

No "Miracle on Ice"

Some excitable newcomers to the game of hockey compared the early round USA win over Canada in the Olympics to the "Miracle on Ice" in the 1980 Olympics.

There is no comparison.

Well, there is one. Both games were played on ice with a frozen rubber sphere.

The 2010 USA hockey team consisted of players who are all on NHL teams.

They defeated a Canadian hockey team which also consisted of players who are all on NHL teams.

One group of professionals playing against another group of professionals.

In years leading up to and including 1980, American hockey fans complained about the Soviets and other teams in the Olympics using either professional hockey players or players whose only job was to play hockey (fulltime Russian Army, etc.). In the 2010 Olympics, there were no collegiate players on either the USA or Canadian team.

In 1980, professional hockey players were not allowed on the USA team. In 2010, collegiate hockey players were not invited to try out for the team. Same with Canadian players for the Canadian team.

In 1980, twelve (12) of the players on Team USA were born in Minnesota. Nine of the players played for the University of Minnesota, two for the University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD), two at the University of Wisconsin and one at North Dakota. Outside of that Midwestern area, two played for Bowling Green and four for Boston University.

Did you follow that? The 1980 Olympic team was made up of players from only four universities, predominantly the University of Minnesota's two campuses.

There were twenty (20) players on the 1980 Olympic roster.

There were twenty-three (23) players on the 2010 Olympic roster with eleven (11) alternates. Seventeen (17) NHL teams were represented on the roster.

Mike Eruzione and Buzz Schneider were the oldest players on the 1980 Olympic team. They were 25. Nine players were 22, six were 21, two were 20 and one was 19.

Jamie Langenbrunner, captain of 2010 Team USA is 34. Seventeen team members are 25 years old or older - as old as the 1980 team's two oldest players.

Eighteen members of the 1980 Miracle on Ice team were 22 or younger. Four players from the 2010 Team USA are 22 or younger.

Many complained in 1980 that Team USSR players were so much older than the college kids that made up Team USA. But only four of Team USSR were 30 years old or older. The legendary Russian goalie Vladislav Tretiak was only 27.

Some sportswriters and self-proclaimed sports experts dared compare the recent USA victory over Canada with the real "Miracle on Ice" of 1980? Get real.

The recent hockey game was one that matched full rosters of NHL teams against each other. While the Canadian roster boasts the bigger NHL stars, it is not fair to compare one group of NHL players to another. Compare the USA or Canadian team, even Russia, Slovakia or Czech Republic teams to Denver University or Colorado College.

That is how Team USA matched up to the big bad Soviets in 1980. No one, repeat, NO ONE, gave the Herb Brooks coached college players a chance. NO ONE! Anyone who now says differently is either uninformed, forgetful or a liar.

Those same "experts" may also recall that Team USA defeated the Soviets for the gold medal. That is incorrect. Team USA alternated goals with the Soviets until the tie-breaking goal by Mike Eruzione at the 10:00 mark of the 3rd period and beat the Soviets 4-3 in the semifinal game. The Soviets had led 3-2 for over 26 minutes until Mark Johnson scored his second goal of the game on a power play. One minute and twenty-one seconds later, Captain Eruzione scored the winning goal and Team USA gutted out the final ten minutes to win.

Team USA had but 16 shots on goal, the Soviets (USSR) had 39. The great Tretiak was pulled from the game at the 19:59 mark. In those days, a replacement goal tender was given a long warmup and the USSR coach probably did the switch to try to psyche the young Americans. Mark Johnson had scored his first goal at the 19:59 mark. It didn't work.

To further put into perspective just how outstanding the coaching job was by Herb Brooks, most of the team members did not go on to become notable NHL players and some never played a game in the NHL. Mike Eruzione said his accomplishment as the captain of the 1980 Olympic Team that won the gold medal (he scored the winning goal) could not be topped and did not sign an NHL contract.

A 1980 Team USA player, Neal Broten, is the only American hockey player to play on an NCAA champion team (University of Minnesota, 1979), Olympic gold medal team (1980) and NHL championship team (New Jersey Devils, 1995). Broten also played on his Roseau high school team that played in the Minnesota High School hockey tournament (the equivalent of college tournaments almost anywhere else) three times. Neal played in the NHL for 17 years and is one of the few players to have fought Wayne Gretzky in an NHL game. Brothers Aaron (12 years) and Paul (7 years) also played in the NHL.

Another Team USA player, Dave Christian holds the record for quickest goal in an NHL game by an American-born player - seven (7) seconds. When Herb Brooks died in a car accident in 2003, all Team USA players attended his funeral. That was the "Miracle on Ice" team.

There was no "plug pulled by economy"

Every retail operation faces the same economy. So, there is generally much more involved with a business failure than the economy.

When we settled in Cheyenne, the first major purchase we made was a washer and dryer and we bought them from Automatic Electric. Maytag. My wife never did like them. They operated on 17th St. then - where Bedder Sleep now is. Those were the days before Sanford's or Medicine Bow and parking was much better.

The move to Central Avenue may have contributed as much to the eventual demise of Automatic Electric as did the recent economy.

Why doesn't a business attribute "the economy" to their success? It seems like the first thing they point to when sales or profits are down or they choose to terminate their business but is never mentioned when they're racking up record sales or attractive profits.

The rest of Wyoming resents Cheyenne because we're "center of government." With all the government jobs, including military and teachers, others are of the opinion that Cheyenne is populated with a bunch of cry babies when the economy tanks in their towns and cities.

Basically, because of the thousands of public sector jobs in Cheyenne, we experience "good times" and "better times" while other areas of the state, dependent on the energy industry, experience good times and worse times. At least, that is

how they view the "economy" in Wyoming. Ask a visiting legislator from an energy-dependent district how sorry they feel for Cheyenne during these "down" times. They'll give it to you straight.

The local economy did not take out Rex or Circuit City. Those were corporate decisions apart from how the local stores were doing. That should have freed up a bunch of sales for remaining retailers in their categories. Again, no one goes public with thanks for less competition in their market - they only refer to the economy when there is negative fallout.

A downtown business like Automatic Electric is aided considerably by robust retailers near them. As major downtown draws like Grier and Dinneen failed, that had an effect on Automatic Electric and would have even in the best of economic times. Those businesses were lost, not because of the economy but because a younger generation could not profitably operate a business handed to them.

In 2000, downtown was home to the primary furniture outlets in Cheyenne. Now, all that's left is Bedder Sleep. That draw was helpful to an appliance store like Automatic Electric. The others' departures had little to do with the current economy - each left for different reasons.

There is no joy in the loss of another downtown retailer. There is also little optimism that new retailers will locate in the downtown unless changes are made. But, this business was lost for reasons beyond the economy. It's sad to lose 'em.



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