

Strong-Willed or Strong-Pilled

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How the Soviet Union built a culture and a legacy around Fitness and Performance Enhancing Drugs, and at the height of the Cold War, how the Olympics proved to be another battleground, riddled with abuse and Drug Usage.

"The physical education of the rising generation is one of the necessary elements of the system of communist education of youth"

Vladimir Lenin

In 1987, a competitive powerlifter by the name of Louie Simmons established his gym: Westside Barbell in Columbus, Ohio. The gym; which started as a place for him and his friends to continue lifting, is now an invitation-only 'laboratory' that sees record-breaking lifters from all walks of life and all parts of the world. Along with training methods specific to certain athletes, and an embrace of 'Soviet Systems,' Simmons quickly became one of the most sought-out instructors and revered powerlifters in the world. In his Book of Methods Simmons describes his 40 years of weightlifting experience and where he says he found enlightenment and success in

becoming stronger. From training splits to exact rep numbers as well as certain new machines and weightlifting techniques, Simmons' embrace of the Soviet Union's work into fitness has been kindling for his sensei-like reputation. In an interview with Vice, his answer to why he had not expanded or moved was "The people go to the Shaolin Temple. The Shaolin Temple doesn't come to them."¹ However; over forty years of experience and adoption of Soviet methods did not only garner weightlifting tactics for Westside Barbell; for Simmons also embraces, in every way that he does lifting; the use of Steroids. Louis Simmons represents a modern-day example of what the culture around sports and fitness that the Soviet's developed means to the world of sports and fitness today. His embrace of their methods, as well as the lifestyle defined by fitness, is similar to the culture that millions of Soviet citizens experienced as they became more and more popular and successful at the Olympics. Their last legacy is continued by Louie Simmons at his gym. His experiences with taking PEDs for competition also harkens back to a time where the Soviet Union embraced the use of steroids to get an upper hand at the world's stage.

The use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) is not new and was not new when Westside Barbell was founded. Since the beginning of testing at the Olympic Games in 1968 up to the present, chemically developed PEDs had been found in athletes from several countries that were within both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. These drugs ranged from the most popular Anabolic Steroids, which were synthesized in 1930 for a variety of medical uses, to ethanol, which was used by pentathlete Hans-Gunnar Liljenwall to "calm his nerves" before a match. Since 1967 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has banned the use of PEDs and has stripped the medals of found users; that, however, has not swayed the confidence of athletes to

¹ Vice Sports "Inside Westside Barbell: Powerlifting's Most Exclusive and Controversial Gym" (Vice Sports) February 22nd, 2013 youtube.com 9:27
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvHM7H_hh80

use various substances in the games. As Louie Simmons famously said "It's not illegal to take drugs. It's illegal to get caught taking drugs." ² For the IOC, the battle for fair competition has been so far a no-nonsense albeit losing effort. In 1976; East Germany, the small country that had been mostly irrelevant at the games since its creation, pulled in forty medals in Montreal. The most came in the women's swimming event, where 11 out of the 13 events were won by East Germans. They would be described by Wendy Boglioli, as "machines." The secret to their success is described on the PBS episode, "Doping For Gold" which untangles the complex, state-sponsored doping scheme run by the GDR, who held close ties with the Soviets and were under Soviet influence throughout their existence. Girls ranging from ages 12-25 were recruited and given anabolic steroids in the form of Oral-Turinabol, which boosted hormones via testosterone, the male growth hormone. This program led the women to supremacy at the games, but would be incredibly harmful to the health of those involved and would harm the legitimacy of the IOC. The events of those games were part of the grand scheme developed by Russian scientists and high-ranking officials to coerce their athletes to become human test subjects in order to research the effects of Performance enhancers both pharmaceutical and through processes like blood-doping. Most famously at the 1980 Olympics not one player in entire games tested positive for a banned PED. This was after the 1976 Olympics where eight weightlifters, two from the US and six from Eastern European countries tested positively for anabolic steroids. The answer to this enigmatic Olympics came out in documents leaked from as far back as 1972 to whistleblowers in 2016, when athletes, coaches as well as the documents from the Soviet Union produced evidence of a state-run doping program that spanned not only throughout Russia but also those countries

² Joe Rogan "Joe Rogan Podcast 854: Louie Simmons (Joe Rogan) October 1st, 2016
<https://www.jrepodcast.com/episode/louie-simmons-on-steroids-and-peds-drugs-dont-make-you-strong/>

like the German Democratic Republic who were heavily influenced by the Soviets. One athlete, Konstantin Volkov described handing a vial of urine to a laboratory technician to which the worker said "We throw all this stuff out, hand them one of these." producing a different vial of urine. It was also in the 1980s where the USSR State Sports Committee provided steroids to 'promising athletes' via a "special program." The steroid crisis is described by Thomas M. Hunt's book *Drug Games*. "Indeed the history of the IOC is important in this regard, in that its failure to address the doping crisis during the presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch (1980-2001) contributed to the creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) which went into operation in 2000."³ The WADA has been in operation ever since but it came into even greater focus during the Sochi Olympic Games when Russian laboratory director Grigory Rodchenkov whistle blew the activities of the Russian government before the games. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Rodchenkov claimed that he developed a 'cocktail' of banned substances mixed with liquor and provided that to the athletes at the games, a list that included 15 medal winners. Glaring similarities to the events of 1980 in relation to 2016 are described in that article. "In a dark-of-night operation, Russian anti-doping experts and members of the intelligence service surreptitiously replaced urine samples tainted by performance-enhancing drugs with clean urine collected months earlier, somehow breaking into the supposedly tamper-proof bottles that are the standard at international competitions, Dr. Rodchenkov said. For hours each night, they worked in a shadow laboratory lit by a single lamp, passing bottles of urine through a hand-size hole in the wall, to be ready for testing the next day, he said."⁴ WADA slapped the Russians

³ Thomas M Hunt, *Drug Games: The International Olympic Committee and the Politics of Doping, 1960–2008* (Austin, Texas: University at Texas Press, 2012), pp. 2.

⁴ Rebecca R. Ruiz and Michael Schwartz "Russian Insider Says State-Run Doping Fueled Olympic Gold," *New York Times* May 2nd, 2016

with a four-year ban, meaning that they would not be allowed to compete in Tokyo although the COVID-19 pandemic delayed those games into 2021.

It was not until the 1970s and beyond, that defectors, as well as journalists, began to uncover a state-sponsored doping program in the USSR that had existed for the past few decades, a doping program that involved human test-subjects who were coerced to try and exhibit the effects of several types of performance enhancers like Anabolic steroids, blood doping, which involves the infusion of oxidized blood right before an event with the hopes and expectations that this will increase performance by around 10% of the original action. "The Soviet government supported the development of blood doping, which is banned by the International Olympic Committee. Blood doping was pervasive in the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s, and was used by many Soviet athletes in the 1976 and 1980 Olympic Games."⁵ Additionally, Russian scientists in the USSR studied the effects of creatine; the first group to do this with such a meticulous and widespread scientific method. Creatine is still widely used today, fully legal in pharmacies, although the safety of the substance is still in question. "Creatine is likely safe to take for up to five years. As with any dietary supplement, it's important to choose a product that follows recommended manufacturing practices and subscribes to third-party testing to ensure the product's quality." ⁶. It is important to note additionally that creatine is a naturally formed amino acid found in the human body, although supplementing this product drastically increases the amount, similar to dopamine levels when stimulant drugs are taken.

⁵ Michael Kalinski "State-Sponsored Research on Creatine and Blood Doping in Elite Soviet Sport", (*BLDE university journal of health sciences* 2) 445–451. Pubmed.gov

⁶ Mayo Clinic "Creatine" [mayoclinic.org/creatine](https://www.mayoclinic.org/creatine) 2021 (Rochester, MN) February 9th, 2021

The unbelievable amount of doping dons the achievements of many great athletes with asterisks. The lifts, runs, jumps, swims and shots of the most superior athletes in the world have been marred by the excessive use of substances in the games. Not only that, but the fitness industry as a whole has embraced Anabolic steroids which have become a staple of modern-day working out that has even been given the friendly nickname: "Gym Candy." I have researched to determine the influence of the culture developed around physical prowess and the results that came from the Soviet's desire to prove their physical dominance, from their athletes and their citizens, I have also researched the process through which the Soviet's held an underground doping scandal to test the effects of various substances and what led to their inhumane actions against their people. The achievements of Gold-Medal winners should be something to take pride in. The Russians became masters of lifting weights, turning it into a science. It is them that we thank for the deadlifts, Romanian deadlifts, advanced training schedules, and even meticulously timed reps suggesting the correct time it takes to complete one rep for maximum results, and how each bar should be lifted. What was the influence of this adopted culture after World War II, and how did the embrace of the Olympics and the culture of fitness affect the diplomatic and athletic relationships formed during the Cold War?

Following the end of World War II, Soviet Russia became far more involved in foreign affairs both through developed alliances and spheres of influence and in an effort to undermine the 'Free World,' and with that involvement came a desire to increase their cultural standing among other nations. The Soviets soon put their focus on athletic prowess above all else culturally. "The forging of wartime alliances had also served to bring the Soviet Union into much greater prominence in the international community. In this context, sport and physical culture came to play a more vital role than ever as a crucial component of foreign policy. Cultural

representations of fizkultura were similarly to play their part in the forefront of a national and international propaganda campaign in the post-war era." ⁷The revelation of the use of PEDs sponsored by the Government came at the end of an era of Soviet dominance at the Olympic games. This dominance was different from games in the past and has since changed following the fall of the Soviet Union. Today, the Olympics feature similar usages of drugs, as was shown in 2016, when whistleblowers like Grigory Rodchenkov who worked within the Soviet Union as a steroid researcher blew the lid on a similar doping scandal like the one from the Cold War. The IOC and the WADA today have scrambled to solve a near-impossible problem of keeping the Olympics clean, and the anti-doping facilities of many eastern European countries are less than advanced. The problem does not seem to be going anywhere as the embrace of drugs has become almost necessary as hundreds of athletes each year are caught using PEDS. Making the task for the IOC less about creating and overseeing each set of games, but rather keeping them clean.

By the 1970s, at the height of Soviet influence, the political tensions between the countries of the world culminated with the boycott of two different games in 1980 and 1984. It was at this point that the Olympics were no longer seen as mere athletic expos but a new brand of battleground with significant consequences associated with a win or a loss. The Olympics became the largest and arguably only meeting between the 'Communist world' and the 'Free World.' The games inspired each world to strive for greatness both athletically and societally and would be used by world leaders as a strategy in fighting the other side of the Cold War.

However, the Soviets continued to win each year in events that required strength, stamina and were always the events that required significant athletic superiority. This display engendered not

⁷ Mike O'Mahoney, in *Sport in the USSR* (London, England: Reaktion Publishers, 2006), p. 201.

only their nation but nations across the world to look at the Soviet system as one that fostered this kind of superiority. It would not be until the whistleblowing of the state-sponsored doping program in Soviet Russia that would void these successes. Although many athletes from many countries were doping for gold, it would be the Soviets that turned it into a science, and the only country that got caught cheating at a government level, a scandal that led to significant repercussions from the International Olympic Committee on a legal scale and was canceling out for some if not all that the Soviet athletes had done in the past thirty years. Perhaps no one summed this period up better than Dr. Lev Markov who served as the President of the Federation of Sports Medicine of Soviet Russia and was the chief physician of the 1st Moscow City Medical and Sports Dispensary from 1963-2003. When asked if the Olympics served a political purpose in Soviet Russia he said,

“Certainly, it did, and not only in the Soviet Union. I always recall and quote as an example the famous statement of American President John F. Kennedy, who used to say that in the world of that time all the problems were being solved by two things-- the quantity of golden Olympic medals and the quantity of Missiles.”⁸

This paper will describe the political landscape surrounding the Olympics and how the games themselves were used as measures of superiority between the two different worlds at the time of the Cold War. From the Games in the early 60s to the end of the Soviet Union. For this, the life and times of certain lifters, athletes, coaches, and officials will be delved into as the complex government systems that led to both triumph and scandal at the apex of the Cold War. Chapter one will discuss the advancements that the fitness world has to credit the Soviet Union

⁸ PBS Red Files "Interview with Dr. Lev Markov, Soviet Institute of Olympic Committee." (pbs.org) Interview by PBS Thirteen 1998

for, their devotion to the fitness world from the top down of their society led to some of the greatest athletes performing the zenith of athletic prowess. The chapter will describe the methods in the gym that were used to train Russian athletes, methods most people probably recognize from movies like Rocky, where Drago was all but created in a lab to defeat the Italian Stallion. From specific types of lifts described by fitness experts of the day and by those inspired by the work from the sixties. The chapter will also tell of the lives of Russian lifters and the impact that they had on their society when they came home with gold, signifying the importance of their participation in the Olympics and the importance of Athletics to the Russian Government propaganda machine. Chapter one will also describe the importance of the 'fizkultura' in Russia, which got nearly every citizen to participate in some form of athletic competition or training, and the interested 'sports societies' created to foster athletic research, training, and performance. It should be clear after chapter one that Soviet Russia was more than enthusiastic to heighten their athletic gains following World War II.

Chapter two will delve into the important games specific to the competition between the different countries of the world up to the end of the Cold War. The underlying and sometimes overhead concerns by the Americans and Soviets alike at each new location every four years. The Rise of Soviet influence across the globe will also be discussed as places like Cuba, renowned for their boxing prowess and with a willing Communist leader, fell into an alliance with the Soviet regime. Certain events at the games will also be highlighted for their historic and social significance, including the Miracle on Ice in the 1980s winter Olympics and the blow to the American reputation that was the 1972 defeat at the Basketball final featuring the first

American loss at the sport since it began in 1936, and even worse, it being at the hands of the Soviets.⁹

Chapter three will delve into perhaps the most politically significant Olympics in history, in which Moscow finally got to host the games since beginning their push to host in the early 50s. The surrounding invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets saw the United States admonish the invasion by boycotting, along with many of their allies the games which were intended by the Soviets to be a dramatic display of the wonders of Soviet Russia.

Chapter Four will describe the scandal that occurred at the games, where conspiracies of a State-Sponsored Doping program surfaced when both documents and whistleblowers alike came out against the Soviets for their inhumane testing and cheating at various Olympic games, most specifically in 1980, where not a single person tested positive for any PEDs. The ramifications of this would soon be met with more whistleblowing and eventually repercussions by the International Olympic Committee, which was trying to keep the games clean under their new President Juan Antonio Samaranch, who unfortunately would be known as the President presiding over the worst drug period in Olympic history.

Chapter five will describe the legacy of this period, including the 2016 scandal that was uncovered after the Russian's once again used drug research and development to succeed at the Olympic games. Through whistleblowers from inside the Russian program; the Russian team was given a cocktail of steroids mixed with liquor that was developed by Russian scientists and sponsored once again at a Government level. Chapter five will also describe the task that the IOC

⁹ David Goldblatt. *The Games : a Global History of the Olympics* First edition. New York: (W.W. Norton & Company), 2016. P. 431

is forced to undertake, looking at the immense problem of doping at the games even in the modern era, and the unfortunate conditions of several nation's Anti-Doping facilities and programs that allow for several athletes to passed by dope screenings unseen and unmarred by penalization.

Chapter One: The Lifting

The Soviet Union did not just believe that drugs were the key to winning at the Olympics, they did develop a culture around the pursuit of being in peak physical condition, and many of their methods are still embraced by modern-day experts in the field. When Louie Simmons opened Westside Barbell in 1987, he took with him the knowledge of years of powerlifting, coaching, and competing in one of the world's most difficult and dangerous sports to the human body. With knowledge of a then-emerging method called the "Soviet System," Simmons was able to develop his training method, which was inspired by the Soviet System. He called it his "Conjugate Method" and it focused on the use of machines and dynamic workouts to maximize the strength of each muscle. Weightlifting has a long history, and Louie represents the latest and greatest in an industry that has become outstandingly advanced since the end of the Cold War. The Soviet System was developed by researchers from communist nations like Russia and Cuba and led the Soviets to utter domination in the Olympics and specifically weightlifting throughout the latter half of the 20th century. When the Berlin wall fell, the fitness industry was pushed into a new era.

Although weightlifting is a sport that dates back to Ancient Greece, since the early 20th century, modern weightlifting has been circled around lifting heavy things. For a while, it was seen as more of a circus act rather than an attainable goal for the average person. Squats of a few hundred pounds would be performed for audiences, but there were no gyms as we know them today, and the gyms that did exist were only accessed by the super-rich. Olympic Weightlifting has been a part of the games since the 1896 inception of the Olympics in Athens but has greatly evolved since then. Powerlifting contrarily is relatively new. Louie Simmons is a powerlifting

coach. While there are similarities between the two sports, it is in powerlifting that we see an inspired use of Soviet training methods.

Dr. Grigori Raiport defected from the Soviet Union in 1978, in his time working in Soviet Russia, he was tasked with assisting athletes in reaching "peak performance" through his idea of success in sports being "eighty percent mental and twenty percent physical." His methods gained him national attention in the Soviet Union and he, along with his contemporaries would be rewarded with cars, apartments, and high-class living., however, due to the strict control by the KGB and the Soviet Government at the time his research was heavily monitored and censored, but due to his celebrity status for working with high-ranking Soviet officers, athletes and officials, he was able to leave the Soviet Union when he came to New York in 1977. "Dr. Raiport expanded his practice to include professionals. "I found it extremely stimulating to work with creative people," he observed. "In the Soviet Union, the specialized techniques I used, boosting human performance in athletes, were also applied to fighter pilots and astronauts." ¹⁰

Dr. Raiport's success in the field represents how the Soviet Union focused so much on athletic prowess that they turned it into a complete science, with proven results. From the end of World War II, the Soviet Government would involve nearly every citizen in the society of sport and would create some of the greatest athletes in history. This overall exploit by the USSR has become known as the "Soviet System " in the world of training and has been lauded by many of the premier voices of physical training. The legacy it left cannot be understated, however, it had a black mark placed upon it following the end of the Cold War.

¹⁰ Singer, Penny "Giving Business and Olympic Spirit" *The New York Times*. October 30th 1988
14 <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/30/nyregion/giving-businesses-an-olympic-spirit.html>

Two important parts of the Soviet weight training system are time and intensity during training. This method will happen over three weeks and during the Soviet era with their Olympic lifters, would have been measured meticulously. One important aspect of the 'Soviet system' as it is now called is the process of Periodization. Take the bench press for example. A lifter who is benching 200 pounds as a one-repetition max, would begin week one by lifting 60-70 percent of his or her one rep max and doing 6-8 reps of that, ergo 120 pounds for 6-8 reps for three sets, for the whole week. The focus for week one is the volume. The lifter should be able to do many more reps than usual because of the lower weight and focus on strict formatting and exact weights and reps are integral to the system's success. During week two, the percentage jumps to 70-85 percent of the lifter's one rep max. Now the lifter presses 6-8 reps of 170 lbs. This continues as the lifting enters week three, where they should be able to perform their original one rep max for several reps and therefore increase the weight. Especially in Olympic weightlifting, a training method like this would be invaluable as the competition calls for high weights and velocity of lifts to achieve higher scores.¹¹¹²

The career of Soviet lifter Yury Vlasov is one example of this method paying off. He credits his success to the volume and training focus of the Soviet System. Vlasov competed in the 1960 and 1964 Olympic Games for the Soviet Union, where he won gold and silver respectively and broke thirty-one weightlifting records during his career. Vlasov became the first man in history to Clean and Jerk over 200 kilograms (440 lbs). His weightlifting career became more notable following the breakup of the Soviet Union, of which he was a staunch and

¹¹ Louie Simmons, *The Westside Barbell Book of Methods* (Columbus, Ohio Westside 4 Athletes) 2007 p. 35-45

¹² Pavel Tsatouline. *Get Ripped: The Soviet miracle (Body Book: Circuit Training: THE BIG MUSCLE ISSUE)*. *Joe Weider's men's fitness* 31, no. 9 (2015): p. 108

courageous opponent due to the atrocities and abuse from the KGB that his family had suffered. When his exploits were picked up by the west, he was part of the surge of new fitness techniques. "An increase in the volume of training loads leads to long term [structural and functional] changes in the organism... builds a foundation for increasing strength... Of course, strength grows at the same time, but not too much. [Then] an increase in intensity assures a quick conquest of new results. But by itself, the intensity does not produce deep adaptive responses."¹³ Vlasov is not alone in his support and usage of this method. It was the vernacular of the Soviet Lifter when they entered the gym. Austrian David Rigert who embraced eastern methods similar to that of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Soviet Vasily Alekseyev, and several other Soviet Olympians also credit the record-breaking to this system. Many of these lifters would all train at the same place.¹⁴

Following World War II, the world was quickly split into one of two categories; either by force or by choice. Winston Churchill famously warned about the increasing threat of the "Iron Curtain" that was Soviet influence across Europe. This fear was shared by the IOC, as they strongly encouraged the prevention of the Soviet Union from participating in the Olympics due to ideological differences between the USSR and the Olympiad. However, this prevention, which would become a back and forth between the two forces did not stop the Soviets from adopting a love and obsession with sports as a whole, that would culminate each year when the Olympics began. Ultimately, the IOC realized that the Soviet Union's power had become too great. "In the

¹³ Pavel Tsatouline "The Origins of the StrongFirst Programming: The Soviet System" (StrongFirst Inc.) July 29, 2014 <https://www.strongfirst.com/the-origins-of-strongfirst-programming/#:~:text=Names%20of%20Vlasov%2C%20Rigert%2C%20Alexeev,still%20untouched%20thirty%20years%20later.>

¹⁴ Gwendolyn Sisto, Ivan Rojas *Fundamentals of the Soviet System* (Parker, Colorado BookCrafters Publishing) March 27, 2017 p. 11-21

interwar period, the IOC chose not to pursue Soviet membership, and the Soviet Union made no attempts to convince the IOC to let it join. The IOC's attitude would be very different after World War II, when Soviet influence over Eastern Europe made the Soviet Union a necessary member of the IOC, especially if the Olympics had any hope of universal membership among European states." Hunt "Drug Games" To lose the Soviet Union would be to surrender several European states and as the years continued, several Asian countries as well. The dream of unity or peace would be influenced largely by the meeting every two and four years. By the end of World War II, the Soviets had established several "Sports Societies," which became an amalgamation of trainers, trainees, nutritionists, scientists, and doctors all sponsored by trade unions that sought to turn all sports in Russia into military researched and run operations. In just thirty years, the Soviets went from relatively "untrained" people without a reputation in sports to arguably the most dominant athletic country in the world. Reet Howell, a Physical education professor in the seventies at San Diego State explained, "By 1970, approximately 44,000,000 Soviet citizens were taking part in programs run by the 'sports societies'"¹⁵Howell 1975

According to Belarusian trainer Pavel Tsatsouline, a staunch supporter and teacher of the Soviet System. "The System did not have a single author; it grew out of corroboration between Medvedev, Vorobyev, Chernyak, and other scientists, many former champions themselves."¹⁶.

Pavel Tsatsouline "The Origins of StrongFirst Programming: The Soviet System" The Soviet System was the product of years of research. The Russian were not hell-bent on achieving 'in-the-gym PRs' or "Personal Records," they were more concerned with building the strength of

¹⁵ Reet Howell, "The USSR: Sport and Politics Intertwined." ,” *Comparative Education* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 1975): pp. 137-145, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006750110204>.

¹⁶ Pavel Tsatouline "The Origins of the StrongFirst Programming: The Soviet System" (StrongFirst Inc.) July 29, 2014 <https://www.strongfirst.com/the-origins-of-strongfirst-programming/#:~:text=Names%20of%20Vlasov%2C%20Rigert%2C%20Alexeev,still%20untouched%20thirty%20years%20later.>

their lifters so that when the Olympics came around, they could indeed spend the time wiping the floor with the competition, which for twenty years; they always did. Yuri Vlasov, a Russian athlete for Olympic weightlifting, won gold and silver in two Olympics, four Gold medals at the World Weightlifting Championships, and a whopping six gold medals at the European Championships in six appearances. His silver at the 1964 Tokyo games was due to Leonid Shabotinsky (another Soviet) taking gold by 2.5 kilos. At the 1964 games, the bronze went to American Norbert Schemansky, who lifted 32.5 kilos lower than Vlasov. This trend of Soviet success would continue for the next two decades. After Zhabotinsky in 1968, the super-heavyweight category continued...Alekseyev gold in '72 and '76, followed by Russian, Sultan Rakhmanov in 1980, the 1984 Olympics were boycotted by Russia and the winner was Dean Lukin from Australia, the very next games in 1988 saw Russian Aleksandr Kurlovich win gold. After that, the demise of the Soviet Union occurred and the "Unified Team" began their gold medal streak, with Kurlovich taking gold in '92 and Russian Andrei Chemirkin winning in 1996.¹⁷ From 1960-2000, the Russians did not win gold in the heavyweight class only once, and that was the year they boycotted from Sydney.

The achievements at the games, however, were not limited to weightlifting, the Soviets did not just desire the show of strength, but rather a prowess and superiority in all the events at the Olympics. The dominance during the Olympics culminated, however, with the 1980 Summer games in Moscow. Before these games in 1976, the Russians had won 125 medals in Montreal, 49 of which were gold. In past games, the Russians always won around 100 medals and consistently came in first by total medal count. This number, however, was destroyed at the 1980

¹⁷ Olympic.org "Results" (Olympic Channel Services 2021) <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games>

games. Maintaining home-field advantage, the Soviets won 195 medals, a number not reached since the United States in 1904, when they pulled 239. This number of 195, has been untouched since 1980. The eighty gold medals won in 1980 put the Soviets in second place all-time, and most in the post-war era, and that number has been an outlier ever since.

From the outset of the Soviet Union's participation in the world Sports theater, success in that field was used as propaganda for the Soviet Government, with several interesting examples of Soviet athletes seen as political and societal role models.



"If you want to be like me; Just train!"¹⁸

¹⁸ V. Koretskiy (Moscow, USSR: V. Koretskiy, 1951).



"A Mighty Sports Power" ¹⁹

The Soviet people used sports as an inspiration for themselves, and were trained to become incredibly proud of their successes athletically, perhaps this idea was most clear during the Soviet Union's 'spartakiada' which occurred every four years in the year preceding the Olympic Games. "The competitions in the first of the games, which is considered the 'grass-roots' level, are open to all and hence in the Spartakiad in 1967, eighty million people participated.

Competitors gradually advanced through the city, district, and republican level competitions and on to the finals which in 1967, there were 16,138 participants. ²⁰These finals serve as one of the means of identifying and selecting the best athletes for international competition."²¹. As the Soviet people on the home front were becoming more enveloped and involved with the Spartan ideal of sports dominance, the Soviet athletes sent to the Olympic games were realizing dominance across the globe, which not only strengthened the resolve of the Soviet people but also represented a power that the 'Soviet System' and along with it, Communism both had

¹⁹ "B. Reshetnikov (Moscow, USSR: B. Reshetnikov, 1962)

²⁰ James Riordan, in *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 435.

²¹ James Riordan, in *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 435.

embodied. Along with these spartan ideals, the Soviet Government made great strides to get their people interested in the sporting world, from chess to boxing. The society developed the idea of a 'fizkultura' translated to mean 'physical culture' that was bent on training the population and propagandizing athletes as the peak Soviet citizen, as a way of inspiring the Soviet people. This idea began when the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party made this decree in 1925. "Physical culture must be considered, not only from the standpoint of physical education and health, and as an aspect of the cultural, economic and military training of Youth, but also as one of the methods of educating the masses and in addition as a means of rallying the broad masses of workers and peasants around the various party, Soviet, & trade union organizations through which the masses of workers and peasants are to be drawn into social and political activity."²²..The 'fizkultura' would exist throughout the Soviet Union's control in Russia, used to rally the masses behind athletic prowess, adding to the gravity of the Soviet Union's performance in the Olympics when they began participating in 1952. "Fizkultura was as dependent on its presentation as it was on its actual practice. Images of vigorous Soviet sportsmen and women were constantly evoked in literature, film, and folk songs; they frequently appeared on the badges and medals of various work associations and even on plates and teapots. Several major artists made their careers out of vivid representations of sports."²³. Throughout this period of dominance; the Russians treated their Olympians as a new brand of war-hero, decorating their 'troops' with medals and high honors. For Yuri Vlasov, the success in the Olympics evolved into a promising and influential political career, where he fought against the atrocities performed by the KGB. Vasily Alekseyev would come home to a Soviet Union that treated him as not only a

²² James Washburn, "Sport as a Soviet Tool," *Foreign Affairs* 3 (1956): p. 490.

²³ Mike O'Mahoney, in *Sport in the USSR* (London, England: Reaktion Publishers, 2006), p. 201.

sports star but a national hero. His success garnered him the Order of Lenin in 1972 which was the highest civilian honor obtained in the Soviet Union, he was also named to the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, which celebrated acts of achievement in sports, arts, music, education, and several other spheres of labor in Russia. He would also coach the 1992 Unified team to five gold medals. This embrace of the feats of these athletes not only showed the power that success in the games held but also represented a drastic difference in attitude towards the Olympics by the Soviets and the United States. Success at the Olympics however, thought to be great propaganda for the Russians would most benefit those involved in the games on the coaching level. "Athletic success in Olympic Games provided extensive privileges in the USSR for the elite athletes, coaches, scientists, and sports officials. These privileges included prestige at the state level, expensive gifts, cars, apartments, state stipends, increased salaries, and extensive travel abroad." ²⁴

For the US, Olympians were not treated as members of the military, or as science experiments as that assignment would later be discovered in Soviet athletes. Throughout the Cold War, there was no great unification of science and athletics in the United States and while the process of becoming an Olympian was by no means an easy feat; the two processes were far different with one country almost raising their Olympians from birth, or finding them in the mix of great athletes and another training and hoping for the best. It would be this difference that would lead the Soviets to the domination of the world's stage for the thirty years during the Cold War.

²⁴ Singer, "Giving Business and Olympic Spirit" *The New York Times* October 30, 1988
<https://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/30/nyregion/giving-businesses-an-olympic-spirit.html>

Chapter Two: The Gold War

The events of and surrounding the 1980 Soviet Olympics came down to the circumstances of the games themselves. The Soviets had dominated before, finishing first in the total medal count in 76', 72' and second in 68' and 64'. However, in 1976, the Soviets finished first with 125 total medals; come 1980, the Soviets would come in first with nearly two hundred medals. This was no ordinary first-place finish; this was pure dominance. The 1980 Olympics came at the heels of a failed bid by the Soviets to host the games in 1976, an honor that went to Montreal, and by 1980, political tensions between the Soviets and the United States had reached a peak due to events that had happened just a few months prior.

The Cold War had shifted from a world conflict involving the development of weapons, and a militaristic showing in the years following the fall of the Third Reich to now a diplomatic battle between the nations that had fallen under Communist control and therefore, Soviet influence and the United States, which had taken the driver's seat in the prevention of the spread of Communism. Although more diplomatically oriented, tensions between the two nations would continue to rise to a boiling point on several occasions. The United States had won the Arms Race, solved the Cuban Missile Crisis, and had most spectacularly defeated the Soviets in the race to the moon. The Cold war had become an argument over which political system was superior. This is why the Olympics became the focus of Russian athletes, scientists, politics, and even the social zeitgeist. The Olympics had become, since the Soviet's first appearance, the only political battleground for the Iron Curtain. This political battleground would become more and more imperative as the years went by and the convening of the two nations became more and more scarce outside of the Olympics. "When the Soviet Union made its Olympic debut at the

1952 Summer Games in Helsinki, no one quite knew what to expect from a country that had shunned not only the Olympics but most athletic competition with the west since the 1917 Revolution." ²⁵The stakes at the 1952 games proved more integral to each side as the Olympics were almost 'proof' that my side had better specimens than your side. This was no clearer to the world than in 1980. After years of coming in first, the Soviet Union bashed the world in Moscow, minus the United States and its allies, for they had boycotted the 1980 Olympics.

In December of 1979, in another attempt to expand political control over the east, the Soviet began an invasion of Afghanistan, whose regime had been supported by the United States. ²⁶What followed was a rally by the USA for all of its allies to boycott the games, a measure which paid off to the tune of sixty-six countries boycotting the games. The Moscow Olympics were far more empty in 1980, but IOC chairperson Michael Morris did what he could to maintain the bi-partisanship of the games even arranging a meeting between President Jimmy Carter and the Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev only to have Carter maintain that the United States' decision to boycott was final. The IOC held the belief that these boycotts were an attempt to turn the Olympics into an event to garner political power rather than display athletic prowess, and yet the US and their fellow sixty-six did not compete.²⁷

Winning at the Olympics was a symbolic gesture more than anything, and one that proved to be most valuable during the later years of the Cold War. For the Soviets, domination in

²⁵ Michal Reiman "About Russia, Its Revolutions, Its Development and Its Present." Vol. 10. Frankfurt: (Peter Lang International Academic Publishers,) 2016. P. 111

²⁶ John Lamberton Harper, "The Cold War," in *The Cold War* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 83-130.

²⁷ The US Department of State *The Olympic Boycott of 1980* (The US Department of the State, Washington D.C) p. 1

the Olympics provided a victory in the new type of battleground that had emerged during the Cold War. The war was not fought with guns, but rather, it was a race to decide which nation ran their countries most successfully. The Americans had won the Space Race in the late sixties it would soon be realized by the Soviet Union, that rather than a military defeat, the economy could not continue internally dependent; a notion that would be widely realized by not just the government, but from their people as well as early as the mid-1970s. Communism up until that point had been a fierce ideological competitor to the United States, which would be marred by recessions through the 70s as well as an energy crisis. Reputation was everything for either side. For the Soviets in the sixties, no better example of superiority existed than the Olympics, which provided a world's stage to display feats of physical excellence, a characteristic of success since the dawn of the Olympics in Ancient Greece. Throughout the sixties, an argument could be made that the impressive performances in the Olympics coupled with strategic diplomacy, served as an attractor for nations gravitating towards a Commune, and while the United States had gone to the moon, the growing GDP of the Soviet Union throughout the fifties and even into the sixties served as enough to convince countries like Cuba in 1962 to place strong Communist Fidel Castro in control. A Communist coup in the Dominican Republic prompted President Lyndon Johnson to dispatch the US military to put down the rebellion of 1964. Indonesia was threatened by the surge of Communism as well, as a coup was put down through horrific genocide by the Indonesian army during the Communist purge of 1965-66; a gruesome act that would lead to the brutal deaths of an estimated five hundred thousand to three million people. Throughout this period of both economic and political clashing, the Soviets remained the most powerful Commune in the world.²⁸The reasoning behind Communist or Socialist revolutionaries fighting

²⁸ Erin Redihan *The Olympics and the Cold War, 1948-1968: Sport as Battleground in the US-Soviet Rivalry*. (Mcfarland Publishers, Jefferson, NC 2017) p. 45

for an overthrow of often horrible and tyrannical dictators often varied, however, having a country like the Soviet Union appear from an outside viewpoint as strong and capable of longevity was often an extra inspiration for these leaders. Fidel Castro for example began and maintained strong trade agreements with the Soviet Union to develop support for his new government in Cuba and the two countries often hosted diplomatic conventions with one another.

²⁹This action fostered relationships between Cuba and the Soviet Union while harming relationships with the United States.

As Communism was becoming more and more powerful, so too was their performance in the Olympics, where they dominated for thirty years. The apex of this story meets at the 1980 games, however. In one of their final attempts at spreading their ideology and control; the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. .By the end of the 1970s, neither the US nor the Soviet Union could call themselves 'successful' as years of economic recession and crisis befell the United States, while a combination of an inability to innovate, lack of man-power to drive the industrial machine, and a foreign trade network that was never fully effective nor integrated into Five-Year Planning led to the deterioration of the Soviet economy.³⁰ The 1980 Olympics also came after years of the Olympics being used as a political display rather than just an athletic one. "After all, during the Cold War, any major event that involved a matchup between the Soviets and Americans— whether it was a chess tournament or, in this case, a hockey game—was bound

²⁹ Yinghong Cheng. "Sino-Cuban Relations During the Early Years of the Castro Regime, 1959–1966." *Journal of cold war studies* 9, no. 3 (2007): p. 78–114.

³⁰ Andreev-Khomiakov, Gennady., and Ann Erickson Healy. *Bitter Waters: Life and Work in Stalin's Russia : a Memoir* Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1997.p. 27.

to be viewed as not only a confrontation between the world's two superpowers but as a competition between two very different political systems and sets of ideological beliefs." ³¹

That "Hockey Game" was the Miracle on Ice, an Olympic Gold Medal match between the US and the USSR during the 1980 Winter Olympics just a few months before the events of the Summer Games. The game proved to have more on the line than just a gold medal. As Dave Silk, who played for the American team would recall. "For us, it was a hockey game, for the rest of the world it was a political statement." ³²By this point, tensions not only between the US and Russia were high, but there was already a history between the two Olympic teams as well. In 1964, it was the Russian hockey team that took gold, then in 1972, the Russian basketball team defeated the highly-favored US team in the Gold medal match, a game for which the US refused their medals calling the officiating into question. By 1980, the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan, and the Winter Olympics were located in Lake Placid, while the Summer games, already boycotted by the US and several allies, were to be played in Moscow.

Following years of the tensest relations between the Democratic world and the Communist one, the boycott of the 1980 Olympics served a message to the Soviet Union that the US and its allies were putting their feet down against the military actions of the Soviet Union. In addition to a showing of how important the Olympics were to world politics at this time. With Communist nations worldwide, the Olympics were now not just games, but battles, with wins and losses meaning just as much to their respective countries as wins and losses on a military battlefield. For the Russians, the boycott could have been a time to cease their campaign in

³¹ Abelson, Donald E. "Politics on Ice: The United States, the Soviet Union, and a Hockey Game in Lake Placid." *Canadian review of American studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 63–94.

³² Loftus Mike , "Miracle on Ice at 40: : Scituate's Dave Silk Still Treasures His Memories," *Patriot Ledger*, February 21, 2020. www.patriotledger.com

Afghanistan, but it would present for them an opportunity. One that they would not let slip through the cracks. The boycott removed the Russian Olympic team's fiercest and most capable rival, so the 1980 Olympics were not just going to be a victory. They were going to be a true expression of Russian physical superiority. Why did this matter? A question that any researcher or historian must answer. Why did the breaking of records and the acquisition of Gold have such incredible stakes at this time? Today, when a person thinks of the Olympics, images of Ancient Greeks, Carl Lewis, and Opening ceremonies may come to their mind, however, that person might not think of it as a battleground with major political ramifications.

Chapter Three: Legacy Games

Most of the legacy of the Soviet Union at the Olympic games and arguably their legacy in history would be decided during their final decade of existence. Their invasion of Afghanistan ended in 1988 and had led to the deaths of nearly 2 million people.³³ This invasion was another attempt at realizing the Brezhnev Doctrine, which theorized that any threat to socialist rule in the east, was to be considered a threat to the Soviet Union and therefore invasion was justified. This was just why the Soviet Union sent thousands of troops into Afghanistan to replace Noor Taraki, who led the recent overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud; a Socialist-friendly leader who was executed in 1978. The Soviets mobilized in Afghanistan and by 1979, had a full invasion force in the country, and left the Taraki-lead "Khalqis" reeling and mutinous as they were already suffering from a lack of supplies. "Washington demanded an explanation, which the Soviets ignored. Finally, on Christmas Eve, the invasion began. Soviet troops killed Amin and installed Babrak Karmal as the Soviet's puppet head of government."³⁴

Although the invasion was an arguable violation of the Helsinki Accords which had been signed by almost every major country in the world at the time and was introduced by the Soviets in an attempt to hammer down peaceful securities like assuring European safety from the Soviet Iron Curtain, and a joining of cultural and economic exchange. The Soviet invasion may have appeared as an initial success to them and their people like the previous invasion of Eastern Bloc countries throughout the latter half of the 19th century, however, the next decade would prove to

³³ Office of the Historian “‘Milestones: The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. Response, 1978–1980’ ,” *The Office of the Historian of the United States*, 2020.

³⁴ Robert G Keiser, “Allied Support Is Building for Olympic Games Pullout,” *Washington Post*, January 23, 1980. Sec. 1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/01/23/allies-support-is-building-for-games-pullout/89782838-f01c-4913-9092-96fdb6392de1/>

the Soviets that this invasion was disastrous to the USSR and that the ends did not justify the means of controlling the east. It would be this event that would once again place the Olympics in the limelight politically in front of the world's stage. The United States, angered by this act of aggression against an ally, would place several embargos on the Soviet Union and boycott the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

This latest act of resistance against the invading Soviets set up the next battleground on the Olympic stage. For the Soviets, sports had always been a staple in the state philosophy, likening their athletes to Spartans, and would carry through as weapons during the turbulent times of the late seventies and early eighties, and then, as President Mikhail Gorbachev adopted his perestroika policy of re-opening the USSR to the world, athletes entering professional sports around the world would be used as a peaceful first-step into adjusting into an increasingly democratic world. Peter Alfano of the New York Times put that exchange in this tone "In the current climate, athletic competition has become more comparable to cultural exchange, rather than a metaphor for war. Only nine years after the United States boycotted the Moscow Olympics and five years after the Soviet Union reciprocated in the Los Angeles Games - underscoring the effect that political tensions can have in sports - the presence of the Soviet sport in the United States is more visible than ever." ³⁵During the late seventies, however, the opinion of the Soviet Union was still far more agitative than it was just a decade later, and the Olympics served the Union many purposes, however, the two most prominent bonuses to having a successful sports industry in Russia were the fact that Russia could once again show their "Spartans" off to the world and their people, as well as generate a nice chunk of revenue for the

³⁵ Peter Alfano, "For Soviet Athletes, a Greater Presence in American Sports," *New York Times*, April 30, 1989, sec. 1 .p. 1 <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1096450/phil-barker-big-read-moscow-1980-forty>

USSR, a fact that would become more enticing as the Soviet's all but ran out of money in the late eighties. It was this second bonus that inspired Gorbachev to push as many Soviet athletes around the world as he could. "Some cynics say that the Soviet Union is using sports as propaganda, a means of improving the country's image. But they concede that the Soviets also appear interested in solidifying their place in the world athletic community. This participation will enable them to obtain needed currency for their troubled economy."³⁶ This notion was shared by the President of the USSR Leonid Brezhnev, who was a President only in name and held almost if not complete control over every aspect of the Soviet Government. He unified the Agricultural and Industrial powers of Soviet Russia and reestablished the position of General Secretary, which was last held by Stalin and came with it; control over the Communist party of Russia. Brezhnev wanted socialism to have a 'human face' and believed that both social and technological innovations would assist in the Soviet Union gaining more supporters abroad. While this idea initially increased optimism in Soviet Russia, the foundation was an inconsistent and faulty pillar to continue, as the Soviets would soon increase defense spending and would betray the detente founded in the early seventies by invading Afghanistan. Output agriculturally did not meet input and there was little in the way of economic management and supervision.³⁷ Brezhnev however, loved sports from a young age, and took that love of sports to the political level, places bids as early as 1966 to host the games in Moscow; a dream that would be realized in 1980, although the execution came at a time of the highest political tension since the Cuban Missile Crisis. For the Soviets, not much was going well during Brezhnev's presidency, the KGB grew in power and was almost untouched in its aggression against its people, concurrently,

³⁶ John C. Dewdney et al., "Britannica," in *Britannica* (London, England : Encyclopedia Britannica, 1999), pp. 2-3.

³⁷ Quirin Schiermeier "Russia Aims to Revive Science after Era of Stagnation." *Nature* (London) 579, no. 7799 (2020): 334.

unemployment in industrial jobs continued to rise.³⁸"The root of the problem was motivation. Over time fewer and fewer workers were willing to do an honest day's work. Not subject to international competition, management was lax and resisted innovation. Overstaffing led to labor shortages, and this gave the labor force considerable leverage over management. There was a perceptible improvement in living standards until the early 1970s, then stagnation or decline. The black market grew to plug the holes of the planned economy. Along with this went corruption, which had filtered down from the political elites; it eventually became pervasive."³⁹The Olympics were one of the bright spots in Soviet society, especially when they came to Moscow in 1980. A decade before this move to re-enter the 'Free World' as a far more democratic nation, the Soviet Union saw the influence of Sports as a completely different tool for maintaining dominance in the homeland and across the world.

The boycott of 1979 may have been seen as an act of aggression from the United States in their own right, however, the Soviet Union's main competitor at the games for the past thirty years was now absent going into the eighties. This, to the Soviet Union, would be an opportunity to show their strength both literally and figuratively. They planned to show off their skill in utter dominance, hoping to prove their superiority to the rest of the world, as they had done in the previous years, now without any Americans to peck away a gold medal now and again. While the Olympic Boycott seems now as an act of defiance from the US, at the time, it came as a great shock to the athletes who were set to participate in them. "He (President Jimmy Carter) came on TV and said something about if the Soviets don't remove their troops from the Afghanistan

³⁸Reet Howell, "The USSR: Sport and Politics Intertwined." ,” *Comparative Education* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 1975): pp. 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006750110204..>

³⁹ Alfano, "For Soviet Athletes, a Greater Presence in American Sports,"

border, we will not send spectators or athletes. I thought: "Uh oh, he thinks he decides who goes to the Games. He does not have that authority." I thought this could be a problem."⁴⁰

It was clear from the President, that the boycott, and the embargos, that the only reason this was happening was the act of aggression that the Soviets had handed down upon the Afghanistanis supported by the west. "Above all, the decision you will make today is not a choice between a sports issue and a national security issue; for the President and Congress have made it clear that the Olympic boycott is a genuine element of America's response to the invasion of Afghanistan... It is a keystone in our call to our allies for solidarity... And thus it is also a referendum on America's character and fundamental values."⁴¹

Unified by this resolve, the Carter Administration handed down strict blocks against the USSR beginning in 1980 and were soon supported by the United States Olympic Committee and some sixty countries around the world. The Soviets now were the bully on the playground. His decision was met by overwhelming support by Congress as well as the decision-makers regarding the Olympics. "The U.S. House of Representatives passed a nonbinding resolution approving the decision to stay away from Moscow with a vote of 386 in favor and 12 opposed; the U.S. Senate passed a similar measure with a vote of 88 to 4. Technically, the decision of whether or not to send athletes to the Olympic Games does not rest with either the President or the Congress, however; it is the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) that makes the final

⁴⁰ Erin Redihan *The Olympics and the Cold War, 1948-1968: Sport as Battleground in the US-Soviet Rivalry*. (Mcfarland Publishers, Jefferson, NC 2017) pg 45

⁴¹ "Address by Vice President Mondale to the United States Olympic Committee, *US Call for an Olympic Boycott*," April 12, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, FRUS 1977-1980, Vol. 1, Document 143. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123796>

determination in such a situation."⁴². The USOC responded in turn by showing their support for the President and Congress's decision to do what they saw fit in the situation. "The USOC expressed its willingness to respect the decision of the U.S. Government with regard to the games. While some nations chose to express their displeasure with Soviet military actions by not sending formal teams to compete, but also not preventing individual athletes from attending and competing under the Olympic flag, athletes in the United States were warned that travel to Moscow for the games would result in them being stripped of their passports." ⁴³

The Soviets responded in the best way that they could: Domination. Of the 204 Gold Medals earned, the Soviets won 80; the most of any country, seconded only by East Germany, who had been fast becoming a promising competitor as the Soviets would realize in 1984, the GDR would win 47 gold. In addition, of the total medal count, the Soviet Union won 195, the second-place winner, also East Germany won 126. The win was glorious, and it represented the power of the Soviet Union to the rest of the world. This was until a whistleblower in the Soviet Union Anti-Doping Agency blew the lid on a secret that would void the reputation that the USSR had built over the last half-century through dominance at the games. "There should be no underestimating the significance the Soviets themselves put on their selection. They have been treating this Olympiad as one of the great events of their modern history."⁴⁴

⁴² U.S Department of the State "The Olympic Boycott of 1980" (The US Department of the State Washington D.C 2018) pg. 1

⁴³ United States Senate, "Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations: 1980 Summer Olympics Boycott," Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations: 1980 Summer Olympics Boycott § (1980), p. 25.

⁴⁴ United States Senate, "Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations: 1980 Summer Olympics Boycott," Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations: 1980 Summer Olympics Boycott § (1980), p. 25.

Chapter Four: 1980-1984

Influential Olympic games were by no means created by the events of the late 1970s, in 1936, the Berlin Games were held at a time when Nazi Germany was nearing the zenith of its power and displayed a regime that in just three years would go on to cause the most damage in human history as a glorious triumphant society. The 1968 games would result in one of the most iconic moments in Olympic history when two winners held up a Black power salute that drew attention across the globe to issues facing black people everywhere, most specifically focused in America. The 1972 games would feature a brutal hostage situation that would lead to the deaths of ten people including nine members of the Israeli Olympic team. Iconic images, sporting events, and moments seem to go hand in hand with the amalgamation of many nations on Earth. The 1980 games came at a time of great political unrest, so it was clear to the Soviet Government after years of stagnation that the tipping point of the Cold War had been reached and the tides would soon turn in one direction. The 1980 games in Moscow were the culmination for the Soviets of years of lobbying for the games to come to Russia. They intended for these games to be not only a display of Soviet superiority abroad but also to their people, who they had spent the past forty years trying to convince of their athletic dominance. "The Kremlin was determined to host an untarnished event after the United States and 65 other countries boycotted the 1980 Olympics over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the secret police were heavily involved in the effort."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Aleksei Aleksandrov, Ivan Grebeniuk, Volodymyr Runets "The 1980 Olympics Are The 'Cleanest' In History. Athletes Recall How Moscow Cheated The System." (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, Prague, Czechoslovakia July 22nd 2020) <https://www.rferl.org/a/the-1980-moscow-olympics-rank-as-the-cleanest-in-history-athletes-recall-how-the-u-s-s-r-cheated-the-system-/30741567.html> Accessed April 14, 2020

Important to note regarding the 1980 Olympics is that they went on to be the "cleanest" on record, as not a single athlete tested positive for any performance enhancers at the games. It would later be revealed, however, that the State-Sponsored Doping Program that had existed in Russia for the last twenty years was responsible for juking the stats in Moscow and fabricating DNA samples before the events. The events of the games did display Soviet excellence. Being the most unattended games in the Cold War era, the Soviets had little competition as they pulled in 195 medals, and won the games in medal count handily. The Soviets also understood that the lack of participation would put a damper on the social effects of the games, as they had dominated previously, Soviet-hosted games would certainly drive the point home to every one of their athletic superiority.

Although the 1980 games featured a dominating performance by the Soviets, scholars look back at the games as a mess for the USSR as they were clumsy, even beginning with Brezhnev announcing the Olympic rings in his opening speech by saying "Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!" To thunderous applause at first, but then confused murmuring after three or four.⁴⁶

Although the games in 1980 would be highlighted by the political ramifications and circumstances surrounding them; it would be the revelation of doping at the events that would create major problems for the Russians following the games and even following the fall of the Soviet Union from 1989-1991. As the Soviet Union began to fall, several documents and defectors released their knowledge of a State-Sponsored doping program that violated several of the IOC's policies on doping that were developed in time for the Mexico City games in 1972,

⁴⁶ Phillip Barker "Forty years on from Moscow 1980 – the most political Olympics of modern times" (Inside the Games, Bletchley, England July 19th, 2020)
<https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1096450/phil-barker-big-read-moscow-1980-forty>

although anti-doping measures had been put in place in the early sixties. The complex scientific undertaking by the Soviet Union operated like most operations in the USSR, focused on all decisions being made directly by the Kremlin, with very few people privy to all the knowledge of the industry. "All orders to organize and finance such research were given in a highly centralized system. Research into the medical and biological aspects of sport was an integral part of the athletic agenda in the former Soviet Union. It was conducted in more than 28 State Institutes of Physical Education and State Research Institutes of Physical Culture. It is unlikely that crucial decisions about financing and implementation of research programs on androgenic-anabolic steroids by the State Central Institute of Physical Culture in Moscow were made without the knowledge and consent of governmental officials."⁴⁷

Of course, it is foolish to believe that the Soviets were the only ones using some sort of steroid or performance enhancer at the time. The gravity of the situation increased not only as the Soviet Union got caught, but the method of human experimentation that they used to access data. "A document from the State Central Institute of Physical Culture made clear that within the former USSR, there was a completely different situation - a government-sponsored scientific effort, which did not follow the accepted norms for treatment of human subjects. By governmental agencies, circulating the research report among elite State Sport Institutions in the former Soviet Union, sports officials, coaches, and athletes were being advised, recommended, and encouraged to use androgenic-anabolic steroids."⁴⁸ The actual crime at the 1980 games was perhaps the most egregious effort to juke stats by the Soviets and specifically the KGB. British Journalist Andrew Jennings claimed that a KGB colonel informed him that KGB officials

⁴⁷ Thomas M Hunt, in *Drug Games* (Austin, Texas: University at Texas Press, 2012), P. 65-66

⁴⁸ Michael Kalinski "State-Sponsored Research on Creatine and Blood Doping in Elite Soviet Sport", (*BLDE university journal of health sciences* 2) 445-451. Pubmed.gov

were placed in testing sites to remove tainted samples and replace them with clean ones. The games would later be dubbed "The Chemist Games" by the Australian Government claiming

“There is hardly a medal winner at the Moscow Games ... who is not on one sort of drug or another, usually several kinds. The Moscow Games might as well have been called the Chemists' Games.” Australian Senate Olympic Committee 1989. The true irony in all of these claims is that the Moscow Olympics would be reported by the IOC as "the cleanest games in modern Olympic history." Not one athlete tested positive for any performance enhancers. The Medical commission chairperson for the IOC Alexander De Merode cited that the Soviet laboratory facilities were "well-equipped," although his claims would be called into question by Dr. Robert Voy, who became the chief medical officer for the USOC in 1984, who argued that "after seeing their facilities in Moscow, and seeing firsthand the Soviet's willingness to play these games, I simply cannot believe that claim." ⁴⁹.

Not one athlete tested positive for the drugs banned by the IOC years prior, although conspiracies confirmed by the documents released in the 70s and 80s as told by Kaslinki tell of the complex Soviet doping scandal. This was followed by claims by athletes for the Soviet Union and their experience at the 1980 Olympic Games testing periods. One such athlete was Konstantin Volkov. "Konstantin Volkov, who won a silver medal in the pole vault for the Soviet Union at the 1980 games, told Current Time that when it came time to hand in his urine sample for testing, an employee at the Moscow lab informed him that "we throw all this out" and handed him a different container already filled with urine." ⁵⁰This claim was backed up by retired KGB Colonel Vladimir Popov. "They filled the containers [of urine] that were purportedly to be from

⁴⁹ Thomas M. Hunt, *Drug Games* (Austin Texas University of Texas Press) 2011. P. 72

⁵⁰ Barker "Forty years on from Moscow 1980 – the most political Olympics of modern times"

the athletes," said Popov, who handled sports journalists at the time. "Naturally, they didn't have any positive doping tests, and that's how the samples were clean...If an athlete like Volkov actually provided samples, they were "simply replaced with obviously clean ones," ⁵¹

These claims may have been a conspiracy, but it would be in 2016 that the Russians were once again caught in a virtually identical scandal to the one from 1980. This time with no conspiracy, only fact. The major difference was the advancement of the scandal that occurred in 2016 as PED "cocktails" were used to increase performance, representing a Russian environment that continues to reflect similarities to the inhumane research into human reactions to PEDs to excel at the zenith of sports events unfairly.

The 1980 Olympics simply put, came and went for Russia, it did not turn out to be the glorious exercise that Brezhnev had hoped for, and soon after the end of Brezhnev's term had ended in Russia, a period that came to be known as the "era of Stagnation." ⁵²The 1984 games featured a retaliation by the Soviet Union against the United States. According to the Soviet Union, the reason for the boycott was "safety reasons," ⁵³. It is clear, however, that the boycott of 1984 was due at least in some large part to the boycott of the previous games. The Soviet Union after was the spectacle at the games for the past several decades and the Los Angeles games of '84 were being privately financed even with McDonalds paying for concessions. ⁵⁴. The Soviets would draw attention to the games as yet another brought between the two world powers would

⁵¹ Aleksei Aleksandrov Ivan Grebeniuk Volodymyr Runets "The 1980 Olympics Are The 'Cleanest' In History. Athletes Recall How Moscow Cheated The System." (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, Prague, Czechoslovakia July 22nd 2020) Accessed April 14, 2020

⁵² Theodore Rosenof. *Economics in the Long Run : New Deal Theorists and Their Legacies, 1933-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). P. 104

⁵³ U.S Department of the State "The Olympic Boycott of 1980" p. 1

⁵⁴ Thomas M. Hunt, *Drug Games* (Austin Texas University of Texas Press) 2011. P. 72

be very interesting for many Americans and Soviets alike, along with the rest of the world. America is not innocent of juking stats either. Throughout their history, several athletes in most of the games of the modern era had tested positive for steroids or other banned testosterone supplements especially following the fall of the Soviet Union. This became most apparent when Lance Armstrong in 2012 was found guilty of the use and trafficking of banned substances, the once inspirational athlete was disgraced when it was found he had used PEDs at Sydney in 2000.

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Being that the 1984 games were being privately financed, and were also being run by Peter Ueberroth, a man who succeeded in the private sector as the owner of First Travel Corporation, the testing at the games became more and more privately run as well. "The USOC's refusal to disclose positive drug tests by American athletes prior to the Games for instance, probably derived from Ueberroth's emphasis on pre-competition fundraising. Revelations about positive test results might have hurt the fundraising campaign."⁵⁶ The Soviets refused to let the lack of testing or disclosure to the public slide, which is ironic due to the previous three decades, although their fervor might have been due to bitterness about the 1980 games and any chance to embarrass the Americans would be greatly exercised. Ueberroth responded by citing the Winter Olympics of 1984 in Sarajevo, whose games turned out to be one of the straws on the camel's back for the Soviet Sports industry.

⁵⁵Jacque Wilson , "Lance Armstrong's Doping Drugs," *CNN.com*, January 18, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/01/15/health/armstrong-ped-explainer..>

⁵⁶ New York Times "1984 OLYMPICS TO RELY ON PRIVATE ENTERPRISE" (*New York Times* New York City, NY) 1981. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/06/us/1984-olympics-to-rely-on-private-enterprise.html#:~:text=The%20organizers%20of%20the%201984,most%20Olympics%20in%20recent%20decades.>

"I believe completely without question that for Sarajevo, the week before, the day before, all systems were go for their competing in the games...they didn't do well, and this is way underestimated in the eyes of the West; and they were severely criticized at home because they didn't perform well. The East Germans beat them in the measurements that count: the number of gold medals and the premier Sports, and the projections that they went there with. And remember this; they had sold their public in 1980 that their 80 gold medals truly reflected their summer games Power. And that the few countries that didn't come there were not significant in terms of medal-winning." ⁵⁷

Peter Ueberroth probably unknowingly touched upon an insecurity that the Soviets had feared for some time leading up to the fall of their Union. They were getting defeated; they could no longer keep up. Not only in sports but politics, economics, agriculture, and industrialization. Since the 1980 games, Brezhnev had retired and passed away, leaving his second in command, Yuri Andropov, in charge, only for Andropov to continue most of what Brezhnev had done, continuing the Era of Stagnation. It was the beginning of the end of the Olympic Domination for the Soviet Union.

⁵⁷ Thomas M Hunt. "Turning Point" in "Drug Games"(Austin Texas, University of Texas Press) 2011. P. 74

Chapter Five: Framing Pharming

It was not long after 1984 that the Soviet Union collapsed through several means. By 1986, the Soviet Union saw what could have been the worst nuclear disaster in human history when Chernobyl nearly created a nuclear winter. That event would be credited by Gorbachev as a "turning point" and one that opened the possibility of much greater freedom of expression, to the point that the system as we knew it could no longer continue".⁵⁸ Gorbachev, who would serve as the final General Secretary for the Soviet Union, and his far more open-door policies would be the final straw in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union by 1991. Although it was the end of the Soviet Union and their dominance at the Olympics, this would by no means be the end of the Russian's legacy at the Olympics. In 1992, famously known as the year of the "dream team" in the United States, Russia would lead a 'unified team' to the games in Barcelona.⁵⁹ The Russians might have said goodbye to the Soviet Union, but the far-reaching hands of Doping in eastern European and former communist bloc nations would remain and will seemingly remain for a long time. "Countries like Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine punch above their weight in the Olympic medal table, but their high rates of performance enhancing drug use, flawed testing systems, and records of political interference in sport are a cause for concern."⁶⁰ The legacy left by outdated methods of taking performance-enhancing drugs at the level that the Russian's set the standard for has only been enhanced by the WADA's inability to manage the problem correctly. Countries like Azerbaijan had more than a dozen athletes test positive for PEDs and

⁵⁸ James Bloodworth "Did Chernobyl Kill Communism?" (Unherd.com 2014) pg 1.

<https://unherd.com/2019/06/chernobyl-and-the-meltdown-of-the-ussr/>

⁵⁹Eva, Kassens-Nor. "Transport Legacy of the Olympic Games, 1992-2012." *Journal of urban affairs* 35, no. 4 (2013): 393–416.

⁶⁰James Ellingworth. "Doping in Ex-Soviet Nations Echoes Russia's Problems." *Associated Press*, July 25, 2016.

Ukraine's Anti-Doping agency tested just two players in 2014. This was completely legal as the WADA set no minimum for the number of tests necessary for athletic competition.

It's important to note that many PEDs are addictive substances and that many athletes that participate in weightlifting for recreation consider the use of PEDs a lifestyle rather than just an enhancer. Taking a PED once won't do much, but taking PEDs regularly, and taking several will garner desired, or nearly-desired results. They do work; they do the job. ⁶¹

The doping agencies in many up-and-coming nations on the demographic chart are laughable. "If an athlete is tested in the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan, their sample must be flown almost 1,600 miles (2,600 kilometers) to the nearest functioning lab in India; further if sent to larger-capacity facilities in Europe. That poses a major problem for the blood tests needed to detect some substances. If a sample doesn't reach a lab within 36 hours of collection, it must be thrown away." ⁶². The outmoded and under-supplied drug testing facilities in many of these eastern countries have led to more and more cheating among athletes that can quite literally get away with it. Unless of course, the whistle is blown.

In 2016, Grigory Rodchencov did just that to the Russian Federation. Putin reminded all of us watching the Olympics that the old Soviet Union had not yet completely gone away when the brains of "The Duchess Cocktail" whistle blew the massive scandal that took place in 2016. According to Grigori Rodchencov, who was responsible for combining several anabolic steroids with liquor, "Putin, he is quite logical. He separates opposition in two ways — enemies ...

⁶¹ Associated Press "Grigory Rodchenkov, Russian doping whistleblower, still lives in fear" (Associated Press August 10 2020) p 1. <https://olympics.nbcsports.com/2020/08/10/grigory-rodchenkov-russia-doping-whistleblower/>

⁶² Associated Press "Grigory Rodchenkov, Russian doping whistleblower, still lives in fear"

betrayers," Rodchenkov said. "I am falling in the betrayers' category and all betrayers should be beheaded, cut, dead. So, there is no doubt that he wants me to be dead."⁶³ Rodchencov documented his time in Russia in his book "The Rodchenkov Affair: How I Brought Down Putin's Secret Doping Empire" in which he described his state-sponsored work to developed an undetected dope cocktail and the spies used to tamper with urine samples at the Sochi Olympics where the Russians won 13 gold medals. "When you are a laboratory director and you have 50 employees and you are reporting to your high ups at the ministry, I could not even think about morals," he said, dismissing concerns about any long-term damage to the health of athletes he allowed to be pumped with steroids."⁶⁴.

Rodchencov now lives in America where he fears for his life constantly, and his work is a frightening example of how the Russian's are up to their same old tricks when it comes to doping, and how the "fizcultura" is still alive in Russian society and a lesser-known, yet still, a government-sponsored trial that goes to abusive lengths to prove Russian dominance. The Russian method was centered around not only winning in sports but manipulating them completely and getting around the WADA and the IOC, who has since handed out bans and disqualifications to many of the same athletes from Sochi for the Rio Games in 2016 and the PyeongChang Games in 2018. "This is the huge problem of the militarization of Russia sport," Rodchenkov said. "They follow orders, they are disciplined but they cannot tell the truth because they have given the oath to the Russian state and consider foreigners as potential enemies or even actual enemies. That's why in Russia there are three ways – lying, cheating, and denying." ⁶⁵

⁶³ Associated Press "Grigory Rodchenkov, Russian doping whistleblower, still lives in fear" p 1.

⁶⁴ Associated Press "Grigory Rodchenkov, Russian doping whistleblower, still lives in fear" p 1.

⁶⁵ Associated Press "Grigory Rodchenkov, Russian doping whistleblower, still lives in fear" (Associated Press 2020) p 1. See paragraph 4 /

Doping has always existed in the games, from having one beer before a game and getting suspended, to stuffing blood full of anabolic steroids, drugs have always been a part of getting a competitive edge in sports. Many professional leagues like the MLB, the NBA, and the NFL⁶⁶ have strict, no-nonsense policies and nearly all substances both legal and not. Of course, those leagues have to manage maybe 400 players, but the IOC and the WADA have a very difficult time managing the entire world's drug use. The political sphere of the Olympics during the Cold war was a research project that to me, has opened so much knowledge about what was going on during the most diplomatic war of the modern era. Battlegrounds were on the track, in the gym and definitely, the weapons were the players. What is to come of all drug crises is anyone's guess, but it will be interesting to see that one leader of the IOC come in and completely change the game. The Soviet Union may be gone, but its legacy echoes in the same battleground which the Union favored for half of the twentieth century.

⁶⁶ NFL Players Association "Drug Policies and Resources" p 1-2

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