THE MIRACLE ON ICE:

HOW 1980 UNITED A NATION

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It was Feb. 22, 1980, and Team USA took the ice against the Soviets in the Medal Round of the Olympics. The game would later be titled "The top sports moment of the 20th century" by Sports Illustrated in 1999.

How exactly did they get there? The answer was nothing short of a miracle.

It all started with the Olympic committee selecting a coach who knew how to build a championship team. The selection came down to a Minnesota coach, Herb Brooks, after leading Minnesota to three NCAA championships in 1974, 1976 and 1979.

Brooks was a top-tier coach who convinced the committee that the traditional style of American hockey would not be enough to defeat the successful European teams. He suggested a new approach mixing speed and conditioning, similar to the Europeans and the toughness of the Americans.

Brooks was also the final player to be cut from the 1960 Olympic team that went on to win gold. This added another level of personal drive to win on the world's biggest stage.

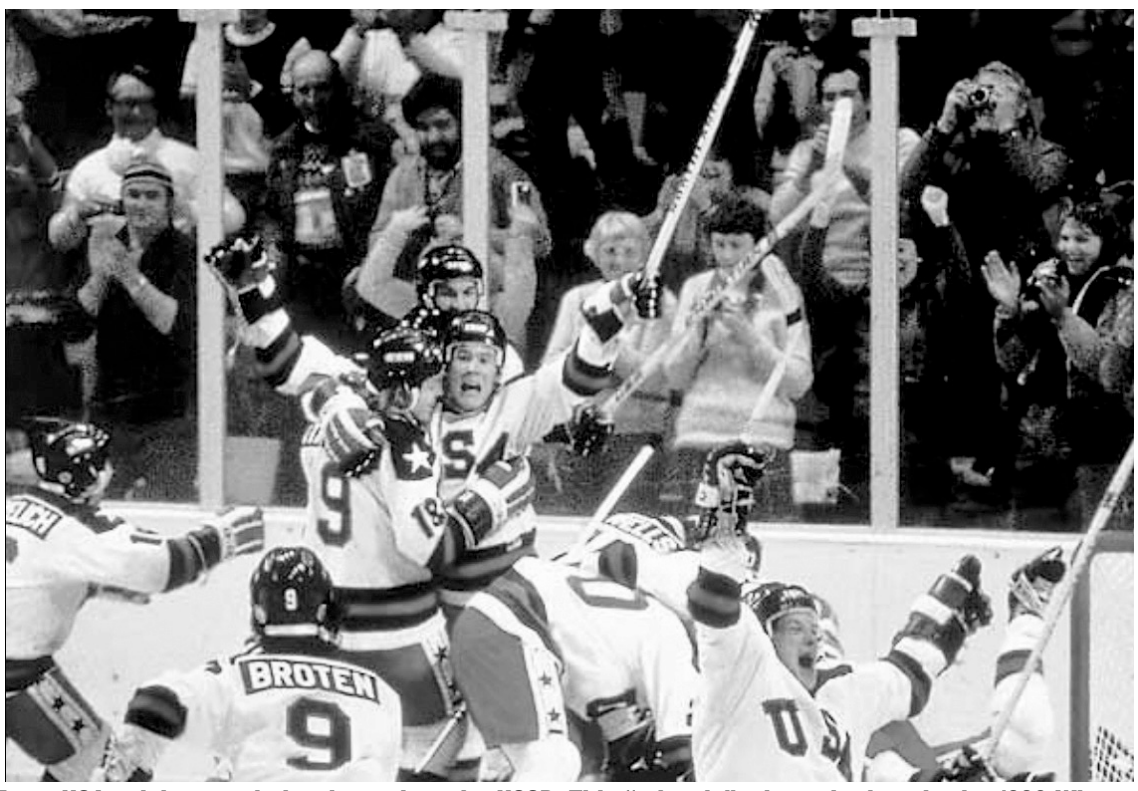
When drafting his team, Brooks focused on players that fit his new hybrid-style approach instead of the best overall players. This caused a lot of tension between Brooks and the committee as he was doing it his own way and without the committee's approval.

He later silenced the crowd after he led team USA to multiple wins on the Olympic stage in Lake Placid, N.Y. in 1980.

The Winter Olympics took place in America during high tensions between the USA and the Soviets. The political tensions rose between the two countries, especially after the nuclear arms race, the Space Race and the race for better and more advanced technology. This competition trickled down to hockey as any win over the opposing side showed strength.

The Soviets controlled the ice for many years, winning five of the six previous Winter Olympic Games before 1980 and were the heavy favorites once again in Lake Placid. The Soviets consisted of professional-level players, meanwhile the United States was comprised of more amateur players on the collegiate level, being the youngest team in the tournament.

Both squads went undefeated in the group stage with Team USA pulling off a shocking 2-2 draw against Sweden and then a monstruous 7-3 win over a second place favorite Czechoslovakia. Even though the Americans showed hope defeating top teams, the Soviets were doing the same and doing it much better.



Team USA celebrates their win against the USSR. This "miracle" win took place in the 1980 Winter Olympics.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CBS SPORTS ON FACEBOOK

Defeating Japan 16-0 to start the tournament and then winning 17-4 against the Netherlands and 8-1 against Poland, their box scores did not even look like hockey results. They easily cruised past teams before meeting up with the United States in a game that redefined hockey in America.

The United States still entered as heavy underdogs but soon asserted themselves as true competitors, staying with the faster Soviets and staying in the game. The score was tied 2-2 after the first period and the second period ended 3-2 in favor of the Soviets.

With just one period left to play, the Americans had 20 minutes to pull off the greatest upset in sports history.

The stands were filled with hopeful Americans chanting "U-S-A" anytime they could in hopes of gaining some momentum. A power-play goal by Mark Johnson gave Team USA hope as they tied the game 3-3 early in the third period. At about halfway through the period, team captain Mike Eruzione scored the go-ahead goal to put Team USA up 4-3. All they had to do was maintain the lead for the final minutes.

The final seconds ticked down as broadcaster Al Michaels delivered one of the most famous calls of all time:

"Do you believe in miracles? Yes!"

Two days later the Americans rallied back from a 2-1 deficit to defeat Finland 4-2 and take home the gold.

The movie Miracle was released in 2004 starring Kurt Russel as Brooks following the 1980 Olympic events.

Brooks passed away in August 2003, with the film paying tribute to him with the line:

"This film is dedicated to the memory of Herb Brooks, who died shortly following principal photography. He never saw it. He lived it."

Forty-six years later on the exact day, Feb. 22, Team USA claimed their first gold medal since; defeating Canada 2-1 in an overtime thriller.

The miracle may have started nearly half a century ago, but the legacy continues every time the stars and stripes rise above Olympic ice.

MONEYBALL WEEKLY:

THE BOSTON BRUINS' DEADLINE PREVIEW

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Nine days remain before the NHL trade deadline. When this happens, no more trades can be sent in for the remainder of a team's season. Many teams who are in good standing to make a run at the playoffs will beef up their rosters, while the bottom of the barrel will sell off parts that don't fit their timeline.

The Boston Bruins have been in both of these positions in the last few years. The 2022-23 season saw the Bruins finish with the best record ever and they'd accordingly ship two of their first-round picks at the deadline to acquire Dmitri Orlov and Tyler Bertuzzi for a cup run.

The ensuing playoffs ended up being one of the worst endings to a team's season ever, blowing a 3-1 series lead to the eight-seed Florida Panthers and making their accomplishments almost entirely pointless. Both players left in free agency, and captain Patrice Bergeron retired, leaving the Bruins in a bad spot for the future.

The Bruins did make the playoffs the following year but fell yet again to the Panthers, this time in the second round.

Last year was a total change of pace from the success they were not far removed from. Linus Ullmark was traded prior to the year due to cap reasons and head coach Jim Montgomery was fired a quarter of the way in. The deadline was a fire sale, with Brad Marchand and Brandon Carlo as two notable names moved. Just two years after trading away two firsts at the deadline, Boston was the team coming away with two firsts.

The polarizing recent history of the Bruins has continued on this year. The team sits fifth in the Atlantic and seventh in the East, but they are a victim of their conference. While the top five of the league has three western teams, the top ten contains seven east teams, with the Bruins at tenth.

The gap between the Bruins and those directly above them is not large, but they have ground on those behind them. The general sentiment surrounding their plans is that they'll be set to buy. With their recent history of playoff failures, this likely will be a lot less aggressive in terms of rentals and instead focused around long-term solutions.

The Bruins rank in the top ten in terms of goals scored but sit just outside the bottom ten of goals against. While some of this has come from starting goaltender Jeremy Swayman struggling and Joonas Korpisalo struggling even more, the defense has also been an issue and will likely be the focus of the deadline.

One of the obvious suitors in a trade would be the New York Rangers. The Rangers are expected to sell at this deadline, and they hold the most valuable piece at this year's deadline in center Vincent Trocheck. With three years left on his deal after this season, Trocheck would fit well as a second-line center who can provide defense and scoring for years to come.

The Rangers also have blueliner Braden Schneider. Schneider is a right-handed defenseman, a position that New York already has a surplus of and may be in line to draft more of in June. Schneider is young and plays as a more defensive player, and with years of control left, he would also fit into this Bruins team.



The Boston Bruins during a team practice. The team sits fifth in the Atlantic and seventh in the East.
PHOTO COURTESY OF BOSTON BRUINS ON FACEBOOK

The trade for these two would come at a large cost. Trading seventh overall pick James Hagens would be a drastic move for Boston, but something would have to give. Fraser Minten and Matt Poitras could be options alongside a plethora of draft capital.

Philadelphia Flyers' Rasmus Ristolainen is seen as another option on the blue line. With another year under contract after this year Ristolainen works with the timeline and would cost less than Schneider.

The Chicago Blackhawks could look to shed the contract of Ryan Donato, who signed a four-year deal after a breakout season with the team but has since fallen back to earth.

The St. Louis Blues and Vancouver Canucks hold two long-term big-time center options in Robert Thomas and Elias Pettersson. Both have clauses that they'd need to waive to facilitate a trade but could lock down the center role for the long-term.

Justin Faulk is another Blue who could be an option. Lackluster play makes him an option on the cheaper side but would also provide only a small upgrade from Andrew Peeke.

The Bruins will have many options at this year's deadline to bolster their backend. The worry to not overspend still exists, but the drive to win a cup with Pastrnak complicates that. The Bruins will likely buy more supplementary than go all-in, but they remain a team to watch for a big splash.