

## Herb Brooks: An intimidator and an innovator

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*SportsLine.com wire reports*

MINNEAPOLIS -- Playing hockey for Herb Brooks usually brought a bounty of rewards, even though few of his protégés realized that right away.

"My head was spinning, trying to figure out what this maniac was doing with us," recalled Mark Johnson, a forward on Brooks' ragtag 1980 U.S. Olympic team that upset the Soviet Union in the "Miracle on Ice" and got the gold at Lake Placid that winter.

"Looking back, it made a lot of sense," Johnson said.

Brooks died at age 66 on Monday afternoon when his minivan veered off the interstate and rolled several times. As friends and family arranged his funeral for Saturday morning, fans set up a makeshift memorial along the highway and investigators tried to piece together details of the crash.

Hockey players at St. Cloud State, where Brooks coached during the 1986-87 season, said they will put his initials on their helmets this season.

Investigators were still trying to piece together details of the crash. The coroner's office said Tuesday that Brooks wasn't wearing a seat belt and died of multiple blunt-force chest and abdominal injuries when he was ejected.

Several of Brooks' former players and colleagues talked Tuesday about his impact.

"Any player who played with him, from the start of the year to the end of the year, was a better hockey player and a better individual," said Jack O'Callahan, a defenseman on the 1980 team.

Brooks was one of the game's greatest coaches, equal parts innovator and intimidator. The collection of mostly college players he assembled six months before they pulled off that improbable feat quickly found that out.

"We got a sense it was a very different style of game we were going to play," said Mike Eruzione, who scored the game-winning goal in the Americans' 4-3 win over the Soviets that set up the chance for the gold medal.

"It's become something we could kind of laugh about," Eruzione said, remembering standing in line during practice behind some of the 10 who had previously played for Brooks at the University of Minnesota and asking them what to do.

"It was like, 'Jee, where's he going with this drill?'" Eruzione said.

As that tight-knit bunch of twentysomethings learned, it was all part of Brooks' plan. The only way the United States could compete with the other world powers and their professional-caliber players was to adapt.

"He understood the European style -- it was a little more free-flowing," said John Harrington, a forward on the 1980 team. "He knew he would have to combine that if he was going to be successful in the Olympic game. He had a belief, a conviction, that this could be done. He could teach it, and he could explain it. He was willing to take those chances with the ability he had."

The American game, at the time, was based on power. Brooks taught his players to control the puck, encouraging them to hang on to it as long as possible and attempt high-percentage passes as they cycled across the ice.

"When we played, hockey was a north-and-south game," Eruzione said. "You stayed on your wing. Once you got over the red line, you'd dump it in the zone. Herb would say, 'You worked so hard to get the puck. Why would you give it back to him?'"

Offseason training, back then, also was unheard of.

"He had a sense of respect for way the Europeans played and the way they trained," O'Callahan said. "Now, it's pretty much become a 12-month sport. Herbie sensed that athleticism was a big component of success. It wasn't just talent or how fast you could skate or how well you could handle the puck or how well you could shoot it. He took the European training environment and sort of melded it into the North American way of doing things.

"He was the first guy who really started making that connection. It just reverberated and really affected generations of American hockey players."

O'Callahan recalled that in his final NHL season, in 1989 with New Jersey, players weren't even allowed to chew gum that wasn't sugarless.

"They were even micromanaging our diet and exercise," O'Callahan said. "In 1979, the way pro hockey players prepared for training camp was by playing three or four rounds of golf and maybe going fishing."

Brooks also was remembered as a master motivator, one who knew how to get the most out of his players by being as negative as he possibly could without pushing them over the edge.

Harrington remembered a day when he got to the rink early and Brooks sat down beside him.

"I'm tying my skates, and all of a sudden it's, 'Harrington, you're the worst defensive player I've ever seen.' He went on for what seemed like 15 minutes. 'You think you're

going to play pro hockey? You're going to get run out of town wherever you go.' He just shrugged his shoulders, and I shrugged my shoulders and went on the ice.

"That was his way of saying you needed to work on your defense. I got the message."

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The Associated Press News Service

## Vater des «Wunders auf Eis»

### Der US-Eishockeytrainer Herb Brooks mit dem Auto tödlich verunfallt

zz. Sechs Tage nach seinem 66. Geburtstag ist der amerikanische Eishockeytrainer Herb Brooks bei einem Autounfall nördlich von Minneapolis ums Leben gekommen. Im Februar 1980 hatte er in Lake Placid das aus College-Spielern zusammengesetzte US-Team zum Olympiasieg geführt. Im Winter danach gab er ein erfolgloses Gastspiel im HC Davos, kehrte sodann in seine Heimat zurück, wirkte als Coach in der National Hockey League und gewann 2002 in Salt Lake City mit dem US-Team noch einmal Olympiasilber.

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*Ack.* Wer vor 23 Jahren in der tristen Kleinstadt Lake Placid dabei war, wird das Miracle on Ice nie mehr vergessen - das «Wunder auf Eis». Es herrschte noch der Kalte Krieg, olympischen Duellen zwischen US-Sportlern und Russen haftete allemal etwas Aufwühlendes an, und nun gelang Brooks und seinem Ensemble aus lauter Unbekannten das Unwahrscheinliche: der übermächtigen Sbornaja, der sieggewohnten sowjetischen Eishockeynationalmannschaft, in der Finalrunde das Bein zu stellen. Mit ihrem sensationellen 4:3-Sieg öffnete sich dem Coach und den College-Boys unterm Sternenbanner das Tor zur Goldmedaille, die sie schliesslich dank einem 4:2-Erfolg gegen Finnland gewannen und darauf wie Nationalhelden gefeiert wurden.

Ein Wiedersehen mit den Veteranen gab es vergangenes Jahr in Salt Lake City, wo sie das olympische Feuer der Winterspiele 2002 entzündeten. Zwei Wochen später gewann Brooks, nach langen und nicht immer erfolgreichen Jahren als NHL-Trainer (u. a. mit den New York Rangers, den Minnesota North Stars, den New Jersey Devils und den Pittsburgh Penguins) noch einmal auf den Posten des Nationalcoachs berufen, mit einem aus Professionals bestehenden US-Team die Silbermedaille. Bis heute gilt der Trainer, ein Disziplinfanatiker, in den Vereinigten Staaten gewissermassen als Synonym für das Eishockey. Dabei hielt Brooks nie mit Kritik zurück, zum Beispiel an den im Vergleich zu Europa kleineren Eisflächen der NHL: «Wir haben grandiose Athleten auf dem Eis, aber viel zu wenig Platz. Wir nehmen ihnen ihre Fähigkeiten. Die Leute zahlen 100 Dollar Eintritt und schlafen vor Langeweile ein. Unbedingt müsste die Eisfläche auf internationale Masse vergrössert werden. Schliesslich sind wir im Unterhaltungsgeschäft.»

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