

**February 22, 1980**

**“Miracle on Ice”**

The scene in the Olympic hockey rink was complete pandemonium. On the ice. In the stands. Outside on the street. Utter and complete jubilation. Within a few hours, the scene would be repeated all across the United States.

That was Feb. 22, 1980, 42 years ago. The United States Olympic Hockey Team did the unthinkable, the seemingly impossible. The group of college kids defeated the Soviet Union squad 4-3. It might be the greatest upset in sports history. The admittedly biased opinions of many Americans rank it at the top.

The game was played at 3 p.m. in Lake Placid, N.Y., but ABC showed it on tape-delay. It aired at 7 p.m. Such was the time that a game as important as this was not scheduled for a television-friendly time slot.

Since the average age of Americans is currently 38 years, more than half of us today were not yet born when the Miracle on Ice happened. Many members of younger generations have witnessed the US top Russia in Olympic hockey without so much amazement. How was it that the 1980 game was such a landmark event?

For starters, the NHL did not release professional players to take part in the Olympics. The team had to be picked from college players. The Soviets had no players in professional leagues because they weren't allowed to leave the country to play. They were, however, clearly a professional team. All the players were in the Red Army, which is how they were paid. Their only job in the Army was to represent the USSR on the ice and, the plan went, show their dominance.

In the intervening years there have been books and articles that told the story from the perspectives of the players, both Soviet and American. Two take-aways: The first, the looks on the faces of the Soviet players when the game was over. They stood watching the celebrations of the college kids who just beat them, the flag waving Americans in the stands who were shaking the building, the chants of U-S-A! U-S-A! that are now so ubiquitous. The prevailing belief is that the U-S-A chant began there, that day.

The Soviet players were unfamiliar with the joy that comes from winning, especially over such long odds. When they won a game, it was always expected. There was no elation, not from themselves or any of the few fans who might get to attend a game. There was just relief that it was over. On to the next.

The second revelation comes from the recollections of players from their time in the Olympic village. Turns out, while most of America thought of the Soviet players only in terms of Cold War enemies, the players themselves got to know each other in the village. They played video games against each other. They shared meals. They became friends.

This lesson, perhaps the cornerstone of the Olympic ideal – and by extension, the Commonwealth Games – shows that fellowship through sports and camaraderie among players, be they teammates or opponents, is the greatest and best purpose of the endeavor.

We learned so much on Feb. 22, 1980.