

Good guys triumph in the ultimate showdown

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LAKE PLACID, N.Y.—There was cheering in the press box and dancing in the streets. It was not a game they played, it was a passion play on ice. It was quite literally a cold war, this Olympic hockey contest between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the good guys finally won.

It was dramatic and unnerving and thrilling and exhilarating and uplifting and any superlative you might care to use. If you saw it, you were moved by it. In Lake Placid, the tumultuous village where they are holding these XIII Olympic Winter Games, fireworks of magenta and royal blue and brilliant white and symbolic gold were still exploding and lighting the sky an hour after the game had concluded.

This was the Big Red Machine that the American hockey team was playing. This was the greatest hockey team in the world, in their red uniforms with "CCCP" stitched on the sweaters, lining up on the other blue line before the game.

This was literary symbolism come to life. A hockey team emblematic of its army, a hockey team that rolls out human tanks and waves of troops in graceful assaults on ice to

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conquer any land, destroy any contemptuous opponent, was beaten by an undermanned but stubborn foe. The Soviets had beaten a team of all-stars from the National Hockey League last year in a three-game series; they had won every Olympic gold medal since 1964; they had not lost an Olympic hockey game since the Czechs beat them in 1968, but they could not prevail here against true grit.

ON A FRIDAY EVENING in this hamlet in the Adiron-

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dack Mountains, while the whole world was watching, a team of college kids from places like Warroad, Minn., Winthrop, Mass., Madison, Wis., and Davison, Mich., played the game of their lives. Kids with names like Eruzione and Johnson and Schneider and Christian and Craig and Morrow and O'Callahan and Pavelich and Broten and Strobel and Silk from schools like Minnesota and Bowling Green and Wisconsin and North Dakota and Boston University, who came together to play hockey six months ago, scored a 4-3 victory in the most dramatic and significant single Olympic game since the pool was red with blood in Melbourne when Hungary played the Soviet Union, whose army had just invaded Budapest, in water polo in the 1956 Summer Games.

There was not blood this time, but there was just as much emotion; a game transcended the sport of the event; politics at last produced something positive at the Olympics.

Just 12 days earlier, the Soviet team had overwhelmed these college kids 10-3 in Madison Square Garden. The game was the grossest kind of mismatch. The Soviets scored four goals in the first period, and Jim Craig, the American goalie, was surprised that was all.

This time, the Soviets pressed as they had in New York and passed as they had and shot as they had. But this time, Craig stopped 36 of the 39 shots on goal. This time, the college kids retaliated and pressed themselves. They took

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but 16 shots on Soviet goaltenders Vladislav Tretiak and Vladimir Myshkin, but 4 of them counted. The final one was by the American captain, a tough Italian from Boston University, Mike Eruzione, who plays left wing the way Pete Rose plays baseball, always pressing and punishing and hustling.

JOHN HARRINGTON dug the puck out of the corner. Mark Pavelich slipped it from the boards toward the center of the ice, 25 feet in front of Myshkin, who relieved Tretiak at the start of the second period. Eruzione, on the ice because of a line change, swooped in from the left, picked up the stray puck and fired it past Myshkin the Goalie. Just 81 seconds earlier, Mark Johnson had scored his second goal to tie the score in a game that was supposed to be a rout, and now there was pandemonium in the Olympic Fieldhouse. The game had become a crusade.

But there were 10 minutes left, and they would feel like 10 years. They were excruciating and unnerving and painful. The clock just would not keep ticking, and the Soviets would not quit coming.

Seconds after Eruzione's goal, Alexandr Maltsev had two shots from point-blank range and missed the goal on both. Vladimir Krutov had his opportunities, and so did Juri Lebedev, Valeri Kharlamov and Boris Mikhailov and Vladimir Petrov kept coming and trying and failing. They had played for this Soviet national team all decade; they had played against Bobby Hull and Bobby Orr and Guy Lafleur and Marcel Dionne and Ken Dryden and Gerry Cheevers and Tony Esposito, and they had never been here before.

They had never so clearly been on the brink of defeat in an Olympic game. And they kept coming, and the clock quit ticking, and it was excruciating. You knew they were doing things differently, the Soviets—throwing the puck into the American end and digging it out of the corners instead of skating there beautiful, impeccable patterns and carrying it over the blue line—but that did not make it any easier.

SOMEHOW, THERE WERE only 2½ minutes left to play now, and there was a face off in the Soviets end. Now you wished that one of these college kids would just turn into Bobby Orr for 160 seconds of his life. You wished one of them would take the puck like Orr and skate those beautifully described circles and keep it away from the opponents until the buzzer sounded. It was not going to be that way, that easy, of course. The Soviets continued to put on the pressure. They had good chances with 50 seconds and with 30 seconds. But Craig kept repelling them. Now there were just eight seconds left and the puck was rolling against the boards and Soviet sticks were swiping at it futilely.

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And now it was an hour later, and the fireworks were exploding over Mirror Lake, and Mike Eruzione, the tough Italian kid from Boston, was standing in a crowd outside the arena explaining to anyone who asked what it felt like to suddenly be a household name and an American hero.

In his hand, Eruzione was grasping a wilted yellow daisy. To figure skaters, they give bouquets of roses. To hockey heroes, they give wilted yellow daisies.

"THIS IS A DREAM," Eruzione said. "We are one more day away from a dream. Six months ago, if you'd asked me if we'd win the gold medal, I'd have said we might have. But now it is a game from reality. Six months ago, if someone had told me going into the third period against the Russians we'd be one goal

down, I wouldn't have believed it.

"But when it came down to it, I had not one doubt." I have a lot of faith in our talent and ability. And we were so pumped. I don't think God could have come down and relaxed us."

Eruzione said he respected the Soviets, and realized he had just beaten the best hockey team in the world. He said that he had not thought about cold wars or invaded countries, but that he might do that a little bit when this tournament is over. He said that the United States Olympic hockey team still had one more game and a gold medal to win, and that the champagne someone had sent to the locker room would remain on ice and unopened until Sunday.

"Did they send you caviar, too?" someone asked.

"Nah, I don't like caviar," said Mike Eruzione. "I'd rather have meatballs."

They go better with dancing in the streets and fireworks in the sky anyway.