confidence in United States leadership, both in the United States and its allies.¹⁶

Nixon's promises, to bring the troops home and to keep a military presence in South Vietnam, soon came into conflict. The people thought that Nixon would keep his campaign promises, but General Creighton Abrams, the American commander in Vietnam, told Nixon that a withdrawal would completely undermine the effectiveness of the Vietnamization process.¹⁷ When Cambodia established a pro-American government, Nixon sent in troops to support the new government and to secure staging areas that American forces could use to attack the Communist forces in North Vietnam.¹⁸

The public was outraged when it discovered that Nixon had stepped up the number of missions being conducted in Southeast Asia,¹⁹ and a series of protests in 1970 culminated in demonstrations at Kent State University and Jackson State College, which turned violent and left six students dead.²⁰ Nixon was determined to continue the fight, and so ordered assaults on North Vietnamese forces, staging grounds, and supply lines in both Cambodia and Laos. He justified those actions, and the successive ground force invasion, by telling the public they were a “protective reaction” to the shooting down of American reconnaissance aircraft. The whole operation was a bloody failure as Laotian troops fought back for six weeks, during which American forces experienced their worst losses of the war.²¹

Public sentiment continued to turn against the war. In response to the invasion of Cambodia and Laos, thirty thousand anti-war activists known as the Mayday Tribe attempted to bring the government to a standstill by conducting lie-ins throughout the nation’s capital. The lie-ins escalated into one of the worst riots in Washington, D. C., history.²² In the midst of the growing anti-war movement, the *Pentagon Papers* were published, further turning the public against the war and the government that kept it going. Nixon also could not control what the people saw on the evening news. Every night, the images of the violence and the flag-draped coffins eroded support for the war.²³

Nixon hoped to have a peace agreement signed to show to the public that would assure his re-election in 1972, and so sponsored secret peace talks. The talks started well, so well in fact that Nixon’s National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, said he could “almost taste peace.”²⁴ The talks broke down over the issue of American support for the South Vietnamese government, and the North Vietnamese

stepped up military actions. Nixon responded by ordering Operation Linebacker, a massive bombing campaign which surpassed all previous air assaults on North Vietnamese soil.²⁵

Following Operation Linebacker, the United States and North Vietnam returned to the peace table. The talks were eventually successful, so much so that the negotiators came to meet and sign an accord. South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, however, rejected the pact, objecting that he had not been consulted during the talks and the agreement did not address North Vietnamese troops who were in South Vietnam, and that if the Communist soldiers remained in his country, there was little chance that his government would remain in place. To Kissinger's horror, Nixon backed his South Vietnamese counterpart, and the peace that Kissinger had publicly declared to be "at hand" fell apart.²⁶

Nixon, however, continued to push for peace. He offered one billion dollars worth of military hardware to Thieu and the threat of the United States' making a unilateral peace with North Vietnam. He also stepped up bombing raids again in a process he termed "jugular diplomacy" to force Hanoi back to the table. Nixon was also looking for a quick peace because North Vietnamese had shot down between fifteen and thirty-four American B-52 aircraft during the bombing raids, losses that the Joint Chiefs of Staff feared would undermine American influence elsewhere in the world.²⁷ Peace talks resumed on January 8, 1973, and the resulting agreement secured an American troop withdrawal, the return of all American prisoners-of-war, and keeping the government in Saigon intact.²⁸

Nixon worked to continue propping up South Vietnam, but by the end of 1973,

Watergate and the utter lack of public support had rendered him ineffective. Congress also began to cut back on aid to South Vietnam in late 1974, and the loss of American money caused the economy to start collapsing. Religious and political turmoil also ate away at the stability of Thieu's government. The North Vietnamese seized the opportunity and invaded South Vietnam for the final time, rolling back the South Vietnamese forces.²⁹ Newly inaugurated President Ford was suddenly faced with the loss of United States influence in Southeast Asia with the fall of Saigon in April 1975.³⁰

As North Vietnamese forces laid siege to Saigon, Ford moved to evacuate the remaining American personnel from the United States Embassy in the city. He had waited to evacuate these six thousand people because he feared acting too soon would have serious consequences, the worst being that such an action would create a feeling of betrayal in the South Vietnamese people and they would take it out on Americans still in Saigon. As the final assault into Saigon by Communist forces began, American helicopters evacuated the Americans and some five hundred important pro-American Vietnamese officials in a sixteen-hour mission that experienced no major problems or serious casualties.³¹ The images of people hanging from the skids of the helicopters were the final blow to support of the war which had claimed over 55,000 American lives. But the problems were not at an end for American interests in Southeast Asia. Once the government in South Vietnam fell to Communist forces, other governments in Southeast Asia, notably Cambodia, also came under the control of the Communists.³² This news caused consternation because it appeared that the United States could no longer keep Communism in check.

To make matters worse, the fall of Vietnam to the Communists coincided with

one of the worst economic recessions in the United States since the Great Depression.³³ A stagnant economy, combined with a large amount of inflation, worried many Americans, especially when governmental policies failed to regain control of the situation. Gas prices were the sector of the economy in which inflation could most easily be seen. An Arab-Israeli clash between 1973 and 1974 did more than raise concerns over Mideast stability; it interrupted the flow of oil.³⁴ This disruption caused the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, better known as OPEC, to raise the prices of its oil exports from three dollars per barrel in 1970 to thirty-five dollars per barrel by 1981,³⁵ and importing the oil cost America a total of nearly \$100 billion.³⁶ President Nixon attempted to gain control of gas prices during 1973 and 1974 by imposing price controls on United States oil, effectively raising the cost of foreign oil fifty percent, which did lessen the price rise for those years,³⁷ but failed to control prices in the long term. President Ford also struggled to implement an effective policy to curb the inflation. Ford tried several approaches, from a grassroots campaign called Whip Inflation Now (WIN) to deregulation, tax cuts, and other policy measures,³⁸ but with little success.

It was President James E. "Jimmy" Carter's term that coincided with the worst of the economic problems. When Carter entered office, the United States' economy was slowing down. One of the major indicators was the price of wheat, which had sold at \$5.32 per bushel in February 1974, but had plummeted to a mere \$2.85 by December of 1976.³⁹ The worst problem was that Carter could not implement any effective policies to stimulate the economy which saw its growth rate drop two percent and its inflation rate rise to six percent during 1977.⁴⁰

Carter attempted to combat inflation early in his presidency by setting an example

for other sectors of the economy. He hoped that limiting the pay raise growth of all federal workers to 5.5 percent and freezing the salaries of some 2,300 political appointees would encourage private companies and state and local governments to implement similar, fiscally-responsible policies, and the combination of these policies would halt the rising inflation. Many business owners, however, felt that Carter should have addressed the oversized federal budget or the money supply instead. Workers' unions argued that the president should have tried to stimulate the economy, rather than focus on inflation. According to a *New York Times*/CBS poll, only thirty-two percent of the nation approved of Carter's initial anti-inflation policies.⁴¹ Worse for Carter was that the effectiveness of the presidency had been so undermined by the Watergate scandal that lobbyist groups began to take the lead in policy creation. Inflation continued to grow, reaching thirteen percent by the end of the decade.⁴²

The other economic issue that Carter had to deal with was energy prices. Carter's first approach to fight rising energy costs was to phase out the price controls that had been put on oil by President Nixon, hoping that allowing the prices to rise would eat into the profit margins for OPEC and other oil companies, forcing them to drop their prices to attract more business. Carter had, however, made a miscalculation as to how the American public would view the issue. Many people were still focused on the rising inflation rates, and increasing oil prices only seemed to make the inflation problem worse.⁴³

Paul Volcker, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, tried to get control of the economy from his end by raising interest rates and restricting the supply of money, but all these actions did was exacerbate the problems that were slowing the nearly

stagnant economy. The effects of Volcker's actions were just becoming evident when announcements from several countries who provided oil to the United States took the crisis to a whole new level. Nigeria had decided to add a three-to-five dollar surcharge per barrel on its oil exports. Venezuela had opted to cut its exports by seven percent, and OPEC announced that it was considering raising its prices for the fourth time in five months. All these announcements, combined with the other economic problems, sparked the first energy demonstrations to break out in America.⁴⁴

Throughout 1978 and 1979, Carter worked to boost the economy and curtail inflation, but each step he took against one of the problems caused the other to get worse. As Carter began to campaign for a second term, all most Americans were seeing in their economy was long unemployment lines that were being fed by interest and inflation rates both hovering close to twenty percent. They watched as massive fluxes rippled across the market, making America's economic status the primary concern for forty-eight percent of the American electorate, according to a Gallup poll in February of 1980.⁴⁵ Then, to Carter's dismay, the situation became even more tumultuous. Reports came out that two of the most influential markets in the United States economy, housing and automobile, were stumbling badly. This news triggered a shift in economic discussions from recession, a slowing market, to stagflation, the dangerous combination of a stagnant or declining economy, growing inflation and rising prices, and growing unemployment.⁴⁶ Stagflation was worse than a recession because, as Carter had found out, fighting it meant serious, across-the-board reforms since attacking just one of these three contributing factors only exacerbated the other two problems. To make matters even worse for Jimmy Carter, 1979 also was a year when American interests overseas were under fire as well.

In February 1979, America was faced with a sudden explosion of violence in Iran. The Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini and his supporters overthrew the Iranian government, and Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi entered the United States to receive treatment as his health had begun to deteriorate. The Shah had represented one of the bastions of American influence in the Middle East.⁴⁷ Secretary of State Cyrus Vance feared that offering the Shah exile would provoke violence in Iran,⁴⁸ but in light of the Shah's medical needs, Carter decided not only to allow the Shah into the United States, but refused to extradite him as well.

The reaction in Iran, however, was more in line with Vance's prediction. Iranian activists attacked the United States Embassy in Tehran and took sixty-nine people hostage. The response of the United States government was swift. Carter severed diplomatic ties with Iran on April 2, 1980, and in November, he froze not only Iranian assets in America but oil imports from Iran as well.⁴⁹ While this step did worsen the oil shortage that was already plaguing America, it was one of the few significant actions the government could take. Carter also began to prepare militarily. On November 20, 1979, Carter told Khomeini that the United States wanted a peaceful resolution, but would not hesitate to use force. Carter then ordered two aircraft carriers, USS *Midway* and USS *Kittyhawk*, and their subsequent battle groups, into the Arabian Sea, where they would remain until the situation was resolved in 1981.⁵⁰

Then the situation deteriorated. Carter and his staff organized a rescue mission, which turned into an unmitigated disaster. While Secretary of State Vance was working to convince America's European allies to instigate their own sanctions, the rest of Carter's foreign policy team, headed by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski

decided to attempt the rescue mission. While waiting for Europe might have been the more appropriate action, Carter, according to Brzezinski, was fed up with the lack of results through diplomacy, and he feared that Europe might back out of sanctions at the last minute. There were also logistical reasons for pushing for a quick rescue mission. The most important was that the mission would need a certain number of daylight hours. If the decision to move were delayed, the mission would have to wait until the autumn of 1980.⁵¹

The mission itself was in trouble from the outset for two reasons: first, Carter had signed off on the mission without being confident that it would succeed; and, second, it was a victim of circumstances.⁵² The mission required six helicopters, but commanders also included two backups. On the way into Iran, one experienced mechanical problems and a second got lost in a sandstorm and both turned back. When the remaining six helicopters encountered a convoy in a region of the desert that was rarely traveled, they were forced to set down. On takeoff, a third helicopter developed mechanical problems, and the mission had to be aborted. As the force prepared to return to its carrier, one of the helicopters collided with a fuel transport, a collision which killed eight servicemen.⁵³ The public's reaction was one of disappointment and outrage at the inept Carter administration. The situation dominated the American news shows for the next fifteen months.⁵⁴

The crisis in Iran was not an isolated incident. It was just one incident in a whole string of events that convinced Americans that they were no longer capable of controlling actions around the world. First, there was the fall of South Vietnam to Communist forces. Then there were the Soviets. Throughout the 1970s, the Soviet Union attempted

to increase its influence on the international stage. In several countries in Africa, specifically in Angola, the USSR worked to establish communist governments. Despite assurances from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev that Soviet intentions were not hostile, President Ford read the situation as a Soviet power grab and relations soured.⁵⁵ Then Iran's revolution, while ideologically anti-Communist, seemed to give the Soviets an opportunity to increase their influence in the Middle East. By 1979, it was apparent to some that containment was being challenged by Soviet geopolitical activities in Africa and the Mideast.⁵⁶ Even the Western Hemisphere was being affected. In July 1979, Nicaragua fell to a leftist regime.

The Soviets saw the power vacuum left in the wake of the Iranian-American fallout and decided to exploit it to strengthen the crumbling Marxist regime in Afghanistan.⁵⁷ Their Red Army invaded on December 27, just months before the Lake Placid Olympics. The USSR's stance, as portrayed by Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States during the Cold War, was that they wanted to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a Western-style government.⁵⁸ The Soviet government feared that the new leadership, the Taliban, would overthrow the Soviet-backed Communist government and inspire Islamic fundamentalists in neighboring states, which included Russia itself.

President Carter's responses were mostly symbolic, as the American people did not want the Cold War to devolve into an actual military confrontation between the Soviets and the Americans. On January 4, 1980, Carter announced his six-point response to the Soviet invasion: first, delay the opening of new consular facilities, the seven-person American outpost in Kiev and the seventeen-person Soviet consulate in New York

City; second, defer many of the cultural and economic exchanges between the Soviet Union and the United States; third, instigate trade restrictions, particularly on technological and strategic items, to create an immediate impact on the Soviet economy; fourth, curtail Soviet fishing privileges in American waters, which comprised four percent of the global Soviet haul; fifth, halt a seventeen-million-metric-ton shipment of grain, a measure designed to affect the Soviet stockpiles after a poor harvest in 1979; and finally, threaten to boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow.⁵⁹ Carter also declared in his State of the Union address one month later that the invasion was "the most serious threat to peace since the Second World War."⁶⁰ The other problem associated with all the foreign policy failures was that it caused some Americans, particularly Conservative Republicans, to fear that Communist dominance was just around the corner.⁶¹ Carter was also fearful that success in Afghanistan would embolden the Soviets to pursue other goals in the Middle East. His response was one of diplomatic hardball. In his 1980 State of the Union address, he issued the "Carter Doctrine," saying that any further attempts by the Soviets to seize control of the Mideast and its natural resources would be fought with military force if necessary.⁶²

Economic woes, the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis, the troubles in Nicaragua, the conflicts in Southeast Asia and the Mideast, the failure of anti-nuclear arms talks like Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II, and the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan suggested to many Americans that the United States was no longer the dominant force that it had been for thirty-five years. For those Americans, it seemed as though the nation was badly in need of inspiration to end this crisis of confidence.

Notes

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Chapter 2

“Do you believe in miracles?!”

In the face of all the problems in the 1970s (Watergate, stagflation, Iran, and Afghanistan), Americans were looking for a moment of reprieve, and the 1980 Winter Olympics represented exactly that. With the economic problems, the hostages still being held in Iran, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Americans desperately needed something to re-ignite their national pride and collective spirit that had been lost due to the humiliations of the 1970s.¹ Very few people, however, expected that spark to come from the United States hockey team. Just weeks before the Olympics, the Americans had been embarrassed at Madison Square Garden by the Soviets in a 10-3 debacle. Sports, said Soviet forward Boris Mikhailov, had political underpinnings in those days,² and America had just lost the first battle. Yet as the Americans defeated opponent after opponent in the preliminary round of the Olympics, including the second-seeded Czechs, excitement began to build for a rematch with the Soviets.

Despite the fact that, as Al Michaels, ABC's play-by-play announcer for the Olympic hockey tournament, observed in the pre-game statements, "most people don't know the difference between a blue line and a clothesline,"³ nearly everybody tuned in to ABC on February 22, 1980, to watch the broadcast. The game was scheduled to be played during the day, but the fervor for the game in the United States was so great that ABC decided to delay the airing of the game until prime time so that it could be viewed by most Americans,⁴ although most viewers did not realize that the game was not live. The game was billed as a contest between the inexperienced American college skaters and the veteran Soviet hockey machine. "It was a sliver of the Cold War played out on a

sheet of ice," recalled Michaels.⁵

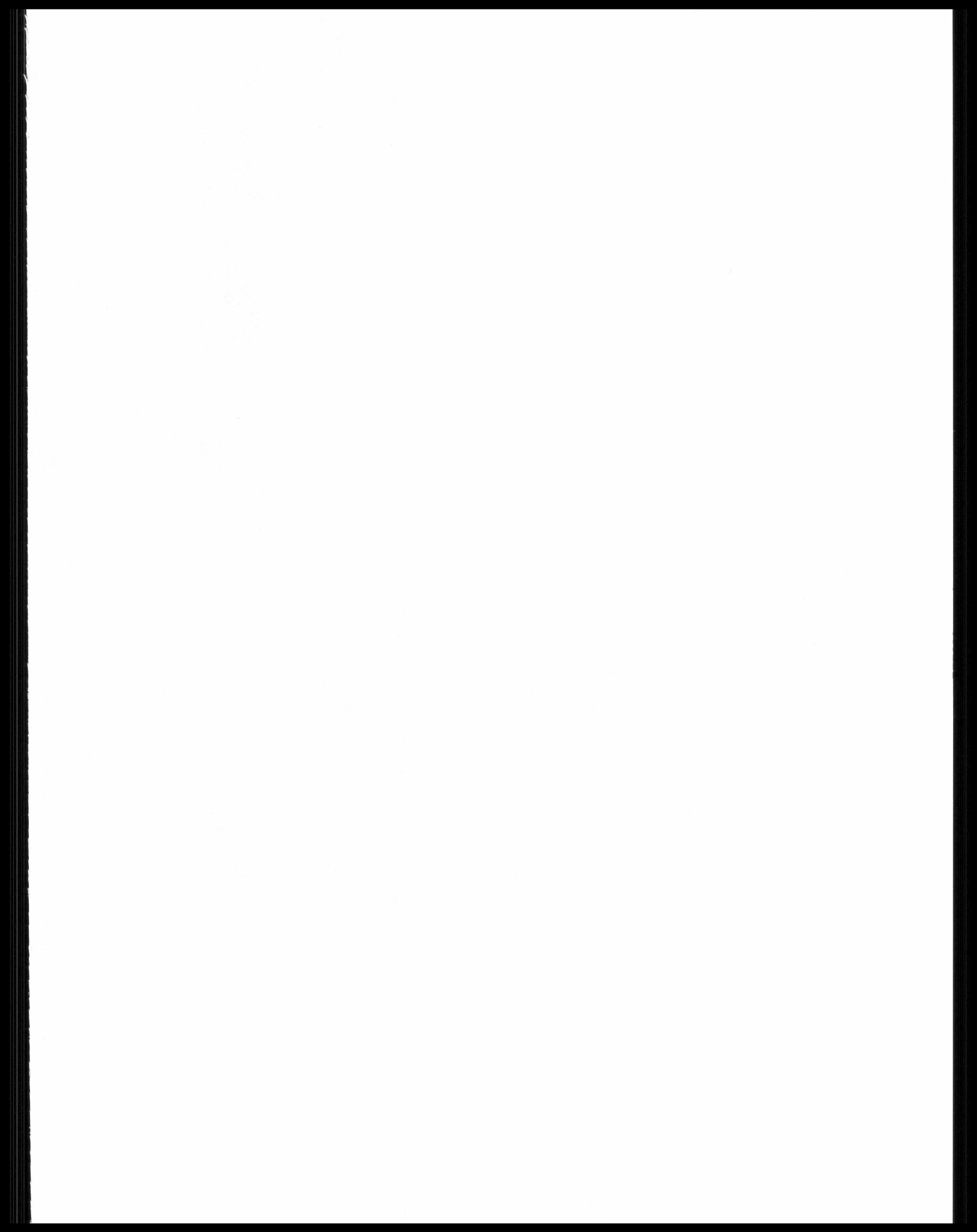
The game itself was a sixty-minute struggle between two talented teams. Few people expected the American players to keep up with the Soviet team. The Soviets had won five consecutive gold medals at the Olympics. The last time an American team had captured that honor was in 1960. That game had left a scar on Herb Brooks, who would coach the 1980 team. He had been cut from the 1960 roster days before the team started preliminary round play. To make it worse, while watching his former teammates skate to victory, Brooks's father told him, "I guess they cut the right guy."⁶ Brooks hoped to bring together a team capable of beating the Soviets at their own game. Traditionally, American skaters played a vertical game, defenders funneling the puck up to the forwards, forwards dropping back to help defend, staying in their particular zones along the whole rink. The Soviet approach, which Brooks's style was based on, was far more fluid, with players weaving around one another in a faster paced, more physical game that would force the defenders to react to offensive tactics, and not vice versa, as the American style did.⁷ After getting the coaching position, Brooks began searching for his team. He did not want the most prolific players. He was looking for players to fit his system. As goalie Jim Craig put it, "Brooks wasn't coaching a Dream Team. He was coaching a team of dreamers."⁸

Brooks found his team and began working them into shape with vigorous practices and a long series of warm-up games against other national team. Brooks had decided to try to overcome regional tensions, particularly the Minnesota-Massachusetts tensions, by uniting the players against him.⁹ He successfully unified the players by being ruthless in his treatment each of them. The most revealing example of this

coaching method came following a game against the Norwegian national team in September of 1979. The Americans had been favored to win the game and they knew it. Expecting to win, they did not skate with as much effort as Brooks expected and found themselves fighting just to tie the score. Brooks was furious and declared, "If you don't want to skate during the game, then you'll skate after it." He then ordered them to begin skating "Herbies," a grueling exercise in which players skated from one end of the rink to the near blue line, and back, to the red line and back, to the far blue line and back, and finally to the opposite end of the rink and back. Brooks had the team skating Herbies for nearly an hour, continuing even after the lights in the arena were turned off.¹⁰

Although the American team had improved, its debacle at Madison Square Garden only entrenched the belief in Soviet dominance. Each veteran member of the Soviet team was revered in the hockey world, and the new skaters were being groomed to take the veterans' places. The Americans' admiration of the greats of their sports was summed up by goalie Steve Janaszak, "They were gods."¹¹ The Olympic game began just like the game in Madison Square Garden, with the Soviets in control. Unlike the Garden game, however, Craig was keeping the puck out of the net. Despite their goalie's good play, the American team could not prevent the Soviet machine from scoring nine minutes into the first period, a score which convinced many American spectators that the Americans' amazing Olympic run, which included a game requiring last-second heroics from Bill Baker against the Swedes, was about to come to an end.¹²

The undaunted American team continued to play well, and generated some offense, an attack that resulted in a Buzz Schneider score. Craig, who had let early goals steal his confidence at Madison Square Garden, continued to play inspired hockey,



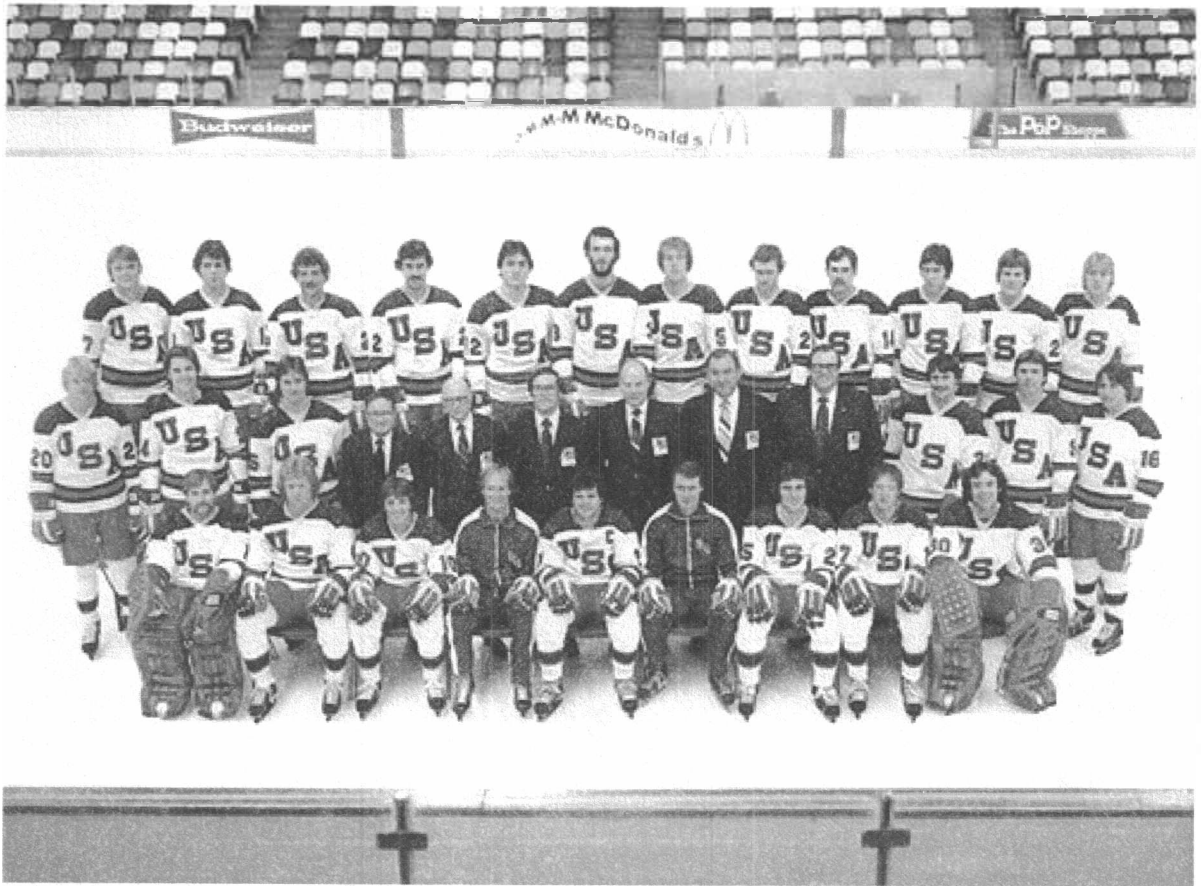
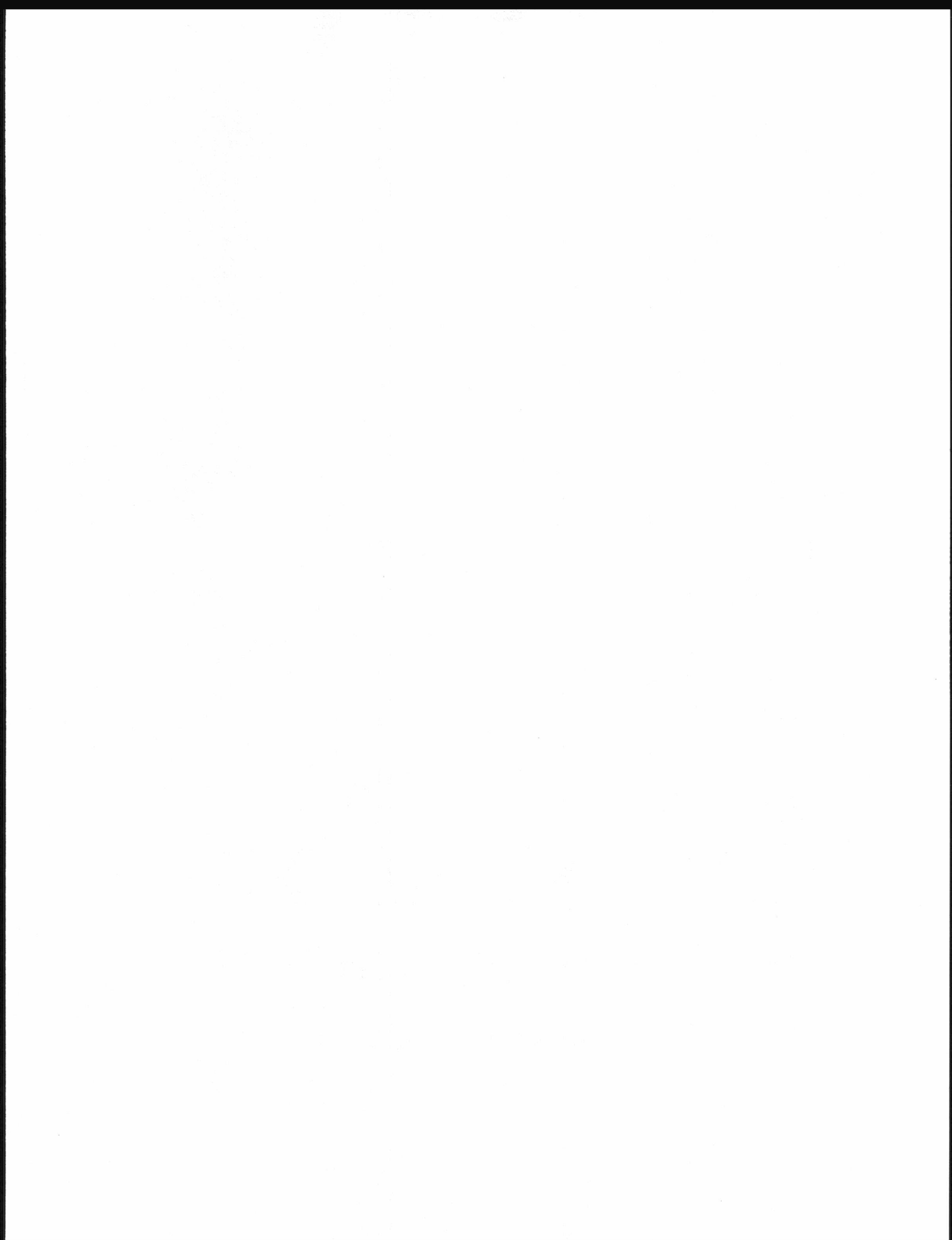


Figure 1. The 1980 United States Olympic Hockey Team. From United States Hockey Hall of Fame, "Our Olympic Legacy," United States Hockey Hall of Fame website, <http://www.ushockeyhall.com/olympic.cfm> (accessed February 14, 2008).



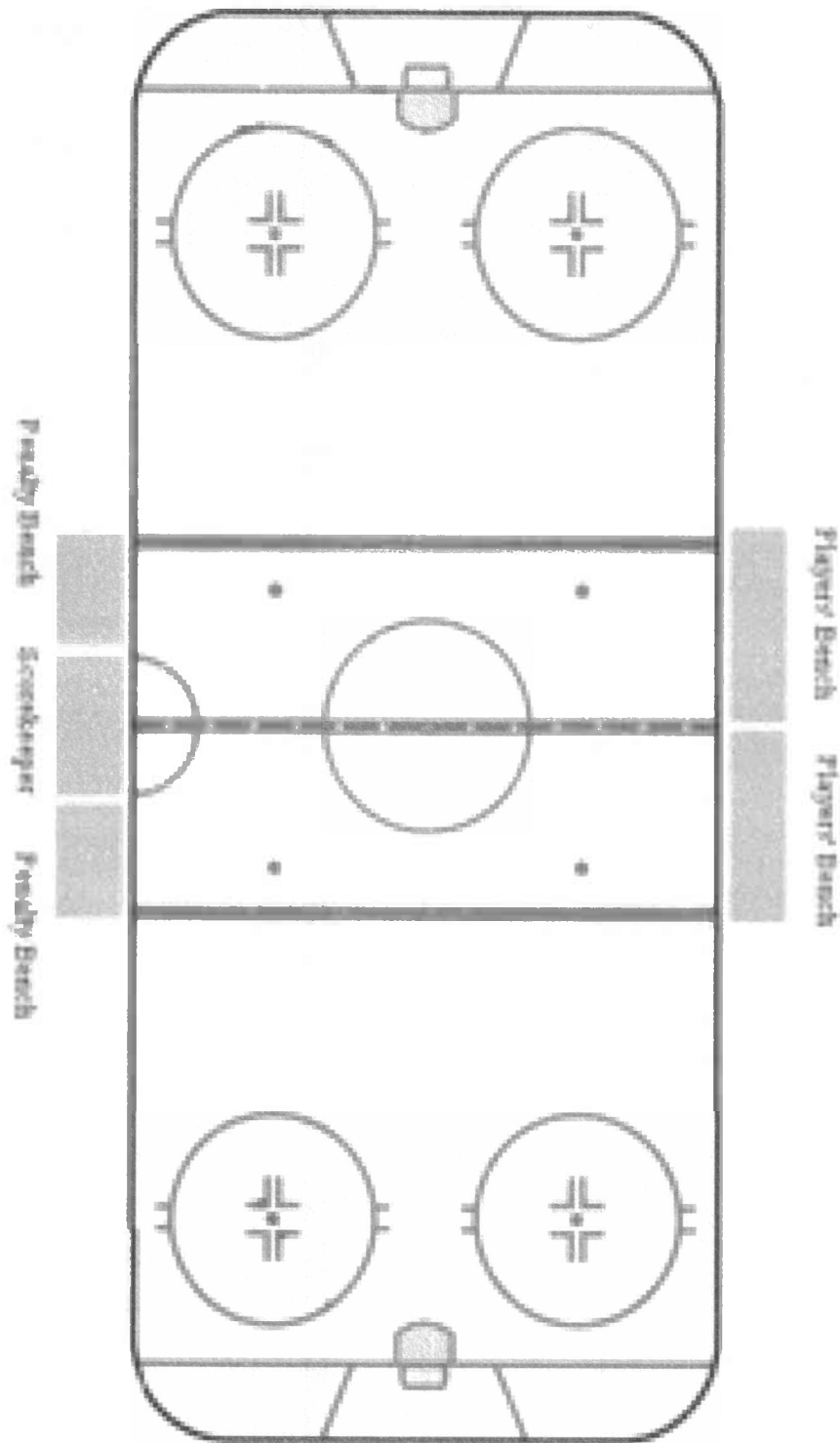
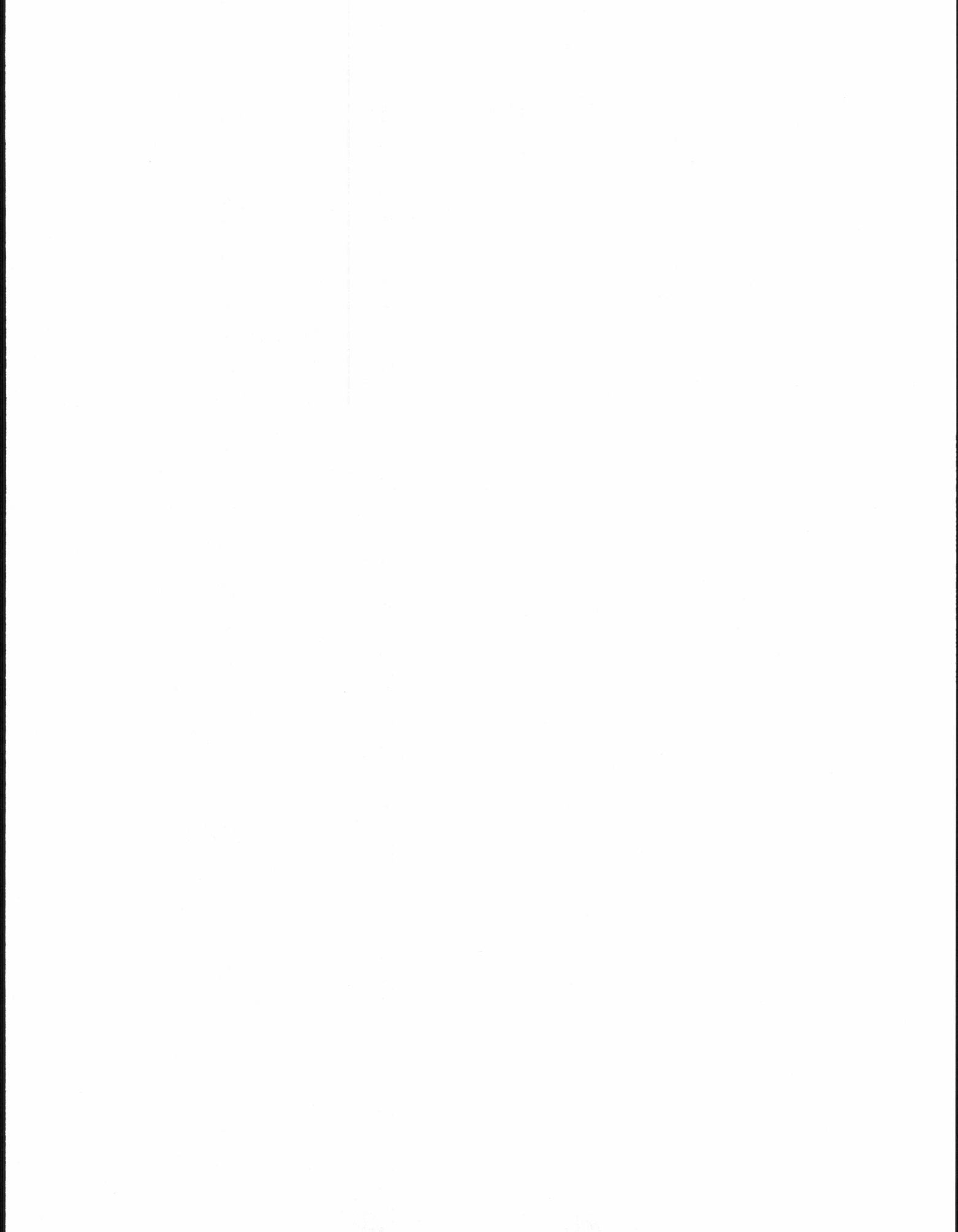


Figure 2. Diagram of a hockey rink. From "National Hockey League," Answers.com <http://www.answers.com/topic/national-hockey-league?cat=biz-fin> (accessed February 14, 2008).



despite the fact that he was fighting a sinus infection, and thwarted Soviet assaults to keep the United States in the game.¹³ But with three minutes to play in the first period, Soviet forward Sergei Makarov slipped behind Ken Marrow and Mark Johnson to receive a pass from Vladimir Golikov and an open attempt on the goal. Craig was unable to deflect Makarov's shot.¹⁴

Leading 2-1, the Soviets tried to capitalize on their momentum, but Craig would not give up. As the first period drew to an end, the Americans engaged in one more attack. The Soviets defense was only half-hearted because there were only seconds remaining in the period. Even the legendary Soviet goalie Vladislav Tretiak did not expect anything to happen. He easily blocked a long-range shot by Dave Christian, but sloppily allowed the puck to skid back into the middle of the ice, as opposed to flicking it into the corner. Mark Johnson collected the loose puck. Tretiak was eight feet out of his net, apparently heading toward the locker room. Johnson, however, was racing the clock, and with one second on the clock, Johnson slipped the puck past Tretiak for the equalizing score.¹⁵ The Americans went back to the locker room to the cheers of their fans, fully in control of the game's momentum and with the belief that they could indeed keep up with the Soviets.¹⁶

Then Soviet coach Viktor Tikhonov made one of the oddest moves in sports history. At the beginning of the second period, he put Tretiak, who was undisputedly the best goalkeeper in the world, on the bench.¹⁷ The move surprised many of those present, especially the Soviet team. Forward Sergei Makarov summed up the feelings on the Soviet bench: "The whole team was not happy when Tikhonov made the switch. . . . Tikhonov was panicking."¹⁸ The Americans played well, but so did Tretiak's

replacement, Vladimir Myshkin. Early in the second period, John Harrington was called for holding. As the Americans tried to kill the penalty, Vladimir Krutov intercepted a pass and sent the puck forward to Alexander Maltsev, who was behind the four American defenders. Maltsev bounced the puck off the left goal post and into the net, giving the Soviets a 3-2 advantage.¹⁹ Tempers began to flare as both teams fought to control the game. Hot tempers meant a more physical game, and the American team almost lost Craig as Vladimir Krutov followed up on a shot and was checked into the American goalie by Ken Marrow. Craig's head bounced off the ice and he lay motionless for several minutes. As Janaszak, Craig's backup, began to prepare for action, Craig rose to his feet ready to carry on.²⁰ He continued to play well. By the end of the second period, Craig had blocked twenty-seven of thirty shots,²¹ a tally that most goalies would have only after a full game. Thanks to Craig's amazing play, the United States team went to the second intermission trailing the Soviets by only one, a huge accomplishment against a team whose record for the previous four Olympics was twenty-seven wins, one loss, and one tie, with a combined score of 175-44.²²

The young American squad was undaunted as it returned to the ice for the final period of regulation. The defense held, even though Makarov was playing an excellent game, coming close on consecutive attacks to adding his second goal of the night. The Americans continued to struggle to generate offense. Myshkin had to defend two shots since coming onto the ice at the beginning of the second period.²³ The Americans got an opportunity, however, when Krutov was whistled for high sticking. For most of the two minute advantage, the Americans struggled, but in the final few seconds of the power play, Dave Silk took a shot that Sergei Starikov blocked. Mark Johnson, however, picked

up the loose puck and added his second goal of the game, tying the game at three.²⁴ A few minutes later, the Americans fought off yet another Soviet assault, and prepared to change lines to put rested players on the ice. Bill Schneider sent the puck forward into the Soviet zone to allow the players to switch out.²⁵ Mark Pavelich centered the puck, and then the American captain, Mike "Rizzo" Eruzione, collected the puck as he came out onto the ice. Eruzione, whom Coach Herb Brooks had threatened to cut days before the Olympics began, found himself not only with the puck, but with an opening as well. He took advantage of the opening, firing off a shot, despite the fact that he was on the wrong foot. Soviet defenseman Vasily Pervukhin tried to block Eruzione's shot, but missed, and in his attempt, he blocked Myshkin's view of the puck. Myshkin could not adjust in time, and Eruzione's shot slipped past him, giving the Americans a 4-3 lead.²⁶ The fans watching on television cheered madly with the crowd as Michaels declared, "Now we've got bedlam!"²⁷ "It was like an earthquake," recalled Michaels,²⁸ a fitting description as the English translation of Eruzione is "eruption."²⁹

The final ten minutes of the game seemed to last an eternity as the Soviets attacked again and again. For the first time in twenty years, the Soviets found themselves trailing in an Olympic match,³⁰ and they began to panic. The seamless passing game, which had defined the Soviet team, disappeared as individual players simply began trying to blast the puck past Craig. Tikhonov also appeared shaken and began to mismanage his team. He left his first line out on a "shift from hell," the players skating well past the normal forty-five second mark. He also left Myshkin in goal, although pulling him out would have given the Soviets an extra attacker.³¹ American goalkeeper Jim Craig, however, put on one of the best performances in hockey history and denied shot after

shot. As the final minutes ticked off the clock, the Americans began winning the battles for loose pucks. There was no question which team had more stamina left. Brooks' training was paying off as the American players were actually *out-skating* the Soviets.³² The noise in the arena was so great in those final minutes that it "stirred all but the dead and the Communists."³³ The Soviets mounted one final charge but were thwarted by the American defense as the crowd began to count off the last ten seconds. Then Al Michaels' voice uttered the words that would forever define the game: "Do you believe in miracles?! YES!"³⁴

Elation swept the crowd in the arena and spread across the country. Many people inside the arena described the ongoing roar of the crowd as "the loudest and most joyful sports sound they had ever heard."³⁵ In California, Jeanette Fregulia and her family celebrated this moment that transcended everything: "All the way across the country . . . it was this sort of national, collective thing."³⁶ In Idaho Falls, Idaho, people were filled with euphoria. Terry Puskas recalled, "[P]eople back then made a fist in the air in front of them and gasped 'Yes!' through clenched teeth as they brought their fist downward with a vengeance."³⁷ The feeling of success probably stemmed from all the failures throughout the 1970s, and they now had a tangible victory over the Soviet Union. The Soviets, on the other hand, stood at their blue line, waiting for the traditional handshake as the Americans mobbed one another in front of their goal, wearing expressions ranging from amusement to disbelief.³⁸ "To lose, that was not possible," said Tretiak,³⁹ but that is what happened. Even though the Soviets had dominated most of the game, as illustrated by the 39-16 shot differential which favored the Soviets, it was the young American team celebrating in victory. The team, however, was not with their coach. Brooks had

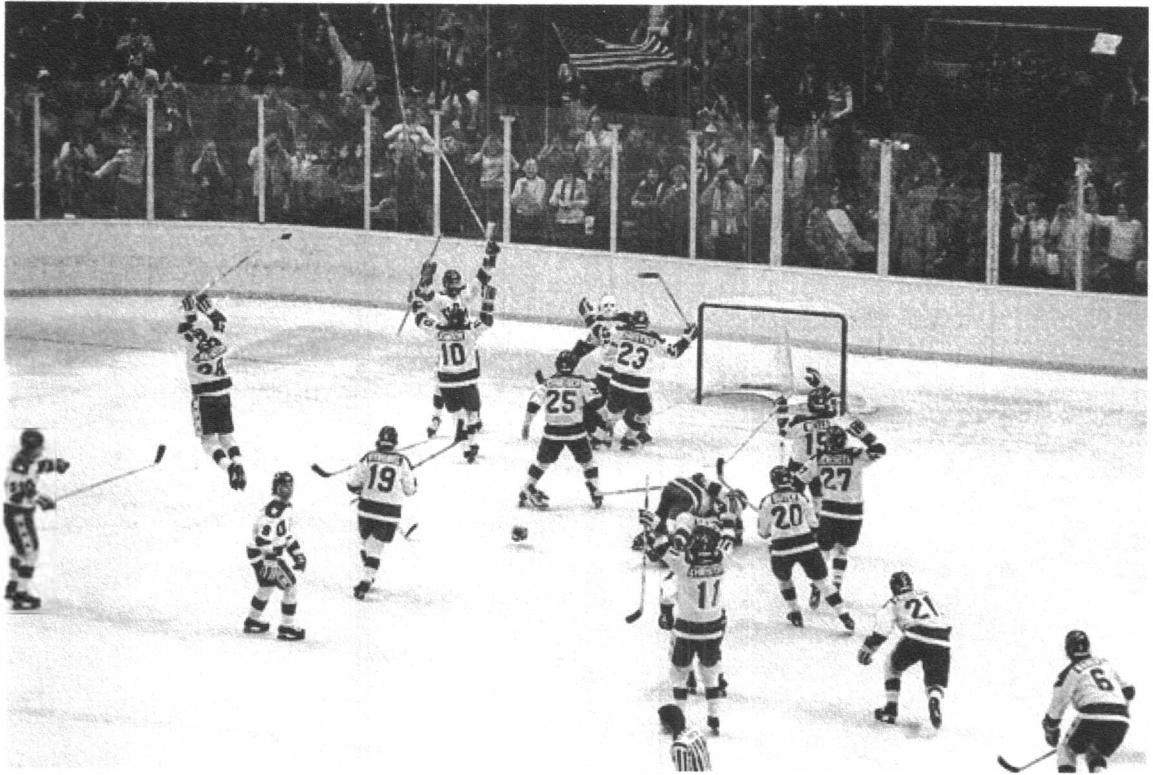
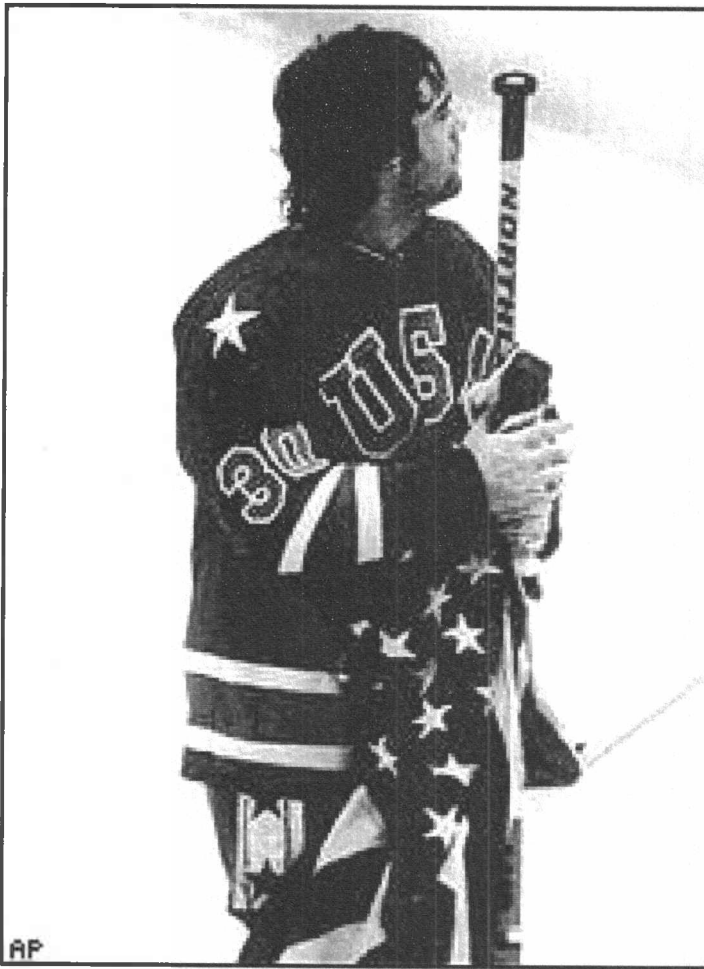


Figure 3. United States team celebrating its 4-3 victory over the Soviet Union. From United States State Department, "Photo: U.S. Ice Hockey Team at Winter Olympic Games," United States State Department website, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/pix/b/eur/79050.htm> (accessed February 14, 2008).



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Figure 4. Jim Craig after the United States team won the gold medal. From Bob Phillips, "Craig was Miracle Worker in Goal," ESPN website, http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/classic/bio/news/story?page=Craig_Jim (accessed February 14, 2008).

disappeared into the locker room almost immediately and ended up crying for joy in an orange toilet stall.⁴⁰ The Americans went back to the hotel after the game, filled with such excitement that, as Eruzione said, "All I could think was, 'We beat the Russians, We beat the Russians.'"⁴¹

In Lake Placid, the people celebrated late into the night. "People were running through the streets, waving American flags, crying and shouting as if the country had just won a war instead of a hockey game,"⁴² and it seemed fitting that the game had been won on American soil on George Washington's birthday.⁴³ One thing that few Americans realized was that the team might still leave the Olympics without a medal of any kind, due to the Olympic scoring process. The United States still had to beat the very talented Finnish team, but that game proved to be anticlimactic.⁴⁴ The United States battled back after trailing early, then won the game and the gold 4-2 due to inspired play during the third period. The medal presentations, however, brought everyone together. The anthem played while the cameras focused on Eruzione, who was on the medal stand, singing the national anthem. Americans in the arena sang along. It did not matter that many Americans did not know the words between "and the rockets red glare" and "O say does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave." It was a moment when the nation stood together. People all over the country were as united as the twenty hockey players who stood side by side through the games and now stood together on the small riser. Strangers across the country celebrated together. There were shotguns fired in Bobbitt, Minnesota, hometown of forward Buzz Schneider, and some seventy people gathered at the home of Mike Eruzione in Winthrop, Massachusetts, to sing the national anthem.⁴⁵ The United States was finally regaining its confidence.

The euphoria continued for days. In Idaho Falls, Idaho, the local newspaper was running five or six stories about the upset each day. Any other year, the big story would have been the success of Eric Heiden, a speed skater from Madison, Wisconsin, who made Olympic history by being the first Winter Olympian to win five gold medals at a single Olympics. Instead, he was completely overshadowed by the hockey team.⁴⁶ Heiden, however, did not begrudge the hockey players their glory. "Everybody expected me to win some gold medals," he said in an interview after the Olympics. "But nobody expected the hockey team to do it. That's the greatest thing I've ever seen."⁴⁷ On the other hand, the Soviets were left searching for answers. Maybe the Soviet team had become inefficient as a unit and so allowed the Americans to win, or maybe it was because "practically all the Americans already have signed professional hockey contracts,"⁴⁸ and so were not really amateurs, as Olympic athletes were supposed to be. The clean-up crews in Lake Placid also found 121 empty vodka bottles hidden in the ceiling tiles above the rooms of the Soviet players.⁴⁹ Coach Brooks put it best in an interview after the team's White House visit: "Going out and seeing Americans as we did today gives us the impression we really did something for all of the country. It gives a little different perspective on what it means to be an American."⁵⁰ America had recovered some of its pride, and this new-found sense of patriotism would be apparent in the 1980s.

NOTES

¹ Ross Gregory, *Cold War America, 1946-1990*, ed. Richard Balkin (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 574.

² Brian Hyland, prod., *Do You Believe in Miracles? The Story of the 1980 U. S. Hockey Team*, DVD, written by Bernard Goldberg, (New York: HBO Home Video, 2001).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Joe Garner, *And the Crowd Goes Wild: Relive the Most Celebrated Sporting Events Ever Broadcast* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 1999), 103.

⁵ Hyland, *Do You Believe in Miracles?*

⁶ Wayne Coffey, *The Boys of Winter: The Untold Story of a Coach, a Dream, and the 1980 U. S. Olympic Hockey Team* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 3-4.

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Ibid., xi.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹² Fregulia, interview.

¹³ Coffey, 63-65.

¹⁴ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵ Ibid., 73-76.

¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹⁷ Dave Anderson, "The Other Side of the Miracle on Ice," *New York Times*, February 22, 2005, late edition, in LexisNexis Academic, http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/Lnac-demic/search/focusSearch.do?risb=21_T2409052688&pap=results_listview_Listview&formStateKey=29_T2409052695&format=GNBLIST&returnTo=20_T2409052693 (accessed September 13, 2007).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Coffey, 119-120.

²⁰ Ibid., 155-156.

²¹ Ibid., 173.

²² Ibid., 14.

²³ Ibid., 218.

²⁴ Ibid., 223.

²⁵ Ibid., 224.

²⁶ Ibid., 233.

²⁷ *The Miracle of Lake Placid: Highlights of the 1980 Winter Olympics*, VHS, (Farmington Hills, Michigan: Magnetic Video Corporation, 1980).

²⁸ Hyland, *Do You Believe in Miracles?*

²⁹ "U. S. Knocks Off Soviets," *Idaho Falls Post Register*, February 23, 1980.

³⁰ Coffey, 234.

³¹ Ibid., 239.

³² Ibid., 241.

³³ Dave Kindred, "Winning the Coldest War," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1999, final edition, in LexisNexis Academic, http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/search/focusSearch.do?risb=21_T2409101848&pap=results_listview_Listview&formStateKey=29_T2409101853&format=GNBLIST&returnTo=20_T2409101849 (accessed September 13, 2007).

³⁴ *The Miracle of Lake Placid*.

³⁵ Coffey, 241.

³⁶ Fregulia, interview.

³⁷ Terry Puskas, e-mail message to author, October 4, 2007.

³⁸ Coffey, 242.

³⁹ Hyland, *Do You Believe in Miracles?*

⁴⁰ Coffey, 242.

⁴¹ Leonard Shapiro, "U. S. Shocks Soviets in Ice Hockey, 4-3; Eruzione Goal Hands Soviet Union 4-3 Setback," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1980, late edition, in LexisNexis Academic, http://www.lexisnexus.com/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?risb=21_T2409157282&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrKey=29_T2409150172&cisb=22_T2409157285&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8075&docNo=1 (accessed September 13, 2007).

⁴² Michael Shalin, "America's Young Hockey Team and Their Impossible Dream," in *Lake Placid 80*, ed. C. Robert Paul, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Sport & Culture USA, 1980), 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁴ Fregulia, interview.

⁴⁵ E. M. Swift, "SI Flashback: A Reminder of What Can Be," *SportsIllustrated.com*, November 1, 2006, <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2006/magazine/11/01/sportsmen.1980/index.html> (accessed October 8, 2007).

⁴⁶ "Hockey Overshadows Heiden's Fifth Gold Medal," *Idaho Falls Post Register*, February 25, 1980.

⁴⁷ "Olympians Bring Pride to U. S.," *Idaho Falls Post Register*, February 26, 1980.

⁴⁸ Kevin Klose, "Soviet Fans Seek Reasons for Loss," *Washington Post*, February 24, 1980, final edition, http://www.lexisnexus.com/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?risb=21_T2409197854&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrKey=29_T2409187573&cisb=22_T2409197857&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8075&docNo=1 (accessed September 13, 2007).

⁴⁹ Anderson.

⁵⁰ "Modern-day Heroes' Honored by Carter," *Idaho Falls Post Register*, February 26, 1980.

Chapter 3

“To Restore America”

The fervor of the United States's upset of the Soviet hockey team helped carry America into the Ronald Reagan era. Reagan took office in January 1981, and began to speak to Americans in terms that they had been waiting to hear for nearly ten years: America was strong, it was good, and it would be dominant again.

Convincing Americans to support his policies and actions was the biggest challenge facing Reagan as he began his presidency, but being persuasive was Reagan's forte. He used communication effectively to stem the negative emotions that had dominated the United States for the previous ten years. Reagan's ability to connect with his audience was a crucial aspect of his speaking skills. He could consubstantiate his audience, which meant, as Kenneth Burke defined it, Reagan could get members of his audience to suspend their own individualism and have them listen to him as simply one part of the larger body.¹ This connection was established through Reagan's use of symbols and rhetorical metaphors to connect with his audience. This parable-esque style of speaking allowed Reagan to use in simple, understandable terms while still illustrating his more complex, underlying thesis.²

Many of Reagan's speech-stories focused around the basic nature of Americans, which was always good. The most poignant were his Universal Soldier and Unknown Soldier. They were heroes who embodied perfect love for their country, and who gave everything they could on the battlefields in Vietnam. These two characters, whom Reagan referred to many times, helped him to shift the public opinion of Vietnam away from the defeat to the dedicated soldiers who faithfully served a cause, and thus morph

the perception of the war from a total failure to a golden-lined defeat.³ Reagan also used broad, allegorical images to unite many Americans behind his anti-Soviet policies. He would portray the Soviet Union as "the heart of darkness," while speaking of the heartland of America as the source of good, thus pitting the righteous United States against the evil Soviet Union,⁴ a rallying cry which many Americans found appealing.

With support building for an aggressive approach to the "evil empire," Reagan began working to end the Cold War. One of the key factors to the weakened American spirit, in Reagan's opinion, was that the Soviets had perceptively equaled, if not surpassed, America in several military and defense categories.⁵ To reestablish America as the dominant military force in the world, Reagan began building up the military at an unprecedented rate for a time of peace.⁶ Reagan hoped to break the economy of the Soviet Union in an arms race powered by American ingenuity. "Our challenge," he said, "is peaceful."⁷ Despite his desire to outspend the Soviets, Reagan still had to face the fact that the United States's economy was in shambles. When Reagan became president, the American economy was experiencing its worst depression since the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁸ Even though that was the case, Reagan was still determined to outspend the Soviets and lead America on the moral "high road," which gave it a diplomatic edge, especially in light of the situation in Afghanistan. These actions gave Americans a sense of purpose, and they rallied behind the president.

Reagan, playing on the newfound American unity, provided Americans with successes to keep the momentum going. This unity stemmed from what Reagan termed America's "New Patriotism," which was a re-emergence of the belief that America had a purpose and the ability to fulfill it.⁹ In order to fuel the growing sentiments, the Reagan

Administration employed a seven-point strategy to control the media: (1) plan ahead, (2) stay on the offensive, (3) control the information the press gets to see, (4) limit the press's access to the president, (5) set the agenda of policy discussion, (6) speak with one voice throughout the administration, and (7) repeat the point many times to drive it home with the people.¹⁰

The most poignant example of the effect of Reagan's control over the American perspective can be seen in the crises in Lebanon and Grenada. By 1983, the United States seemed ready to be effective on the global stage again. Reagan was concerned about the growing violence in Lebanon, and after a hotel was bombed in April, a terrorist act which killed 17 Americans and 46 others, he dispatched military forces as part of a multinational peacekeeping operation.¹¹ One of the units deployed was the First Battalion, Eighth Marines. On October 23, 1983, a terrorist, driving a truck filled with explosives, attacked the Eighth Marines Barracks, killing 241 soldiers.¹²

Alone, this incident would have added to the American depression and, in all likelihood, ended Reagan's presidency with the election season months away.¹³ Reagan, however, responded in a unique way to give America a victory to keep it moving forward with him in the lead. Days after the bombing in Beirut, Reagan sent military forces into the small Caribbean nation of Grenada, which had instituted a Marxist regime in 1979. As the first major military action by the United States since its exit from Vietnam, the invasion of Grenada tested America's "Vietnam Syndrome,"¹⁴ which stemmed from the lack of confidence during the 1970s. Reagan told America that Grenada had fallen under the influence of the Soviet Union and Cuba, who were training a Marxist guerilla force on the island, that it was setting a bad example for the Caribbean, and the Grenadian

government was threatening the lives of Americans on the island, particularly students at St. George's School of Medicine.¹⁵

But the underlying reason was to secure a swift, simple victory that Reagan could use as a rallying cry. His public relations team quickly took control of the media front, blacking out independent investigations and providing the exclusive reports from Grenada. The image they projected, and that the media broadcast, was that this invasion signaled the reemergence of America onto the international stage because it was able to put the humiliations of Vietnam and Iran behind it, due primarily to the strengthening of the American resolve.¹⁶ There were some people who felt that Reagan had pulled a successful sleight-of-hand act to refocus the attention of the American public from Lebanon to Grenada, but documents from within the administration show that the decision to invade the island nation had been made at some point in the three days preceding the Beirut bombing.¹⁷ The skillful handling of the events of October 1983 by Reagan and his team was so effective that the media could not help but buy what the administration was saying. News correspondent John McWethy admitted that he (and the rest of the mainstream media) had been "snookered" by the Reagan Administration.¹⁸ The public saw a decisive action by the president following an attack against American troops, which meant, in many people's minds, that America not only had the strength to fight for freedom, but the resolve to do so as well.

Even when Reagan's policies did not go as he planned, he maintained control over the media, and thus the American perspective, and in doing so, he could continue to fuel the New Patriotism. Several of his policies, most notably his missile defense system (1983), nicknamed "Star Wars," failed. The most threatening event, though, was the

Iran-Contra Affair (1985-1986). Iran-Contra, like the Beirut bombing, had all the potential to destroy Reagan's Administration, as well as the confidence built on the foundation of the hockey game. The Reagan Administration was caught selling arms to Iran and diverting the profits to the Nicaraguan rebel group known as the Contras. Reagan acted quickly, mobilizing his public relations team and diverting the public's attention from the deadly question. His ability to shift the debate to a question of whether or not he was trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government as opposed to whether or not he had the right to try to overthrow a foreign government in this manner gave Reagan options.¹⁹ Reagan opted for deniability and proceeded to distance himself from the Iran-Contra Affair by claiming the program had been run without his knowledge and turning Major Oliver North into the scapegoat.²⁰ By doing so, he managed to avoid losing the momentum he had built up on the emerging nationalism, like the emotions stemming from the hockey game, and continued to push forward against the Soviet Union.

Victories, such as the one in Grenada, combined with the economic recovery, all of which were credited to Reagan due to his skillful manipulation of the media, gave him an easy victory over his opponent in the 1984 presidential election.²¹ The propaganda war also swung to favor the United States. Every Saturday, ABC's *Wide World of Sports* replayed the clip of the Miracle Game with Al Michaels' famous question as part of its opening sequence, reminding Americans of the glory of Lake Placid.²² Reagan capitalized on this cultural taste for "beating the Soviets." When Tom Clancy published *The Hunt for Red October* in 1984, Reagan told America that it was "his favorite bedside read."²³ Movies also promoted the pro-American view. Several of the most popular movies of the day (*Rambo*, which shows Americans returning to Vietnam and

Afghanistan to fight the Communists, or *Red Dawn*, which tells the story of a group of teenagers who defend the United States against a Soviet invasion) continued to fuel the New Patriotism in America.²⁴

The Soviet Union itself was not as strong as many Americans believed. As its aged leaders died, so did the zeal of their ideology and by the end of the 1970s, the majority of the population had become disillusioned with Communism.²⁵ This disillusionment began undermining the primary tenets of Soviet Communism, and the reaction of the old Stalinist leaders was one of harsh restrictions. The early 1980s were filled with overt aggression by the Politburo, the most powerful group in the Soviet government, as they tried to reestablish party dominance with numerous political restrictions and hundreds of arrests and imprisonments. Reagan turned these events, as well as the invasion of Afghanistan, the shooting down of a South Korean airliner by the Soviet military, and other Soviet debacles, to his advantage,²⁶ using them to fuel his anti-Soviet rhetoric and Americans' patriotism. While Reagan continued to depict the Soviet Union as a powerful and determined enemy, Americans who visited the Soviet Union saw a very different country. When Tim Babcock, a former governor of Montana, traveled to the Soviet Union in 1973, he had found that the citizens were not unlike Americans. He also noted that the undermining of the Socialist stranglehold had begun when Foreign Trade Minister Nikolai Patolichev pondered whether or not the capitalist and socialist economies could work together.²⁷ In 1984, when Jeanette Fregulia visited the Soviet Union, she found a nation of starving, freezing people, and not the successful nation that the propaganda war had depicted.²⁸

While Reagan's propaganda and resulting policies took their toll on the Soviet

Union, other forces helped bring the Soviet empire to an end. The Chinese, under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, played on Soviet fears of a Sino-American alliance to force the Soviet Union's hand in diplomatic measures like the SALT II negotiations. The Chinese sent Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping to America just before they invaded Vietnam in 1979 to give the Soviets the perception that the United States supported the invasion.²⁹ Other movements began to fracture the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. In 1978, Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was elected to the papacy, and as John Paul II, he began working against oppressive governments, both in his native Poland and throughout the Eastern bloc. He inspired the Polish people, and during his 1979 visit to his homeland, awakened the Polish nationalism that had been simmering there.³⁰ The Poles then rallied around the Gdansk shipyard workers and their leader, Lech Walesa, and the Solidarity Movement was born. Other Eastern bloc countries, including Hungary and Czechoslovakia, were also experiencing national revivals, and by the end of the decade, these movements would end the Soviet regimes that controlled them. This anti-Soviet nationalism led to a decrease in production and ultimately required the use of political imprisonment and even martial law to try to hold the bloc together.

The Soviets were experiencing internal upheaval as well. The selection of Mikhail Gorbachev represented reform, one last chance to keep the Communist government from collapsing. The fourth Soviet leader in three years, Gorbachev hoped to open up both the Soviet economy and political structure within the constraints of socialism,³¹ much like his predecessor Nikita Khrushchev. His policies of *perestroika* (economic restructuring) and *glasnost* (political openness), however, could never get off the ground. The free market and controlled market systems never fused as Gorbachev

had hoped, and the stronger free market of the West dominated the Soviet economy as food became scarce and Soviet production plummeted.³² *Glasnost* also proved incompatible with Soviet doctrine.

Gorbachev found it difficult to maintain total control and to be open with the people at the same time. The failures of *glasnost* were laid bare after the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear facility in 1986. After the meltdown, one B. Gubarev, editor for *Pravda*, was sent by the Central Committee to discover what went wrong. His report cited failures of the Central Committee to react swiftly enough to save lives in the surrounding countryside, or give any information out to nearby urban centers like Kiev.³³ The Soviet government had withheld information from the public, a violation of *glasnost* policies in the eyes of the people. This policy failure brought about some of the harshest and most vocal criticism the Soviet government had ever seen.³⁴ Ethnic minorities also claimed that *glasnost* entitled them to more influence in the government, but Gorbachev returned to the old Soviet playbook, responded harshly, using force to crush these movements.³⁵ Cynicism ate away at the Soviet people. One citizen illustrated this cynicism in regards to the idea that a Communist utopia was just over the horizon: "You understand that a horizon is an imaginary line that recedes as you approach it."³⁶ This inner turmoil, combined with the challenges being made from outside forces, took their toll on the Soviet Union, and by 1989, it was clear that the Soviet Union would not survive. Congressional librarian James Billington summed the victory of the United States in the Cold War as "a triumph of a story over a theory."³⁷

Unlike his predecessors, Ronald Reagan made defeating the Communists his primary goal, and he reached that goal by not just talking, but acting tough.³⁸ Reagan's

all-out approach to defeating the Soviets relied on the people and their belief that America could defeat the Soviet Union. By directing the pro-American propaganda, Reagan successfully turned the sparks of nationalism emerging in 1980 into a fiery determination by the American people to defeat their Cold War enemy. Reagan's skill as a communicator combined with his geniality helped him win the people's trust and faith. They were willing to follow his lead as he guided America to a brighter future. That new-found confidence, combined with the internal weakening of the Soviet system, allowed America and its allies to win the Cold War.

NOTES

¹ Paul D. Erickson, *Reagan Speaks: The Making of an American Myth* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵ Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns: Reagan and National Security," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 87.

⁶ Beth A. Fischer, "Reagan and the Soviets: Winning the Cold War?" in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 116; Michael Shaller, "Reagan and the Cold War," in *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President*, by Kyle Longley, Jeremy D. Mayer, Michael Schaller, and John W. Sloan (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharp, 2007), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸ Stephen Moore, "Reagan Changed the World [Tax Cuts]," *FreeRepublic.com*, August 17, 2001, <http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a3b7d6bf143f7.htm> (accessed December 8, 2007).

⁹ Erickson, 93 and 101.

¹⁰ Mark Hertsgaard, *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency*, (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1988), 34.

¹¹ Erickson, 98.

¹² "Beirut 1983," The Eighties Club, <http://eightiesclub.tripod.com/id354.htm> (accessed March 12, 2008).

¹³ Hertsgaard, 210.

¹⁴ Stephen Zunes, "The US Invasion of Grenada: A Twenty Year Retrospective," Global Policy Forum, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/history/2003/10grenada.htm> (accessed December 8, 2007).

¹⁵ Zunes; Pach, 99.

- ¹⁶ Hertsgaard, 212.
- ¹⁷ Erickson, 100; Hertsgaard, 210; Pach, 100.
- ¹⁸ Hertsgaard, 210.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 311.
- ²⁰ LaFeber, 331-336.
- ²¹ Ibid., 329.
- ²² Fregulia, interview.
- ²³ Barson and Heller, 155.
- ²⁴ LaFeber, 330.
- ²⁵ Armorer Wason, prod., *History of the 20th Century: Communism*, VHS (Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1996).
- ²⁶ Linda R. Killen, *The Soviet Union and the United States: A New Look at the Cold War* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 158.
- ²⁷ Tim Babcock, "Doing Business with the Russians: Impressions of a Yank in Moscow," *Oxy Today*, Winter 1973, Tim Babcock Vertical Files I, 1, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.
- ²⁸ Fregulia, interview.
- ²⁹ LaFeber, 307-308.
- ³⁰ Isaacs and Downing, 329-330; LaFeber, 323.
- ³¹ LaFeber, 336 and 338.
- ³² Ibid., 339.
- ³³ B. Gubarev to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, May 22, 1986, in *Revelations from the Russian Archives: Documents in English Translation*, ed. Diane P Koenker and Ronald D. Bachman (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1997), 509-511.
- ³⁴ Grogin, 325.

³⁵ LaFeber, 339.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

³⁷ Hugh Hecló, "Ronald Reagan and the American Public Philosophy," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 36.

³⁸ Schaller, 4.

Conclusion

The Miracle hockey game is not the only sporting event that has had an impact on a country. The successes of Jesse Owens in the 1936 Berlin Olympics were portrayed as a counter-proof to Adolf Hitler's master race theory. The 2004 Olympic berth for the Iraqi soccer team was used as a symbol of Iraq's progression in the post-Sadaam Hussein era. Other events have come to epitomize larger trends in a country, such as the recent steroid scandal in baseball in America.

These events have transcended the normal bounds of history. Major successes, particularly those on the international level, are hailed by leaders as symbols of greatness for a nation. Even the right to host these major events helps a country in its growth. As China prepares to host the 2008 Summer Olympics, Chinese leaders are working to use the Games to show off the greatness of China and its many accomplishments, while other countries are hoping to use the Games to highlight some of the abuses committed by the Chinese government. Sporting events and cultural movements in general are becoming more important in understanding the history of a country.

Sporting events offer unique insights into the major issues in a country. Victors are hailed as heroes, and victories are used as propaganda tools to rally support, especially in trying times. Stories of upsets and underdogs are used to inspire people. Legends grow, and they become for modern society what Odysseus and Achilles were for ancient Greece. They define the people who cheer them on. In America, it is people such as Mohammad Ali and Mia Hamm. In England, figures such as David Beckham dominate the scene. Roger Federer is one of the most adored people in Switzerland. The

list of these national figures continues to grow, and each new hero adds to the national identity and history.

History has often focused its primary attention on political events, diplomatic correspondences, and powerful people. In recent years, however, social events, particularly sporting events, have been used as lenses to gain a more complete understanding of historical forces and trends. The ties between the social and political realms, especially at the international level, have become increasingly important as the nations of the world have become more interdependent. Moreover, with an increasing amount of leisure time, sporting events are more accessible and thus enter into the national identity more quickly. Because of this, gaining a complete understanding of contemporary history requires investigations into social and cultural history, as well as economic and political history.

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