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# Parable on Ice: Hockey, Capitalism, and American Decadence at the Lake Placid Olympics

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On the morning of 23 February 1980, on front pages across the United States, the young Olympians hugged and hollered and tiptoed across the ice, sticks in the air and “USA” emblazoned across their chests. Their victory resounded across the nation. In Atlanta, the Off Peachtree Bar named a drink after the goaltender: the Craig Cocktail—“Everything but *vodka*.”<sup>1</sup> At the City Opera in Manhattan, news of the victory brought the “loudest Bravo” of the night.<sup>2</sup> “Some Americans wept, others honked their horns and thousands more broke into the national anthem.”<sup>3</sup> The response was as spontaneous as it was unexpected; an untapped reserve of nationalism poured forth. “I can’t remember anything like that happening since World War II,” Jim McKay, the American Broadcasting Company’s (ABC) in-studio host for the Lake Placid Olympics, crowed to millions watching.<sup>4</sup> It seemed that only one group of Americans had not heard the news. As one *New York Times* reporter mused, imagine the hostages “emerging from the[ir] isolation in Teheran to discover that . . . the American hockey team beat the Russians at the Winter Olympics for the first time in nearly 20 years.”<sup>5</sup>

And yet, surrounding the photographs of the young Olympians, headlines ran that warned of a nation in decline and a world in turmoil. Their frozen image was encircled by news of those American hostages in Iran and Soviet tanks in Kabul, of petrol prices soaring and consumer confidence flagging, of race-baiting in prisons and ballot fraud in presidential primaries. By the late 1970s, foreign policy experts warned that the short-, medium-, and long-term international structures had been shattered as (respectively) *détente*, the peace settlements of World War II, and colonialism fell apart.<sup>6</sup> Far from the triumphal shouts echoing across the arena, many agonized that the United States had become that which Richard Nixon feared: a “helpless, dispirited giant.”<sup>7</sup> As both inflation and stagnation plagued the American economy, a new word was even created. Experts began calling the combinatory contortion “stagflation.”

In such sorry circumstances, why did Americans and their media respond to the hockey victory with an outpouring of renewed nationalism and anti-Soviet sentiment? The consensus answer has been that, for three-and-a-half decades, the U.S. had been caught in an existential power struggle with the Soviet Union. The “Miracle on Ice,” as the victory came to be known, provided much-needed evidence of American superiority, however metaphoric. Or, as the president of the International Olympic Committee, Lord Killanin, would assert, the Olympic feat was a self-satisfied cry of “chauvinism.”<sup>8</sup> This article argues that these answers miss the selective nuances of the story. The Olympic feat was not an allegory, not an illustration of what was, but a parable, a story of how to—a parable of national rejuvenation that would soon be attached to and espoused by Ronald Reagan.

I focus here on the construction of the “boys of winter” as both an embrace and rejection of the widespread critique of American decadence and “national malaise” in the late 1970s. My aim is to trace the matrix of meanings that converged *over time* to bring significance to the American hockey victory. I look at this athletic event as it was constructed and contested on national lines. I return to Eric Hobsbawm’s assertion that “athletes are primary expressions of their imagined communities”<sup>9</sup>—“proxy warriors in a larger ideological conflict,” as John Hoberman describes.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, I emphasize the fantastical nature of the stories, the specific nuances of the tellings, the voices of those groups and individuals who were both larger and smaller than the state, and the ironies created by the incongruities between the “serious” and the “play,” the high and the low. As John MacAloon wrote, “[W]e project onto [sports stars] a polarized set of stereotypes, noble and admirable on one side, infantile and loutish on the other.” These polarities “absorb and echo deep themes in our culture.”<sup>11</sup> Thereby, sport in the late 1970s was characterized as both a “salvific religion in our present madness” and that madness itself.<sup>12</sup> This article will not go so far as to assert that the “Miracle on Ice” caused the rise of a “new nationalism”; rather, it explores the event as a conflicted example of its expression.

### **Enter the Humble Games**

In a sporting culture of high praise and heavy censure, the Lake Placid Olympics were to be a redefinition of the United States for the world’s stage. Like the purportedly humble President Jimmy Carter, the upstate New York Games were to be “an Olympics in perspective, an Olympics of a small community.”<sup>13</sup> This choice suggested a countervailing impulse to the crescendo of sport aggrandizement and the more generally understood American ethos of “bigger is better.” It also foreshadowed the celebration of the “little guy” and “lesson of the small” so central to the “Miracle” narrative.<sup>14</sup> “We’ve tried to change the world, and the world doesn’t want that,” the sociologist Seymour Lipset argued in *Newsweek* a few months before the Games. “The notion that bigger is better has been debunked. The 1970s may have been the beginning of the American retreat from those values.”<sup>15</sup> No doubt, Lipset overstated his case, belying an alternative fantasy

of American reconstruction, a return to global dominance, and a fury against seemingly advancing impotence. Yet, the Lake Placid Games were just such an attempt at redefinition.

Instead of displaying their wealth and power, Americans would show their “great wilderness”; *Sports Illustrated* wrote, “[J]ust as [it was] in the summer of 1354, as [it] will be in 2054 and beyond.”<sup>16</sup> And just where was Lake Placid? “Well, it isn’t too easy to tell you exactly where it is,” McKay quipped in ABC’s special, primetime preview.<sup>17</sup> It was North of New York City, up the Hudson River, past West Point, past Franklin Roosevelt’s Hyde Park resting home, closer to Canada than to the state capital. McKay described Lake Placid as “that little village in the north country”—even Henry Hudson “never got this far!”<sup>18</sup> With a population of 2731, Lake Placid was that small town where the “main street really [was] called Main Street”<sup>19</sup>; the mayor ran a dairy farm, an electrician worked on the Games’ organizing committee, and the head of Olympic protocol was a disc jockey for the local station. The opening ceremonies were held at the horseshow grounds (after paths were paved). The “twin towers” of the ski jump abutted the farm where abolitionist John Brown laid, and speed-skating took place on the football field at Lake Placid Central High. Students from the State University of New York provided the music.<sup>20</sup> It was, McKay concluded, “as if the whole country has come to a county fair except the whole world is here.”<sup>21</sup>

Alas, the Lake Placid Games stumbled even before they began. The media spotlight undercut the sunny message, the upstate economy remained depressed, and the woods were over-hunted. As one ecologist claimed, “any snow that falls on the Winter Games will be acid.”<sup>22</sup> Some mused that this was to be the first Indian Summer Games. The list of gaffes lengthened as the Olympics went on: not one, but two, steel suppliers went bankrupt, a complete transportation-system collapsed, not enough buses, not enough snow, one torchbearer left in the snow, a state trooper rammed and dragged 100 yards by a local motorist, coffee selling at the unheard of price of one-dollar-a-cup, a grassroots campaign agitating against the new ski jumps (for “sight pollution”).<sup>23</sup> A \$70,000 official investigation had to be held to reassure that the ice hockey rink would not collapse under “structural deficiencies.”<sup>24</sup>

As the famed Soviet goaltender Vladislav Tretiak remembered, “Lake Placid appeared to be one of the least fit places in the world” to host the Games.<sup>25</sup> More than half a million descended upon the tiny town. Eventually the New York governor declared a limited state of emergency. “I survived the Lake Placid Olympics,” t-shirts hailed. Finally, in order to secure funding for the Olympic Village, the game organizers resorted to a deal with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In exchange for finances, the Village would later be used as a juvenile prison.<sup>26</sup> “Was it really a jail?” Tretiak was asked on returning home to Moscow. “They thought we were exaggerating,” the goaltender explained. “I had to verify: yes, a jail, a real one with two rows of barbed wire, narrow cells without windows, and a heavily fortified yard for the prisoners.”<sup>27</sup> (Apparently unknown to

Tretiak, the “fortified” perimeter was a mandated response to the terrorist attack in Munich eight years before.)<sup>28</sup>

Under these circumstances, why was Lake Placid chosen for the Olympic Games? Charles Jewtraw, the first winner of a gold medal in the very first Winter Olympics, grew up just outside of Lake Placid. The village had already hosted the Games in 1932. Forty-nine former Olympians lived there, an astounding 1.9 percent of the population. And, as *Fortune Magazine* pointed out, “[N]o one else tried.”<sup>29</sup> The 1976 Summer Games had resulted in a \$1.1 billion deficit and a loan to the city of Montreal that would not be paid off for 20 years.<sup>30</sup> Denver had been awarded the Winter Olympics of that year, but after residents refused to finance a public bond, the Games were moved to Innsbruck, Austria and cost an unforeseen \$700 million. The result was a functionally no-bid contract for Lake Placid for the Greek Games.

Modernity did emerge from the once-dormant village. A five-floor Hilton replaced the boarded-up 100-year-old Homestead Hotel. The Central High basketball court was transformed into media headquarters: 400 typewriters, rows of television monitors, even fledgling computers. The athletes’ “psychedelic” common room—crammed full of “blinking electronic game machines” and Dionne Warwick popping on the jukebox—earned the festivities another nickname: the Pinball Olympics.<sup>31</sup> For, even as Lake Placid faltered in execution, the Games signaled a turning point in media and sports spectacle. ABC spent an unprecedented \$15 million for the rights for the Games and had a budget for another \$40 million. There were more ABC employees than U.S. Olympians who attended, and commercial sponsors abounded (Dannon was the official yogurt of the 1980 Winter Games).<sup>32</sup> Yet, how to cover such an event was still an open question. For example, ABC experimented with tinted dark-blue dye to better capture the rink’s lines for the cameras. Unfortunately, the blue lines appeared to bleed red; “during the Rumanian game they were a purplish-brown.”<sup>33</sup> Events still ran on television exclusively after hours of tape-delay, primed to catch the evening audience.

Tretiak recalled “one last scene from Main Street.”<sup>34</sup> As he strolled through the mobs, the goalie and his Soviet entourage happened upon an unkempt teen with a pile of “Nixon for President” stickers. “Are you taking part in an election campaign?” they asked. “No,” the boy answered. “They were just laying around for nine years, so I asked myself, why not make some money on them? Everything sells here. Maybe these can be sold too.” Fed-up, one townie carped, “we’re either accused of being stupid Adirondack hillbillies or . . . in bed with gypsies, tramps, and thieves.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, a tension festered between the original aim of humbleness and the growing—yet still inchoate—extravaganza that would be late-twentieth-century American professional sports, a tension between a redefinition of the United States and proof of its irredeemable decadence.

## The Fashioning of David

Amid the storylines of the Lake Placid Games, why did the hockey win become so instantly resonant? Why, within weeks, did an editorial cartoonist picture the players as the flag-spearing soldiers of Iwo Jima? Why did the President “all but knight them” at the White House?<sup>36</sup> The Americans’ hockey gold medals over the Soviets at the Squaw Valley Olympics in 1960—at the height of the Cold War—had garnered little such popular enthusiasm. By 1980, knowledge of the “Forgotten Miracle” had been lost to all but the most ardent puckheads. Indeed, six months before the Lake Placid Olympics in *Sports Illustrated’s* 25th anniversary issue, the 80-page spread of year-by-year highlights did not even mention the Squaw Valley gold.<sup>37</sup>

Two misconceptions fed the seemingly instantaneous mythologizing of the “Miracle on Ice,” the first being that the win came “out of nowhere,” and the second being that the players were amateurs. These aspects of the “Miracle” story developed out of battles endemic to the larger sporting world. Juxtaposed against professional athletes, the image of the “boys” was bolstered by the idea that they were not corrupted by monetary incentive, that they did not rely on the kindness of boosters, that they were self-made, and that they came “out of nowhere.” The story of the “Miracle,” in the biblical sense, relied on this construct. Even the secular definition of “miracle” demanded that the impetus for the event did not measure up to the output. So, a few details were consistently missed.

A different story developed in the hockey world leading up to the Winter Games. As Coach Herb Brooks contended, the team was “made up of the superstars of amateur hockey in the United States”<sup>38</sup> Five of the 20 had already been picked in the first three rounds of the NHL draft. Mike Ramsey, the future four-time All-Star defenseman, was the first American selected in the first round by the NHL, which—at that point—accepted few of his countrymen in its ranks. Ken Morrow—the one with the “whiskers that starlings could nest in”—proved vital to the New York Islanders’ four consecutive Stanley Cups in the early 1980s.<sup>39</sup> Two months before Lake Placid, *Sports Illustrated* reported that the team “already appear[ed] to be more promising than any U.S. Olympic team since the bunch that won a gold medal in 1960.”<sup>40</sup> In that article, Coach Brooks told *Sports Illustrated*, “[I]f we play the Russians, it will be strictly a David and Goliath situation.”<sup>41</sup> The article ended with a prescient quip when the reporter reminded readers, “[B]ut, hey, remember who won that one.”<sup>42</sup> Without a doubt, the Soviets were heavy favorites for the gold. They experienced the loss as one of the great chokes in all of sports history, along the lines of the ball through Bill Buckner’s legs or Buster Douglas felling Mike Tyson. However, the “out of nowhere” narrative belied the hypercompetitive selection process and the unprecedented funding and training of Brooks’ team. The notion that the “boys” were amateurs was just not true.

The cult of the amateur had a long history in the Olympic movement, even though, as historian David Young pointed out, “‘amateur’ is in fact one thing

for which the Greeks did not even have a word.”<sup>43</sup> (Ironically, in ancient Greek, *athlete* literally translated to “competitor for a prize.”) As for his British, aristocratic predecessors, for the founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, “social distinctions [would be] maintained through the moral code of amateurism.”<sup>44</sup> Monetary incentive suggested need. As Coubertin succinctly put it, “[A]n ‘amateur,’ that is someone who feels himself sufficiently paid by the joy he experiences at taking part in the Games.”<sup>45</sup> (Of course, he also said, “Olympics with women . . . would be incorrect, unpractical, uninteresting, and not esthetic.”)<sup>46</sup> In the late-nineteenth-century western Europe in which Coubertin lived, amateurism allowed for the uncontaminated pursuit of the higher ideals of athletic competition (will, desire, grace, sportsmanship, etc.). It was what economist Thorstein Veblen called “conspicuous leisure.”<sup>47</sup> Amateurism separated the elite from the masses.

The problem with maintaining such an ideal for the United States was that it had not kept pace in the amateur world of athletics. While other nations historically saw youth sports and amateur training as a public responsibility, the United States maintained a long *laissez-fair* tradition.<sup>48</sup> “Uncle Sam . . . has never unbuckled his wallet to shed a cent in support of those of his children who have crowned him with the world’s athletic supremacy,” the *New York Times* editorial board protested as far back as 1916.<sup>49</sup> “It is high time that he showed a substantial interest in the matter.”<sup>50</sup> By the 1970s, the spectrum for state funding was diverse, from no funding in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, to mixed contributions from public and private associations in Western Europe, to total state control in the Soviet Bloc. (The U.S. federal government made exceptions regarding the one-time expenditures when it hosted the Olympic Games.)

In the United States, a less-than-stellar showing at the 1972 Olympics prompted renewed calls for public funding or, at the least, a federally sponsored reorganization of American amateur sport. President Ford set up the Commission on Olympic Sport to investigate the matter in 1975. Much of the outrage arose from the poverty of some of America’s most prominent Olympians. The 1976 hockey players brought many complaints. For instance, they had had no laundry. At the facilities in Madison, Wisconsin, there was neither a permanent locker room, nor an equipment room. The players eventually had to gather their own money to pay for a part-time trainer. Five players in the back of the rented “two-seat van” had to commute for 30 minutes to get to the rink. When they arrived at the Games, they discovered that the doctor in Austria was a pediatrician. Stories poured into the hearings and out into the mass media.<sup>51</sup> Speaking to *60 Minutes* of her stay at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, the gold medal winner for the discus, Olga Connolly, recalled, “[N]ot even the air-conditioning worked. They fed us and housed us for three dollars a day . . . powdered eggs for breakfast, and a hot dog for lunch, and a pork chop for dinner.”<sup>52</sup> It was widely rumored that the U.S. cycling team had to duck the bill at a Spanish hotel.<sup>53</sup> Even the former gold



medal decathlete and Wheaties champion, Bruce Jenner, purportedly lived off his latest wife's stewardess salary.<sup>54</sup>

The *Times* editors had changed their tune from that of the previous six decades. Countering these rhetorics of *pathos*, they inquired, "[I]s the compulsion to be Number One so irresistible that the only response to state-trained Soviet athletes is state-trained American athletes?"<sup>55</sup> The director of the newspaper *Figaro* concurred, adding a French accent, "[I]s not the amateur simply a lover, someone who loves? Doesn't he who loves find his reward in the pleasure of loving? And a professional of love who cashes in on his physical attributes, is he not a prostitute?"<sup>56</sup> He was not alone in his nostalgia. "In some European circles purists bemoan the fact that [Pittsburgh Steelers' Pro Bowl quarterback] Terry Bradshaw could have been somebody," the *New York Post* found. "They wonder whatever happened to that blonde-haired kid who once threw the javelin 242 feet for Woodlawn High in Shreveport, Louisiana."<sup>57</sup>

Despite such reactionary calls, the idea of amateurism had changed. American sports had undergone a technological and financial revolution. Just months before the Games, *Sports Illustrated* examined the changes that occurred during the magazine's 25-year existence. "Oh, what an era!" the editors exclaimed. "And TV did that in a way that was awesome," they preened. "Down every dusty back road, up every glinting high rise and from sea to shining sea, folks who did not know a five-iron from a flyrod sat in hushed wonder as Arnold Palmer flipped his cigarette to the green and—yahoo!—boldly holed a long snaking putt."<sup>58</sup> Teams moved out of the Northeast to all parts of the nation. With the development of the "star system, mass spectatorship, and the win-at-all-costs," American sports spread and grew exponentially.<sup>59</sup>

The world of amateurs stood in stark relief to the financial revolution occurring in professional sports, a revolution inconceivable in Coubertin's time. By the late 1970s, American professional sports, newly freed by agents and unions, had become a cash cow for some and an arena for sharp rebukes of capitalism, decadence, and American consumer culture for many. Free agency allowed players to compete on an open market after their contracts expired. These athletes were no longer "chattel," bound to the team that discovered or drafted them.<sup>60</sup> Salaries (paltry by today's standards) exploded: in Major League Baseball, salaries went from an average of \$19,000 in 1967 to \$144,000 in 1980; in the National Basketball Association, from \$20,000 to \$170,000, in the National Football League, from \$25,000 to \$79,000.<sup>61</sup> Still, despite the characterizations of "owners as robber barons and/or the players as thieves" or "free-agent gypsies," sports had not yet become big business.<sup>62</sup> As *Sports Illustrated* reporters calculated in a special, three-part series on money and greed in sports, "[T]he annual gross of the average NFL team (\$8.9 million) is equivalent to that of a small supermarket; the revenues of an NBA club (\$4.3 million) put it in the same league with a large filling station."<sup>63</sup>



Nonetheless, the new free market and its apparent rich rewards raised anxiety and many questions.<sup>64</sup> “Free agents are really free now,” one prominent sportswriter wrote. “In the creation of the new celebrity class, however, the interdependence that generates community and teamwork is lost.”<sup>65</sup> Americans associated “professional” with “unemotional” or, worse, with “selfishness,” with athletes who were “mercenaries” and “deserters.”<sup>66</sup> As *Sports Illustrated* stated, “‘Who’s on first?’ is no longer a comic line but a real question.”<sup>67</sup> Even soccer’s once-pure Pelé became a multinational marketing machine.<sup>68</sup> Many simply became disillusioned. The prominent tennis caller, Bud Collins, retorted, “You show me a true-blue amateur [in spectator sports], I’ll show you a virgin hooker.”<sup>69</sup> Soviet exile and noted sports un-enthusiast Joseph Brodsky put it another way: “Can we really call a man who lifts 200 kilos an amateur? And if we can, then how much should a professional lift? And what, then, is your definition of a monster?”<sup>70</sup>

In Lake Placid, even before the cults of personality attached themselves to the “boys of winter,” Jim Denney epitomized the new ideal of the amateur athlete. Denney was straight-laced, religious, and conservative. He was, arguably, the best American ski jumper of all-time. “A little less than two months from now, 22-year-old Jim Denney will marry his high school sweetheart, begin his final two quarters of college and prepare himself for a career as a certified public accountant,” *Sports Illustrated* revealed before the Games. “Until then, he has wings.”<sup>71</sup> In the world of ski jumping, “where upon touching down, one might very probably break both legs in seven places . . . [Denney] finds nothing incongruous about these Clark Kent/Superman aspects of his life.”<sup>72</sup> The ideal amateur had evolved into a search for the un-capitalized idol. No longer an ideal to reproach the lackings of the mindless sporting masses, amateurism had transformed into a barb against the decadent elite. This evolution of the amateur athlete fed a desire to view Olympians in general—and the “boys,” in particular—as amateurs. One Olympian attested to the romanticism behind the plight. He asserted to Ford’s commission, “[O]ur sports media . . . dwells continually on the Horatio Algers of sport, thereby perpetuating this country’s folklore tradition that one must be penniless and shoeless a time before acquiring what it takes to succeed.”<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, to teach the team the strategy and tactics of his innovative method, Coach Brooks needed more time than any previous Olympic hockey team; his approach required funding. The monetary support for the “boys” came as part of a larger shift in the funding of amateur sport that coincided with Ford’s commission. The Miracle team trained for six months on “a \$700,000 budget: \$150,000 from USOC [United States Olympic Committee] funds, \$200,000 from private contributions, and \$350,000 from gate receipts.”<sup>74</sup> They went on a 10-game tour of Europe, played a series against the Canadian Olympic team and another against the top U.S. college teams. Their training was far from glamorous. “The Europe trip was a lot of traveling and carrying our own bags,” Dave Christian recalled. “We’d play a game, get on the bus or a train, end up

somewhere else and play another.”<sup>75</sup> Yet, in the months leading up to the Games, the Olympians became a de facto team in the Central Hockey League (CHL), a Class AAA minor league feeding-ground for the NHL. They played real CHL games that counted toward those clubs’ regular season standings. In total, they played 63 games prior to the Lake Placid Olympics. By and large, accounts following the Miracle elided the details of the unprecedented monetary support.

Further, the hockey players’ university scholarships rarely counted in the wages-earned ledger. The fact that the National Collegiate Athletic Association and USOC plucked most of these young men from small towns in the Midwest and from Boston’s working-class neighborhoods was not considered evidence of monetary incentive, nor were fame, glory, and future earning potential perceived as possible motivations for these unknown college kids. In reality, they were each paid \$7200, the standard minor league pay-grade for their six months of service. Nonetheless, the players’ amateur status became the story, while articles buried their salaries and training under such euphemisms as an “extended six-month training period.”<sup>76</sup>

For all of the nationalist rhetoric and sentiment associated with the “Miracle,” the victorious outcry must be understood as much as national censure as patriotic celebration. Just as the “boys” aimed to rescue the foundering American game, interwoven in the hockey parable was a correction for out-of-control capitalism and American decadence. The Soviet Union was not the only “evil empire”; the money paid for and to the players was ignored, and the “boys” were, instead, laden with moral approbation. The critique ran so deep that individual greed reflected not only what the players parked in their garages, but also how they skated on the ice. Because they were free of capitalist taint, they were said to have an “ethic of self-sacrifice.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, to play as an amateur was to play as a team, as one. They were lauded as paragons of virtue for “a generation of young skaters who have new heroes to talk about and a new style to imitate.”<sup>78</sup> Their working-class stock bore even further evidence of a higher morality. With this elliptically constructed image of the team, the nation constructed an alternative to American decadence through the “lesson of the small”: a celebration of Algerian Supermen and a hope for national rejuvenation.

## Conclusion

Back in the locker room after the victory over the Soviets, the Minnesotan Vice President, Walter Mondale (a self-proclaimed “hockey fanatic”), congratulated the team: “We don’t have to prove our way of life is better through state-run sports, we can do it through amateur bodies!”<sup>79</sup> It was a dissonant sentiment from a vice president who urged Olympians to boycott the upcoming Moscow Summer Games. However, the critique resonated with national themes just as much as it reflected international concerns. Here were amateurs, American heroes untouched by Communist corruption and, implicitly, American greed; they were

talked about as role models, not only for juniors, but also for professionals in the NHL.<sup>80</sup>

From the White House, some players flew on Eastern Airlines to shoot a television commercial and then party at the Roxy Roller Disco in lower Manhattan. Within two weeks, seven of the athletes signed professional contracts. By year's end, the NHL—a league where Americans were “still fighting for recognition”—drafted 16 of the 20 players.<sup>81</sup> In a typical article written just weeks after the Olympics, one sports columnist voiced his misgivings as the threat of capitalism loomed. “Under capitalism, one capitalizes. In signing, the Olympians become absorbed in a system that they had challenged, however inadvertently.” He lamented their future, saying, “There is a sort of anxiousness as fans watch the Olympians play their first games, hoping they don't do anything to tarnish the still-fresh memory of their victory.”<sup>82</sup>

A year after the Olympics, ABC ran a made-for-television movie that starred Karl Malden as an avuncular, if no-nonsense, Brooks and Steve Guttenberg as the Boston-drawling “doolie”-goalie, Jim Craig. There was no mention of international affairs, save for one huddled protest against the invasion of Afghanistan in the pre-Olympic match-up at Madison Square Garden. The real threat came from a cast of American agents and lawyers, who tempted the players to double-cross their promises, quit the team, take the money, and join the corrupted ranks of the professionals. “Sports of one kind or another have a long history of being used to fend off decadence,” Ian Buruma wrote in the *New York Review of Books*.<sup>83</sup> “Power, miracle, power, power! One cannot escape it: these are the expressions of a country that is either superbly confident or racked by anxiety. Whenever one assumes it to be the former, evidence of the latter tends to break through.”<sup>84</sup> Buruma was analyzing South Korean fervor during the 1988 Seoul Olympics but, just as readily, could have been describing the American mood in 1980. Beneath the jingoism laid American anxiety. In fact, Columbia Broadcasting System “cleverly counter-programm[ed]” ABC's opening Olympic festivities with a popular film about the battle over an innocent American girl's soul that occurred between a Catholic priest and evil spirits from the Middle East.<sup>85</sup> The next night, CBS aired the film's sequel, *Exorcist II: The Heretic*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E.M. Swift, “The Golden Goal,” *Sports Illustrated* 52, no. 9, March 3, 1980, 18, [http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/si\\_online/the\\_golden\\_goal/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/si_online/the_golden_goal/).

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Martino, “19th Hole: The Readers Take Over,” *Sports Illustrated* 52, no. 10, March 10, 1980, 80, <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1123243/index.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> “Those Non-Political Olympics,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1980, A14.

<sup>4</sup> Jim McKay, “USSR-US Hockey,” *The XIII Olympic Winter Games*, ABC, February 22, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Karen De Witt, “Digest of News Set for Iran's Hostages,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1980, 11.

<sup>6</sup> See especially James Chase, “Is a Foreign Policy Consensus Possible?” *Foreign Affairs* 57 (Fall 1978): 1–16; Walter Cronkite, “America: Where Do We Go From Here?” *CBS News Special Report*, CBS-TV, videocassette, January 28, 1980.

- <sup>7</sup> “A Helpless Giant in Iran,” *Newsweek*, November 19, 1979, 69 (originally from Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia,” April 30, 1970).
- <sup>8</sup> Lord Killanin, *My Olympic Years* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983), 187.
- <sup>9</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 143.
- <sup>10</sup> John M. Hoberman, *Sport and Political Ideology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 262.
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