

# This Day in History... February 22, 1980

## The Miracle on Ice

On February 22, 1980, the US men's hockey team scored an unexpected victory over a more experienced Soviet team at the Winter Olympics. The victory was one of the most memorable moments of those games and in all of sports history.

Just two weeks earlier, the Soviet Union national hockey team had badly beaten a young American national team made of college players, by a 10-3 score. On February 22, 1980, the two teams played again in the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York.

The Soviet team was a powerhouse, having won the gold medal in the previous four Olympics. They had been nearly unbeatable during that time, losing only once in 29 games and outscoring other Olympic teams by a margin of 175-44. They featured a goalie, Vladislav Tretiak, whom many people said was the best in the world.

Facing them was the upstart squad from the United States, which wasn't expected to be a factor against the experienced European and Canadian squads. Instead, the scrappy US college players surprised everyone by advancing to the medal round. It was a fine achievement, but one they weren't expected to improve upon. Standing in their way was the powerhouse Soviet team, widely considered to be the best in the world. Nobody gave the US a chance in the rematch between the two teams.

The Soviets took a 2-1 lead in the first period, but US center Mark Johnson tied the game with under a second remaining. Soviet coach Viktor Tikhonov was furious, and when the second period began, replaced Tretiak with a backup goalie.

Going into the third period, Team USA trailed 3-2, but Johnson again scored a tying goal. The Soviets continued to put tremendous pressure on American goalie Jim Craig – they would out-shoot the Americans 39-16. But moments after Johnson's goal, team captain Mike Eruzione scored to give the US a 4-3 lead.

The Soviet response was frantic. They swarmed the US goal, but Craig blocked all shots. The minutes ticked down into seconds, and after a flurry of Soviet shots in the final minute, the Americans finally cleared the puck out of their territory. Sportscaster Al Michaels famously announced the final



*These stamps were issued for these games, which were the 13th Winter Olympics held between February 13 and 24, 1980.*

seconds of the game, saying, "Do you believe in miracles? Yes!" The game has since been dubbed the "Miracle on Ice."

Team USA defeated Finland 4-2 two days later to win the gold medal, but it was the victory over the Soviet Union that captured the attention of the country. *Sports Illustrated* voted the game as the greatest sports moment of the 20th century. And the International Ice Hockey Federation said it was the best international ice hockey story of the past 100 years. In the years since, several documentaries have retold this legendary story. It's also been dramatized in the films *Miracle on Ice* (1981) and *Miracle* (2004).



*1980 perf. 11 Winter Olympic stamps. (The other stamps are perforated 11 1/4 x 10 1/2)*

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