“Boycott This!: The Olympics in the Cold War”

By:

Chester Dabrowski, Shaun Minnich, Tyler Real, Jerame Smith, Scott Switaj
Boycott This!

The Olympics in the Cold War

Introduction

Following World War II, the former Allies found themselves splitting along ideological lines. To the west the United States and United Kingdom, among others, found themselves united in the ideals of democracy and capitalism in a variety of ranges. Meanwhile, in the east, the Soviet Union had helped to set up friendly communist regimes in the areas it had overrun during World War II, providing both supporting states and a buffer between themselves and Western Europe in the case of another war. This soon became known as the Cold War and, while the West and East never directly fought each other in open warfare, there were many other avenues in which the Soviet Union and the United States fought their ideological wars against each other. One such approach was thru the world of sports. International competitions provided both powers a world stage in which to show their superiority over the other power. The largest stage available was that of the Olympic Games, specifically the Summer Games.

Cold War Summery

After World War II, the escalating tension between the United States and the Soviet Union reached a boiling point. In April of 1949 NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, amassed the five signees of the Berlin Treaty, largely viewed as the precursor to the NATO Treaty, with the United States, Canada, Italy, Iceland, Portugal, Denmark and Norway. In 1954 the Soviet Union’s proposal to join NATO was turned down, fearing ulterior motives. The following year West Germany was added to the NATO alliance and the Soviet’s counteracted with the creation of the Western European Union. This only lead to the increased belief that all communist states were working together with intentions of spreading communist rule and ideals. Though there was never any direct exchange of warring between the United States and the Soviet Union, many wars were fought through indirect means. From 1950-1953 the American backed South Korea fought against the communist North Korea and its support from the Soviets. In the Vietnam War, American soldiers took up arms alongside South Vietnamese soldiers to stop the possible spread of communism fought for by the North. In 1989, The Afghani nation became the first to defeat the Soviets thanks in great part to the “covert” support of the United States. In 1989 and 1990 Nixon’s plea was upheld and the Berlin wall was brought down. Shorty after, in 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev called an end to the Cold War.

Olympic Games Summery

The modern Olympic Games found their start in the 1890s as an attempt to revive the tradition of the ancient Games held in Greece. Then the games held serious religious importance and wars would be halted during the completion of the games. It was hoped that the modern Games would likewise be seen as peaceful and nonpolitical. Instead they would seem to pick up a history of such political involvement with the selection of Athens to host the first Games in 1896; a symbolic gesture which was also a compromise choice between the French and British delegates hoping to place the games in Paris
and London. Held every four years, the Games soon begin to gain prominence, and by the time of the Berlin Games of 1932 they were a large event, with every major nation on the planet taking part. Unfortunately, the ideals of wars stopping for the games also would not come true: the 1916 Games were cancelled due to World War I, while the 1940 and 1944 Games would not be held on account of World War II. Today, the Games are a truly global event: at the latest Summer Games in Beijing (2008), 11,028 athletes from 302 participating nations took part.

The 1980 Moscow Summer Games

Held between July 19th and August 3rd, the 1980 Summer Games were held in Moscow, capital of the Soviet Union. 80 nations competed, represented by over 5,000 athletes. A boycott of the Games, led by the United States, took place over the Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan the year before; in all, 62 nations did not take part, though some cited the boycott when they were really suffering economic issues. West Germany, Israel, Canada, and Argentina are among the nations who did not attend the Moscow Games. This resulted in the lowest turnout for a Summer Game since 1956; 15 of these nations also competed under the Olympic banner. Despite the setback from the boycott, the Games were successful: 35 world records, 39 European records, and 74 Olympic records were set, with new Olympic records set 241 times over the course of the Games and world records being beaten 97 times. Eight nations made their first appearance in these games, such as Vietnam and Nicaragua. Warsaw Pact nations did extremely well at these games: The Soviet Union finished first in gold medals won (80) and total medals (195); East Germany finished second on both categories and Bulgaria finished third in both categories.

The Soviet Approach to the ’80 Games

For the Soviet Union, hosting the Olympic Games in 1980 was a significant event and was viewed as important to the cause of the spread of communism around the world. The first games held in a communist country gave the Soviets a world stage in which to try and highlight the positives of their system. An emphasis towards positive media attention, both at home and abroad, was seen in the years and months leading up to the games. The games were seen as a collective effort towards the success of the games – this allowed all citizens to feel like they made a significant contribution, while allowing all positive reactions and events to be shown as socialist achievements that the world would note.

As the games approached, and following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it became clear to the government that a boycott, led by the United States, may take place. In preparation for this, the Soviets began to present a message through the media to their citizens how some Western countries were turning the Games into a political forum, going against the wishes of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) for Moscow to host the games. The true issue behind these boycotts, as present, was not the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but rather a political game as a few Western nations tried to reverse what the world approved of in the IOC vote for Moscow. US athletes, banned from competition, were shown as victims of a government which did not look out for the interests of its own people. When the games finally arrived, the boycott led by the United States was overshadowed in coverage by vast number of nations competing in Moscow and the fierce competition which took place. At the end of the
The Moscow Summer Games were presented as the West’s worst nightmare: a successful game, showing the success of socialist athletes, the skills of the workers, and the devotion and strength of the Soviet system.

The American Approach to the ’80 Games

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, US President Jimmy Carter called for a boycott of the Summer Games held in Moscow. Afghanistan proved to be a piece in the game of political containment with the United States, as the Carter administration saw the Soviet attempt to prop up a communist government in the region as counter to the ideals of containment. In some ways, Carter's calls for boycott fell on deaf ears – while a total of 62 nations refused an invitation to the Games, some did so due to economic difficulties, only joining up with the boycott to avoid embarrassment. Meanwhile, some Western nations, such as Great Britain and France, still took part in the Games, in some senses a propaganda victory for the Soviets.

At home, the USOC (United States Olympic Committee) wanted to take part in the games, regardless of the boycott by Carter. Threatening to revoke the passports of any athlete who went to Moscow and remove funding and tax exemption status for the USOC, eventually a boycott by the nation’s Olympic officials was called; Many athletes were upset with the decision, while some understood the stance the Carter administration was trying to take. This remains the only Summer Games that the United States has not taken part of. A substitute event, the Olympic Boycott Games (also known as the Liberty Bell Classic) took place in Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania, with 29 nations taking part.

The 1984 Los Angeles Summer Games

The 1984 Summer Games were a combination of great athletic performances and drama. Taking place in Los Angeles in July and August, 140 nations took part in the Games of the XXIII Olympiad. 16 nations pulled out of the games in a boycott, led by the Soviet Union. Numerous reasons were cited for the boycott, such as safety purposes and an un-Olympic game. East Germany, Poland, and Cuba were among the other nations taking part in the boycott. The games themselves were considered a success from start to finish. On the American leg of the torch relay, 3,616 participants carried the torch across 33 states from New York to Los Angeles, an impressive performance before the games. American Carl Lewis excelled at these games, making a name for himself by winning four gold medals, recalling the performance of Jesse Owens in 1936. Nawal El Moutawakel, of Morocco, became the first woman from a Muslim nation to win gold, doing so in the 400m hurdles. The People’s Republic of China won their first ever medals at these games, with the first belonging to Xu Haifeng won the 50m Pistol; this was also the first medal of the games. Due to the Soviet led boycotts, the United States ran away in the medals table, clinching most golds (83) and most total medals (174); Romania earned the second most golds with 20, while West Germany finished second in the overall standings with 59 medals.

The American Approach to the ’84 Games

Several issues faced the United States, the city of Los Angeles, and organizing committee chairman Peter Ueberroth in terms of staging the Los Angeles Summer Games of 1984. Fearful of a Soviet-led boycott
which did come to fruition, Ueberroth sent members of the USOC to the national Olympic Committees of the communist/socialist nations which they feared would boycott and tried to convince them to attend. Perhaps one of the biggest surprises was the decision by the People’s Republic of China to attend the Games: This was the first time Communist China took part in the Games since 1952, when a naming dispute with the Republic of China (Taiwan) led to their self removal from the Olympics. Also significant was the acceptance of a bid by Romania, a Warsaw Pact nation usually within the Soviet sphere of influence.

Another issue facing the Los Angeles games were financial costs: Following the economic failures and disappointment of the Montreal Games of 1976, the cost to host the Games became so great that Los Angeles won the right to host the 1984 Games by default: no other cities placed bids. In an effort to make the games a financial success, it was decided that the Games would be financed by corporate sponsorships. These sponsorships, plus the use of existing structures and venues for the games, resulted in an economic surplus of over $200 million. This made the Los Angeles Games the most successful financially to date.

The Soviet Approach to the ’84 Games

Contrary to what many people think, the Soviet Union did not plan to boycott the Los Angeles games of 1984 immediately following the Moscow games of 1980. In fact, the Soviets took actions to prepare their athletes to compete in the Summer Games, looking to enlarge their pool of so-called “Olympic reserves” and to enter athletes, coaches, and judges into classes in an effort to prepare them for the “Western propaganda” that they would experience while in Los Angeles. As the Games drew closer and closer, Soviet officials soon began to repeat a few common themes over and over in the press: concerns of Soviet athletes’ safety in Los Angeles, commercialism in the form of the games funded by financial interests, and racism, pollution, and crime in the city itself.

This media non-commitment between boycotting the Games and attending continued up until 9 May 1984, when the official Soviet boycott declaration was made. Over the next several days, other boycotting nations, mainly from the Warsaw Pact, released their own announcements. At home, it was announced that most of the international community agreed with the decision, with such selected commentary about how the Games would not be complete without their participation and lacking excitement. To the foreign press the main themes were restated: this wasn’t in retaliation for the boycott of Moscow four years before; rather, this decision was made based on fears of security concerns, anti-Soviet actions against their athletes, and the seeming lack of “American” interest in the games (due to the lack of government investment in building infrastructure). Much like the Americans four years earlier, the Soviets led a protest games, called Friendship Games; nine nations took part.

Summer Games of 1988: End of an Era

If the Moscow and Los Angeles Games are case studies in the mixture of politics and athletics during the Cold War era, then the two following games, in 1988 and 1992, bring the era to an end and the start of a new era in the Olympic movement, one without the back and forth struggle between the two superpowers.
The 1988 Summer Games, held in Seoul, South Korea, were the first games since Montreal in 1976 where the United States and the USSR, as well as any following nations, competed together without boycott. The significant story from Seoul would prove to not be political, but athletic: the disqualification of Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson in the Men’s 100m dash and stripping of his gold medal following a positive drug test for steroids. The Olympic movement’s own web page on these games prominently mentions Johnson and the controversy surrounding this race; meanwhile, no mention of the fact that both the United States and USSR were competing in the same games is ever mentioned. The Olympics, while not able to fully get rid of politics from the games themselves, had at least managed to bring the athletics themselves back to the forefront at the Seoul games. In terms of medal counts, on both counts (total medals and most gold medals won), the USSR and German Democratic Republic (East Germany) finished ahead of the United States – the Soviets defeated the United States in the last games to be played between the two superpowers.

Summer Games of 1992: Brave New World

The 1992 Summer Games in Barcelona seemed odd to countless viewers around the world: for the first time since 1948, no Soviet team was present at the games. Instead, following the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991, a “Unified Team”, comprising of athletes from most of the former republics inside the Soviet Union, competed in its place. As happened at the Games before, the United States lost out in terms of total medals and gold medals to this Unified Team. The stories here were also non-political or very little influenced: The emergence of the Unified Team, the Baltic States and former Yugoslav republics competing for the first time, South Africa participating as well following banishment for apartheid policies, and the rise of the American “Dream Team” in basketball. The focus of both the Seoul and Barcelona games were a far cry from those of the Moscow and Los Angeles games – once again, athletics was back in the forefront of Olympic coverage.

Conclusion

From the end of World War II until the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union fought an ideological war against each other, pitting capitalism against communism. One theatre where this conflict played out was in the world of sports, especially the Summer Olympic Games. These international competitions provided a global stage to show their superiority over their competing superpower rival. The highlight of this mixture of sports and politics is seen with the Olympic boycotts of the 1980s; at no other point before or since has the lines between athletics and national political goals been more blurred together. Using the following Games in Seoul and Barcelona we can see just how political this process was, and the stories that these boycotts produced.
Barcelona '92
Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad Los Angeles 1984
Игры XXII Олимпиады
Москва 1980
INTERVIEW SYNOPSIS:

Dr. Bloom’s background with the subject, 1980 and 1984 boycotts of the Olympics in Moscow and Los Angeles, Marketing during the 1984 Olympics, Mindset of players and coaches during the Olympics in the Cold War Era, how politics plays a key role with the Olympics, and the 1988 games in Barcelona.

TRANSCRIPT:

Scott: Thank you again for the interview, if you would like to state your name and give us a little biography.

Dr. Bloom: Okay, I’m John Bloom, and I’m an assistant professor of history here at Shippensburg. And I have my PHD in American Studies from the University of Minnesota. My topic that I have written about the most and what I have done most me research is been on sports history. I have written about baseball card collectors and Native Americans who went to boarding school and what sports meant to them. I have edited a volume on race in sports and I have written a biography of Barry Bonds.

Scott: Alright, our topic which we are covering is specifically the Olympic movement during the Cold War period. We are taking a look at the boycotts of the Moscow games of 1980 and then the following Olympiad, the Los Angeles games of 1984. Now, the boycotts are seen as kind of a huge event in terms of the Cold War, Sports, the Olympics, but if you think about it the Olympic movement itself has always been politicized. I mean, the selection of Athens to hold the first games in 1896 were themselves a compromise between the French and the British who were at each others throats basically, picking for London and Pairs so it was seen as a fitting compromise. The Berlin Games with Nazi Germany are seen as a huge event and there had been some other boycotts before in terms of either race relations, third world issues, why do you think it is that the 80 and 84 games boycotts are so huge? Is it because that they were led by the two super powers at the time? The fact it was the Cold War Atmosphere or were there kind of other factors involved with that?

2:00

Dr. Bloom: Well, I think for a couple of things uh the Olympics were really so tied in to competition to the United States Block, the Western Block and the Soviet Block that when one of those two uh was not there, it kind of took the drama out of the games and they were almost not seen as legitimate. So, when you look at like the 1968 Olympics, I don’t know how many sprinting medals were won by the sprinters from the United States but it would have been a majority of them. And, same in 72 and 76. If their not there then it lends a lack of legitimacy to the medals that are given and also it takes away from the kind of drama that is a battle between the east and west. That was probably even more so in 84 because in 84 when the Soviets boycotted the game they brought the whole block with them. When the United States boycotted the games there still were some European countries like Great Britain that attended. So, it was probably even stronger in the 84 that essentially ruined the games.

3:20

Chester: Well, uh even though there was a bigger boycott in 80, you said 84 was the bigger of the boycotts?
Dr. Bloom: Yeah, I shouldn’t say that it ruined that games because 84 what they had going for them was a better marketing side of it, so you know there was a huge marketing success. So, you know, politically, the Reagan administration used it tremendously to the American Advantage that we were you know the 84 gold rush they called it, we were winning all these medals. They kind of just ignored it but if you look at it just terms of sports it was probably more of a disaster to have the Soviets gone because they brought with them they brought East Germany, Poland, Hungary, their water polo was a strong team, Yugoslavia had some very strong teams, so Romania with the gymnastics, so they brought so many with them you know where as the United States actually there were quite a few European teams, Western European teams that still competed in the 80 games.

Chester: In an article that I found online from I think its Infoplease.com, they said that uh, one of the reasons why jimmy carter boycotted the 1980 Olympics in Moscow was because his presidency was failing and he needed something to liven it up and to get more attention to him and do you agree with that president carter just uh do you agree that his that his motivation was towards helping his presidency more than the communists, being it communist at Moscow?

5:03

Dr. Bloom: You know I’m not, in terms of Presidential History I don’t really know that much, I don’t know if I could really answer that with any accuracy. My own feeling about it is no because it wasn’t that popular of a decision, you know people really wanted the US team to go to the Olympics and when he did announce the boycotts, I remember the news stories that we saw were mostly of athletes sad about not going and the end popular voices were those who tended to say he was right. And Reagan said he was right and that was one of the few things that Reagan and Carter agreed on. I mean I think but im not sure if Reagan agreed on that.

Chester: I believe I read something about that.

Dr. Bloom : So uh, I don’t know if that would of helped his presidency that much thinking about, and this is no expertise of mine other than remembering it, and it was pretty unpopular among most people that I talked to, but the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and I think he did it more because of the response to that. It was more that kind of way of using diplomacy to react to that.

6:15

Scott : You had said earlier that the Los Angeles games were successful especially from kind of like the marketing point of view and you had mentioned that government was involved with that and I read recently I think it was off of msnbc.com, or it might have been Newsweek it was had to do with Chicago’s bid for the 2016 games and one of the points they made was that one of the things that the IOC might be looking favorably on in American City candidates more now than they have been in the past is their seems to be government support like for example the 96 games in Atlanta you know was kind of shock that Atlanta was picked over Athens for the 100 year games then you know scarred by commuter issues and commercialism, some people dub it as the Coca-cola Olympics, they kind of seemed lost favor with it because the government didn’t really want any part to do with the Olympics where it is now the Chicago bid you have remarks from President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, there seems to be a lot of government action involved, there was one quote, I cant remember word for word but paraphrase, if we need more fence, if we need more security, if we need more FBI, they will be there. Do you think that the Olympic Games for this instance the 80 games in Moscow with the Soviet government and the 84 games in Los Angeles with the American government, do you think because of the fact it was in the Cold War Period that there was that support from the government to make sure they had the top dollar, if they needed building supplies, they had it, if they needed something, they would have it, because it was such a large stage?

8:05

Dr. Bloom : You know I think it just might be the other way, the 84 games from a marketing stand point, that was the height of the Cold War, one of the things that Reagan bring forth at that time was the idea that private spending could trump public spending and a number of public amenities and institutions. And uh his era was not only defined by his policies but by a lot of different um trends during that time period was toward
privatization. So he oversaw a tremendous constriction of government aid to poor families, government housing, and try to move a lot of social services and social amnesties to the private sector and have corporations do it and so that was part of his legacy. And in fact I think that's something right now with out economic downturn is coming into a lot question so people are turning the other way again. But the 84 games were kind of an epitome to that and that was set up very much an opposition to the Soviet System in fact any kind of government involvement was almost termed socialism you know so the 84 games were really this triumph of corporate commercialism and it worked strongly with the Reagan ideology of the time period you know and it was kind of a perfect Reagan storm at the time because you had Peter Ruberoff who was a southern California corporate guy and uh he came from the same world that Reagan did, and Reagan coming from southern California you know movie actor and both really supporting corporate involvement and creating public spectacles of some kind. So it was really like it was the first corporate Olympics and in a way I think after 96 you saw a little bit of a backing away from that, even before 96 and I remember in the 92 Lola hammer winter Olympics, that they made a big deal about the arena around the ice you used to see advertisements and they made a big deal that they were going to get rid of that and you would just see the Olympic logo.

Scott: O like at the soccer matches?

10:50

Dr. Bloom: Exactly, right. And uh you saw a lot of that in the 84 games. McDonalds and all sorts of stuff. And now, you know those who supported that said, look In the 84 games it didn’t cost the LA tax payers very much, although im not very sure how true that is but they claimed it didn’t cost very much. And corporations ended up spending for everything and they created this great Olympics and you know it ended up being that it didn’t cost the public anything. It was really seen as a triumph of that and in a way because of that a triumph of the American system that we were able to pull that off. So, in a way I think it was the opposite that the public was more, in terms of public spending, pulling that off without public spending was more of a sign of a triumph of capitalism.

Chester: Whenever the Olympics first started of course they wanted to rid it of all politics. I just wanted to know since you studied the sports aspect, do you think that with big events like the Olympics, will politics ever not be involved with sports?

12:05

Dr. Bloom: I can’t imagine that politics would never be involved with sports. And that was something and with the Olympics especially and that’s something that a guy im writing about right now, Howard Cosell, he covered a lot of Olympics beginning with 1968, and that was the Olympics where you had the famous Black Power salute with John Carlos and Tommy Smith and they were kicked out of the Olympic village and castigated for bring politics into the Olympics, and he said, “that’s the height of hypocrisy.” Everybody in the Olympics, if you want to criticize them for something you know whatever, but to criticize them because their bringing politics into the Olympics is ridiculous because you know what do we do? We show the medal counts between the United States and the Soviet Blocks. You know, its all about politics and all about which system is better and think about in 1980 in the winter Olympic hockey game, between the United States and the Soviet Union that was all about the Cold War, so I think that once your talking about an Olympics that’s set up in a model of nation states competing against one another, the very fact that a nation state is competing and just a unified entity and people are competing under the flag of you know “this is my identity, my nation” and obviously you know subsuming other identities that might exist within the boundaries of that nation. That’s a political act, an overtly political act. So their always going to be used as politics and will always be dominated by politics, I can’t imagine any Olympics, if the day the Olympics don’t become political, they become an entirely different event, and maybe die. I don’t know but it would be entirely a different kind of event.

Chester: Because without the countries, of course it’s not the Olympics anymore.

Dr. Bloom: If you really wanted a nonpolitical Olympics, you would have people coming from all around the world, not marching under a flag.

[Banter]
Chester: Do you think the athletes feel the pressure of politics when they compete?

Dr. Bloom: Yea I do.

Chester: Could you name examples?

14:27

[Bloom speaks about John Carlos and Tommy Smith in the 1968 Olympics, The Olympics in Mexico, Dave Waddle in 1972 with his ball cap]

18:43

Dr. Bloom: I think Soviet athletes have talked quite a bit about the pressure they felt. I don’t know if you know the famous story about the goalie in the 1980 game but he uh played the first period pretty well and at the end of the second period literally with a fraction of the second remaining he let a goal go through. In the next period he didn’t come out, they had the second string goalie come out. He had never been pulled in a Soviet game in his history or career on the team. So you know he definitely felt the pressure.

Chester: Even though it was the 1980 Olympics, obviously the capitalist countries were not involved at all, the United States, excreta. Did they still feel the pressure even though they were more likely to win the games, did they still feel the pressure?

Dr. Bloom: Yeah, well at that point I think they brought it within a goal. And the United States was a pretty good team that year and the Soviets were really worried about losing that game. They knew what that would have meant. So uh the coach pulled him as a message like uh you got to win this game.

Scott: I guess kind of a sidetrack on that, I guess the summer Olympics were viewed as a higher prestige than the winter Olympics, I mean at this point they haven’t split yet. The summer games and there was no boycott of the winter games.

Dr. Bloom: They were played the same year.

[Scott discusses medal counts between China and the United States and Britain in the 2008 Olympics and mentions battleground sports during the Cold War]

21:43

Scott: In terms of Cold War Games, did you see stuff like that where like you had sports that were predominantly, like gymnastics was predominantly Warsaw Pac, Soviet Union dominating and you know sprints maybe more of a western. Did you see more like battleground sports? Like they are going to win these medals, were going to win these medals, let’s try to get soccer or let’s try to get this?

Dr. Bloom: Boxing was certainly. In fact I wonder sometimes you know boxing has kind of fallen off the cliff as a professional sport and um Olympic boxing was used as an introduction of certain boxers to the country, Muhammad Ali, George Forman, Joe Frazier, um Sugar-Ray Lenard. All these guys were first introduced, Leon Spinks, were all introduced in the Olympics and came out as professionals immediately following the Olympics. And some of them like Howard Parcel are boxing announcers are key to that, they would hype these guys all the time but um the Soviets always had good boxers and the Cubans always had good boxers so were kind of leaving Cuba out of this.

[Talks about Cuba’s sprinters, boxers].

Gymnastics, the Soviets kind of dominated but sometimes the United States kind of had a good team.

Scott: Was that the year with Mary Lou Redding?

Dr. Bloom: Yes, but that was the year the Soviets boycotted. Now once again I think she got really high marks so people tried to rationalize that by saying well she got those marks against the Soviets then she would have
won the gold medal anyway. On the other hand it’s different when you’re their competing and you see them out there. It’s a little different. But yeah, there were those battleground sports. The marathon was an event anyone could win. That almost always gets dominated by third world countries, Ethiopia, Keno from Kenya I think it was.

Scott: Was that the one that ran barefoot?

Dr. Bloom: The one from Ethiopia was, yeah. I forget his name but uh yeah, Keno was not but he was one of the first Kenyan runners.

Chester: Back to whenever you said Moscow and the soccer game when he pulled the goalie.

Dr. Bloom: It was hockey.

Chester: O hockey, I am sorry, when he pulled the hockey goalie out for fear they were going to lose this game, were the coaches during the 1980 Olympics and the 1984 Olympics, were they telling or pushing ideas that were not losing to the United States or was it this is just a sport and we need to win?

Dr. Bloom: That’s a good question. I think that Herb Brooks, coach of the hockey team, apparently never mentioned the Soviets in terms of the Soviet Union. He only talked about them in terms of what a good hockey team they were. But I remember after the games, he went on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson which is now the Jay Leno which is going to be Conan O’Brien, and he went on that show and said that this shows the superiority of our system compared to theirs. So eventually you know yeah he talked about it in that way but um you know according to other accounts of the games, apparently he didn’t really think of it in those terms.

Chester: So he really thought about it just as a game and not of communism versus democracy?

Dr. Bloom: That is a good question though. From my perspective, coaches are not the most imaginative people sometimes you know, I shouldn’t say that, don’t let Spence here that. But you know their so focused on winning you know that in some ways they can’t do anything…

Scott: Its not that they are not the most imaginative, their able to focus everything out.

Dr. Bloom: Yes, exactly, you put it much better than I did. So Herb Brooks was so focused on winning and the Soviets had the best hockey team so he knew that. He styled after the European style, the Soviet style in the way that they played. So that they could beat the Soviets and they can be fast and so forth. He was so focused on that strategy that…you know I’m sure it was there, overtly. I don’t think he talked about it that way though.

Chester: I was going to say like, in like other sports maybe to relieve that pressure like oh we have to beat the soviet union, they were like maybe no its just you need to do what you need to do like that type of thing, what most coaches do today.

26:42

Dr. Bloom: You’re right you’re right because it’s obviously its part of the culture. It’s so dominated and its so much of what it gave meaning to the Olympics. There’s no way you avoided that topic. There is no way of not addressing that. So you’re absolutely right about that and there is probably a strategy to avoid the pressure of that.

Chester: Yeah but we don’t know what it is.

Dr. Bloom: Yeah but I think your absolutely right about that.

Scott: Um this was something we kind of presented when we had to do the paper portion of this project. We took a look at 80 and 84 but you still had a little bit of a window there. I mean it wasn’t like after the 84 games
you know the cold war is over. Russia and all the stands and stuff, you still had the 88 games in Seoul and then right before the Barcelona games in 92 is when the Soviet Union finally fell apart. So I mean you still had one, if you want to set Barcelona aside for now, you still had the 88 games.

**Dr. Bloom:** And Alberta and Calgary and the winter games, and the 88 summer games in Seoul.

**Scott:** Are they kind of, I mean at least in my personal experience like looking stuff up, there doesn’t really seem to be all that much.

**Dr. Bloom:** Yeah.

**Scott:** I mean 80 and 84, the fact that they weren’t there. You know one of the two great superpowers wasn’t there seems to be the largest thing. Even the um the IOC’s official website I was looking around, it mentions the boycotts and stuff. You look at the 88 page, there’s no mention whatsoever about the fact that the two superpowers were competing and I think 88 was um Johnson the Canadian?

**Dr. Bloom:** That’s right.

**Scott:** Yeah, that was the number one thing, the drug testing thing. Do you think or can you think of any reason why 88 is stuck in the shadow?

28:55

**Dr. Bloom:** Yeah your right, it did kind of. They only thing I can think of is by 88 the Soviet Union was clearly moving towards what they called Pier Strikas, the reconstructing of the Soviet government. And I think it was maybe a sign of some sort of vine of relations. You know Reagan came in it was such a détente in the 70s, and he was reigniting the Cold War. It’s a mixed metaphor there. You know once again he was rashing up the rederick and saver addling. Right then the Cold War really had a strong and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan so the Cold War had a strong resurgence. But by 88 I guess it kind of declined a little bit in terms of its hold on people’s consciences. And 89 by then East Germany had fallen. The Berlin Wall came down. So im guessing that has something to do with it. You know im thinking back to 88, the Calgary games, ABC I remember really built it up that this would be the first um Olympic Competition between the Soviet Union and the United States since 19… I guess they did compete against each other four years earlier in Sareavo in the winter time. I guess in the 88 at Seoul, it would have been the first time they competed head to head since 76. So a lot of people talked about it I remember then but it just didn’t have quite the excitement by that time.

30:45

**Scott:** I know by doing and looking into research, it was one of the ones I had. Depending on your point of view it was either ironic or fitting or you know that the last games where there was a Soviet Union and the United States both gold medal count and total medal count, we lost.

**Dr. Bloom:** Right.

**Scott:** And then it was the same in the Barcelona games in 92, the combined unity team beat the US team, I don’t know, I just kind of found that

**Dr. Bloom:** Yeah the United States did not win the gold medal in basketball that year.

[Scott, Chester, and Dr. Bloom discuss the US Olympic Basketball Team, Shaquielle O’Neal, Pride, Quinn Buckner, Steroid Use with East German Swimmers, Barcelona, and World Cup]