

Where Were You February 22, 1980?

By Tom Gullen

I know, I know, many of you weren't even BORN yet.

There are things in life you remember **EXACTLY** where you were when they occurred. Most of these events were negative. I remember watching TV with my Dad when the Space Shuttle crashed. I remember being at Caribou Coffee when the planes flew into the World Trade Center. Some of these were happy events like the birth of my kids, the marriage of my daughter, and the Cubs winning the World Series.

On the night of February 22, 1980, I was at work in Carbondale, Illinois. My "college job" was working at Pinch Penny Liquors. There are very few growth industries in Carbondale, but I suppose liquor stores are one of them. It was a busy night with five or ten people in each line. While I was collecting money at the counter, the phone rang. It was my sister Kristi calling from Boulder. Immediately I think something is wrong with my Mom or Dad. "Hi Kristi," I said. "I'm kind of busy right now.... everything OK?"

"Tommy, we just beat the Soviet Union," she says. I then say back to her, "Kristi, what do you want? I am busy!" She says again, "Tommy, we just beat the Soviet Union!!"

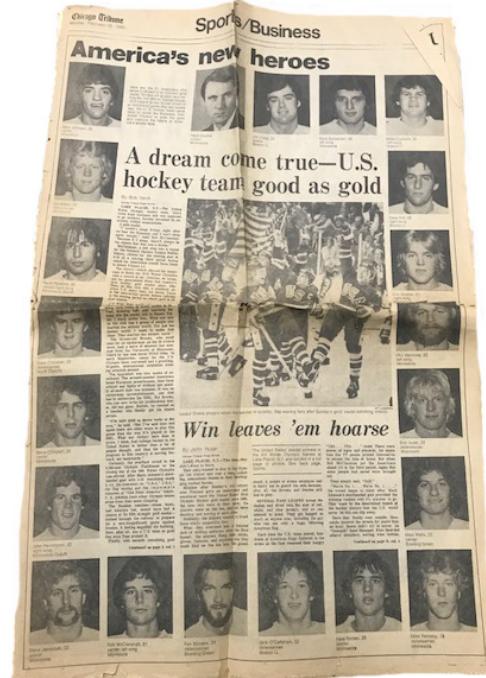
At this point reality set in.... **WE BEAT THE SOVIET UNION!** I put the phone down and screamed to everyone in the place, "We just beat the Soviets in hockey!" The entire place erupted.

To paint a picture, it was a tough time in our country's history. Every night Ted Koppel would begin the nightly news talking about the Iranian Hostage Crisis. The economy was terrible; I remember buying a VW Bug and the interest rate was 18%. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, who was our ally at that time.

For the first time in eight years, my life was not consumed by hockey. From the time I began playing through spending my sophomore year of college playing on three teams, hockey was all I really wanted to do. Mind you, I never said I was particularly any good at it, but I loved it. Nothing that resembles ice hockey is played within 100 miles of Carbondale.

But then the night after this "Miracle" I was glued to the television, watching the United States play Finland in what was a "must-win" for the U.S. to win Gold. It was not easy, as they trailed going into the 3rd period when Herb Brooks gave another impassioned speech to his team.

"Lose this game and you will take it with you to your grave." I guess that lit a fire underneath the boys and the Gold Medal was theirs.



A nation celebrated. Twenty college kids had defeated the best team in the world. Soon professionals started playing in the Olympics, meaning this miracle would never again occur. Soon players from the Soviet Union would defect and play in the NHL. Soon, the quality of hockey in the United States would improve to a point where it would become a power on the world stage. Never would it be considered a miracle for the U.S. to win a World Junior Championship, an Olympic medal. Rather, we would be **EXPECTED** to win, and compete with the best countries in the world.

Soon after this Gold Medal, kids in greater numbers than ever before signed up for hockey. Imagine the impact the Blackhawks winning the Stanley Cup had on hockey here in Chicago, except this impacted the entire country.

Me? I think I realized how much I missed the game. How much I just wanted to be around it. Next thing you know I see an ad for an Assistant Manager at the Winnetka Ice Arena. Why not I thought! I saw the impact of that Gold Medal firsthand. That was 40 years ago. Also, it has all worked out pretty darn well. Had it not been for that game, who knows where the sport of hockey would be. Who knows where I'd be?