

THE LOST SUMMIT

The 1972 Summit Series was a legendary event in hockey history. But you almost never hear about the second Summit Series – the 1974 showdown between WHA stars and the Soviet Union’s best players – even though it featured a similar level of on- and off-ice drama and intrigue across two continents.

On the 50th anniversary of the ice Cold War sequel, here’s a game-by-game recollection from some of the people and players who were there

BY RONNIE SHUKER



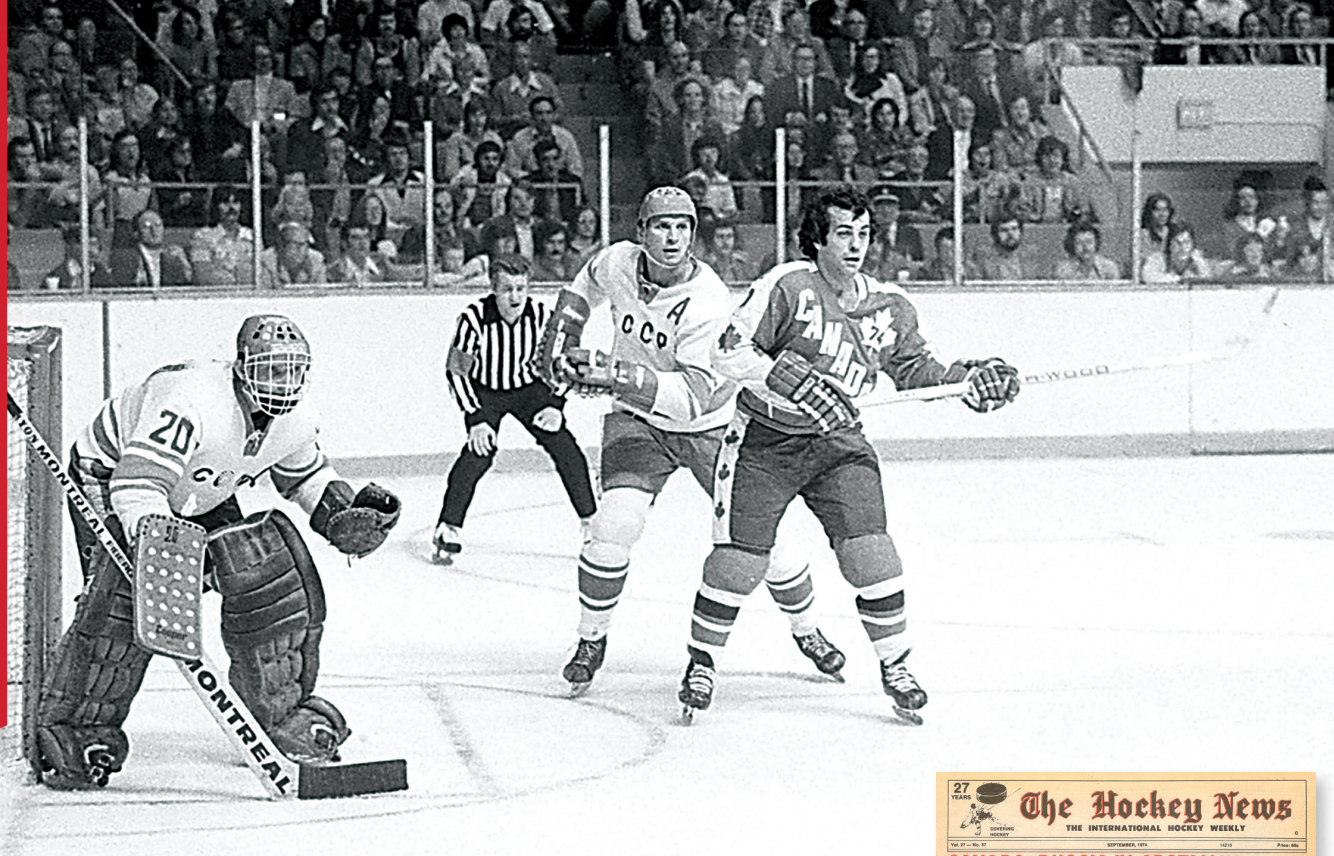
To honor 1974, sticks from Tretiak and Hull travelled to the summit of Lenin Peak.

ON JULY 21 AND 22, on a joint project of the Russian hockey and climbing federations, a group of professional climbers ascended Lenin Peak in the Pamir mountain range in what is now Kyrgyzstan. Among their gear were two special souvenirs. One was a signed white goalie stick from Vladislav Tretiak, the other a brown left-handed Bobby Hull stick, with its shanked curve just about pointing due east. When they reached the summit, at 23,406 feet, they brought out both sticks and set them in the snow, arranging Tretiak's stick against a miniature three-balled snowman. Video was shot, selfies were taken, tributes were said in Russian.

That is how Russia chose to remember the second Summit Series, by summiting the third-highest mountain in the former Soviet Union with the goalie stick of the country's most legendary player and the stick of one of the greatest Canadian goal-scorsers he ever faced.

In Canada, meanwhile, the 1974 Summit Series remains but a footnote to the first. This should come as no surprise. Victory is easier to honor than defeat is to accept. Few will recall that, after a collection of overconfident NHL stars scripted their way to a Hollywood ending at the original series in 1972, a group of underappreciated stars from the WHA wrote a sequel two years later. Same opponent, same format, same arenas (except one), similar timeframe, same sequence, with some of the same players. Ultimately, only the ending, and the scale of recollection since, was different.

Hundreds of books about about '72. All of three exist about '74, only one of which has been published in the past 49 years.



But as the 50th anniversary approaches, the 1974 Summit Series is well worth reliving, because the sequel featured all of the hallmarks of the original: sublime skill, intense competition, cheap shots, fights, questionable officiating, lineup debates, political posturing, diplomatic expectations, capitalist pretensions, communist bureaucracy, backroom bargaining, bugged hotel rooms, stolen beer and, of course, blood. Just like in '72, the fate of '74, too, would be measured in mere seconds.

Players, coaches, organizers and supporters who've passed can only speak from the newspaper accounts and in-game interviews from the series. But Canadian players Paul Henderson, Mark Howe, Andre Lacroix, Rejean Houle and Brad Selwood remember well "the forgotten summit," as it has been called, while Tretiak, through an interpreter and a translator, savors it as the Soviets' first victory over Canadian professionals.

CANADA

"WE'RE BEHIND BOTH TEAMS. WE'RE FOR PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP" – Canadian federal health and welfare minister Marc Lalonde

Having escaped with the series win in '72, the NHL wanted no part of a rematch when the idea was floated to Hockey Canada just over a year later. Having declared war on the upstart WHA, the NHL unwittingly supplied the Soviets with their replacement when an agreement was signed in the spring of 1974.

RIVALRY RENEWED

In 1974, Canada had three players who took part in the '72 Summit Series. The Soviets had 18 returnees.

A joint effort of Hockey Canada, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association and the WHA (especially team owners 'Wild' Bill Hunter and Ben Hatskin), the second series was the perfect setup for the nascent league but also a mighty gamble: win and the WHA could stand shoulder to shoulder with the NHL; lose and it might never shake the "bush league" label with which the NHL had been branding it.

"The guys wanted to prove to the NHL players that we can beat those guys also, but we were dreaming, in a way," Houle says. "In '72, they had so many big stars, and they had a problem to win, too."

Led by coach Billy Harris, Team Canada's training camp lasted 16 days and featured five tune-up games against a junior all-star team from the Western Canada League. But this wasn't Team Canada from two years prior. Only three players returned, all of whom had jumped ship from the NHL to the WHA: Pat Stapleton, Frank Mahovlich and Henderson. The team's average age was 29.4, with 46-year-old Gordie Howe and his 19- and 20-year-old sons, Mark and Marty, pulling the mean at either end. All these years later, there are now 14 Hall of Famers from the first team in 1972 and only five from the second.

"It was obviously a lot stronger team in '72," Henderson says. "I'm not downgrading



anybody in '74. They were all great hockey players, or they wouldn't have been there. It's just like when a first-place team plays a fifth- or sixth-place team. Over a period of time, the better team and the better players are going to win. We knew we were in tough, that's for sure, going in. But we wanted to prove ourselves also."

Team USSR returned 18 players from 1972, with assistant coach Boris Kulagin taking over behind the bench. The average age was 23.8, with only one player on the other side of 29, the age at which most Soviet players were retired.

Most pundits were picking Team USSR to win. Many were predicting a landslide, even among Canadian media.

"There's no friggin' way in 100 years we're ever going to win this series," Henderson says. "That's what they were saying."

For the record, The Hockey News polled a panel of 25 experts ahead of the series: 13 picked Team Canada, eight picked Team USSR, four figured on a draw.

SAVING GRACE

By the end of the '74 Summit Series, the Soviets were calling Cheevers the best goalie they had ever faced.

GAME 1

"WE WERE A LITTLE BIT SCARED OF THE '72 TEAM. BUT THIS TEAM KNOWS US BETTER, AND THEREFORE, IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO PLAY AGAINST THEM" – Valeri Kharlamov

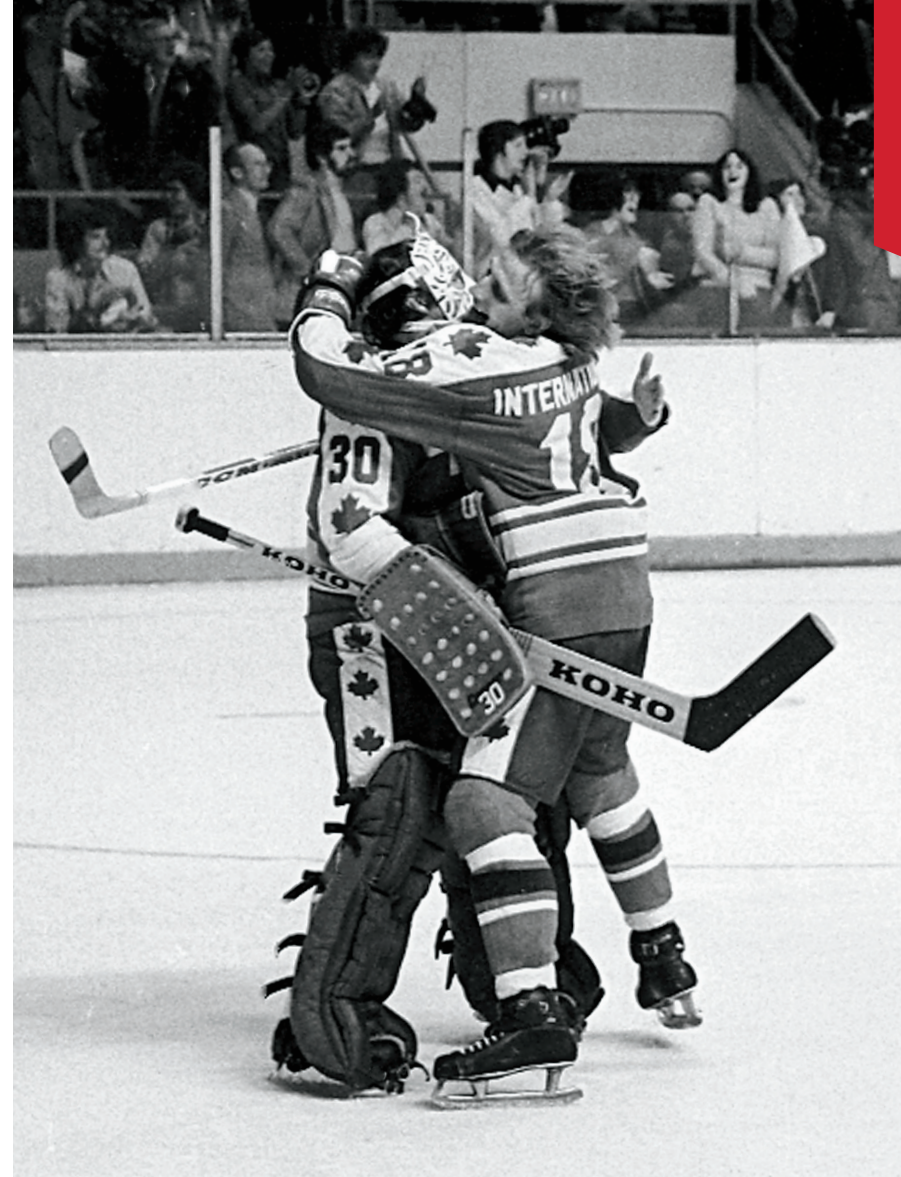
The ceremonial puck drop was just supposed to be a photo op when Stapleton and Boris Mikhailov lined up at center ice at La Colisee de Quebec in Quebec City. In attendance was Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who'd pushed hard for the series as part of his government's efforts to promote more trade with the Soviet Union. Sharing the puck was Georgi Regulsky, vice-chairman of the Soviet Sports Federation. With wide smiles, Trudeau and Regulsky leaned in between the two captains. Either the Soviets didn't get the memo, or they used the moment to send one to the Canadians. The mercurial Mikhailov, who'd nearly kicked off a brawl in Game 7 of the first series by kicking Gary Bergman, played it like a faceoff in a tie game, hacking at the puck and pulling it away from Stapleton with a clear backhand win into his own end. He then skated away, much to the shock of Trudeau.

"I think we were all taken aback by the way he did it, not necessarily *that* he did it," Selwood says. "We all went, 'What was that?'"

Mikhailov returned to shake hands with the prime minister, but the message had been sent. The Soviets were ready.

Unlike two years earlier, so were the Canadians, especially Gerry Cheevers, who, like Hull, had been left off the roster in '72 after leaving the NHL for more money in the WHA. After the series, the Soviets would call Cheevers the best goalie they'd ever faced.

The vaunted Team USSR offense had embarrassed an unconditioned and underprepared group of NHL stars 7-3 in Game 1 in '72. But two years later, with Cheevers in net for the WHA stars, the Soviets could muster only three goals in a 3-3 tie. Hull evened the score late in the third period, and Team Canada would've won had Mahovlich converted a mini breakaway with 36 seconds remaining. "We feel like we could beat those guys," Houle says. "I'm not saying that we're better than them, but if we play the right way and do the right thing, we'll be able to beat those guys."



GAME 2

"THE PUCK WAS IN THE NET AND SHOULD'VE COUNTED. I WANT CANADA TO WIN, BUT I WANT THEM TO WIN FAIRLY" – Harold Ballard

Aside from Mikhailov's overenthusiastic pre-game faceoff, the series opener had gone as smoothly as Canadian diplomats had hoped. But off the ice, trouble was brewing. According to a research paper from the Fraser Institute, a Canadian think-tank, a Canadian citizen had gotten a court order to have the Soviets' equipment seized as compensation for his car being destroyed in the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. It took Hockey Canada and External Affairs to intercede to keep the series on track.

Then, soon after Game 1, the Soviets began calling into question Canadian hospitality. As part of their agreement, both teams were to take commercial flights between Canadian cities. So, when Team Canada took a charter to Toronto for Game 2, the Soviets threatened to pull out of the series.

Admitting their blunder, Canadian organizers apologized, but the Soviets tabled other complaints. Instead of a direct flight to Toronto, they had to layover in Montreal. When they finally arrived at the Royal York hotel, they had to wait two hours for their rooms...which pushed back their practice... which reportedly took place on bad ice... which was the result of a broken resurfacing machine. The Soviet press did its part to play up the events, claiming the hotel delay lasted long into the night, depriving the players of a good night's sleep and leading to their poor showing in Game 2, as Team Canada duplicated its '72 win in Toronto, 4-1. "Toronto was generally an unlucky city for us," Tretiak says. "We always lost there. Why is unclear. For as long as I played, we always lost there. For some reason, Toronto was an unlucky city for us."

By then, controversy had made its first appearance on the ice. Down two goals early in the third period, Team USSR appeared to cut the deficit to one when a shot from Vladimir Petrov hit the back crossbar and bounced back out into play. The red light went on, and the Soviets' arms went up



GAME 5

"WE'RE LUCKY WE DIDN'T START THE THIRD WORLD WAR" - Gordie Howe

Dubbed the Friendship Series before it began, the series had become anything but by the time Team Canada touched down in Moscow. Along with their luggage, the players had other baggage – a payload of pre-conceptions from the politics of the time.

"Probably the biggest thing in '74, you were mentally programmed just to hate these people, literally," Mark Howe says. "There really was an absolute hatred for the people. And that was everybody, not just me. That's part of the mentality of the series."

As soon as the puck dropped for Game 5, that hatred was evident – on both sides. The hard but comparatively clean first four games were replaced with Soviet stickwork, Canadian retaliation and interesting officiating. As he did ahead of Game 1, Mikhailov set the tone early when he attempted to saw off Cheevers' ankles in the first minute of the game. With that, the relative discipline Team Canada had maintained back home disappeared as quickly as the players' steaks and beer.

Their collective frustration even over-

came otherwise mild-mannered finesse center Ralph Backstrom, who drew a 10-minute misconduct when he protested a non-call after Valeri Kharlamov slew-footed him right underneath the nose of Polish referee Waldo Szczapek.

Even still, Team USSR could only eke out a 3-2 win, as Cheevers played perhaps his best game of the series. By now, Team Canada realized they weren't there to make friends, as politicians back home had hoped. It was war on ice.

"As far as we were concerned, we were the enemy," Lacroix says. "They knew we didn't like them, and I don't think they liked us either. Not just because of hockey. In general. They hated us more because we had freedom and they didn't."

GAME 6

"UNDER THE SOVIET CRIMINAL CODE, LEY SHOULD BE PUT IN JAIL FOR 15 DAYS" - Boris Kulagin

Ahead of a crucial Game 6, the players on Team Canada decided to gather together in one of their rooms to discuss a change in strategy. When they returned to Luzhniki

REVENGE SERVED COLD

After the '72 Summit Series, Tretiak says Team Canada couldn't intimidate the Soviets in 1974.

Ice Palace, they found that the Soviets had tweaked theirs in kind. Less than three minutes in, Team Canada was down 2-0. By the time it ended, Team USSR had cruised to an easy 5-2 win.

The mounting frustration that began at the airport and the hotel, and carried over into Game 5, culminated in outright violence in Game 6. In the first period, Stapleton speared Alexander Gusev in the groin. In the second, Valeri Vasiliev pounded a defenseless Bruce MacGregor, who didn't fight back in the expectation Vasiliev would receive the mandatory misconduct for instigating under international rules. Instead, Soviet referee Victor Dombrowski gave them both five minutes for fighting. In the third period, Marty Howe shoved one of the linesmen after exchanging slashes with Yuri Lebedev. Then, just as Bobby Clarke had done in Game 6 in 1972, Rick Ley took aim at Kharlamov.

"Canadians, they are men; they do not like to lose," Tretiak says. "If they thought

they could intimidate us, well, it was useless to intimidate us, because we'd already been through '72, and we already knew how Canadians play."

At the end of the game, depending on which report you read, Kharlamov either speared or butt-ended Ley or tapped him on the shoulder or backside. He then smiled and pointed at the scoreboard. Ley, who Kharlamov had beaten on two of the goals, lit him up with a flurry of punches that left the Soviet star bloodied and cleared the benches. "We thought Ricky was going to go to jail," Lacroix says. "Because in Russia, you go to jail if you do that."

Kulagin said as much after the game, while Canadian media and politicians called for Ley to be sent home. Ley would apologize to Kharlamov in person the next day.

The players on Team Canada returned to the hotel knowing there was no way for them to win the series. At best, they could only tie. Fresh off the loss, some of them gathered in the hotel lobby, where third-string goalie Gilles Gratton attempted to lighten the mood.

"He sat down and played the Russian national anthem on the piano, and he couldn't read a note," Henderson says. "It was unbelievable. It's a great piece of music, but it's too long to listen to when you've lost the friggin' game, I'll tell you that."



GAME 7

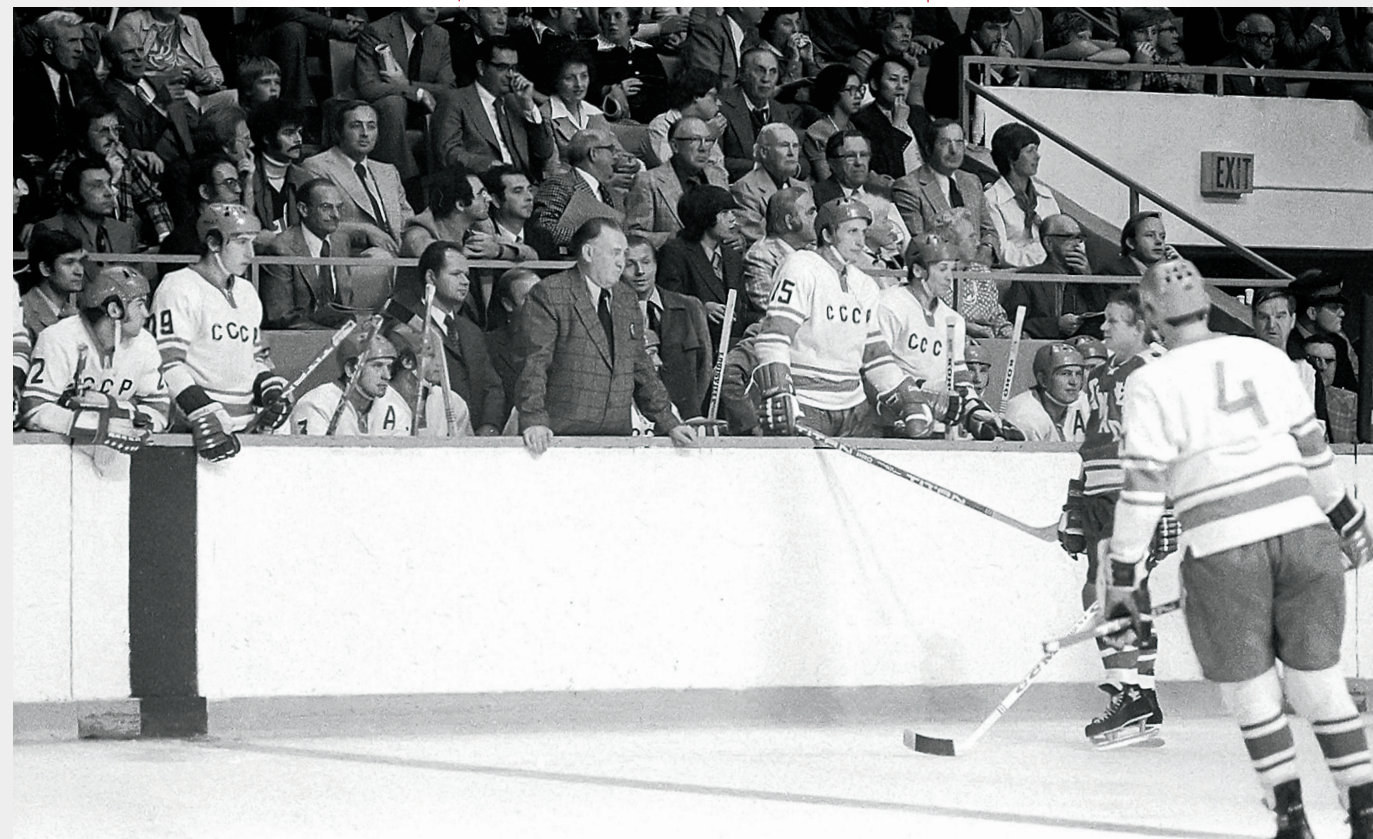
"I LOOKED UP AND SAW THE RED LIGHT GO ON. I FIGURED THAT WAS THE GAME FOR US"

- Bobby Hull

As time was ticking down in Game 7, with the score knotted 4-4, Team Canada mounted a last-second push to win the game. With

ROAD WOES

After a good start on home soil, Canada fell flat – both figuratively and, at times, literally – in Russia.



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a tie, the Soviets would take the series. But with a win, they could still even it up with another victory in Game 8.

For the second game in a row, Selwood took in the proceedings with Gratton and the other scratches from a makeshift players' area near the team's bench. He watched as the play swirled into the Soviets' zone with under 10 seconds left. Then, the puck came to Hull in the slot to Tretiak's right. "I remember sitting there, and we were just going crazy," Selwood says. "Nine seconds, eight seconds, counting down, and then, all of a sudden, he scores."

Part of the reason Team Canada had lost the previous two games was that, after scoring six of his team's 17 goals in Canada, Hull had gone goal-less in Moscow, slowed by a wonky knee he sustained back home. But just as he'd done in Games 1 and 4, Hull came up big when he was needed most.

Henderson, Backstrom and Gordie Howe, who all charged the net in case of a rebound, raised their arms. Team Canada's bench erupted, and some 3,000 Canadian fans in the arena went wild. The red light went on, as did the green light to signal the end of the game, only after which did the siren sound.

However, that's not how the on-ice official viewed the sequence of events. Perhaps he had visions of a one-way ticket to a gulag in Siberia. But just as he did after Petrov's goal in Game 2, Canadian referee Tom Brown waved off the goal and, with it, washed away Team Canada's hopes.

"We knew it was wrong," Selwood says. "We looked up several times, and there was X number of seconds left on the clock. Bobby scored in plenty of time. *Plenty* of time. We all went crazy, of course. We knew we were getting jobbed. I could use a worse word, but you're probably going to put this in print."

Exactly 1:32 earlier, Cheevers had watched from his goal crease as the timekeeper allowed four seconds to tick off the clock during a stoppage in play. Incensed, Cheevers raced over to the timekeeper's box and slammed his goalie stick against the glass. Brown forced Soviet officials to put two seconds back on the clock, but no more, and he would not push his luck with Hull's goal.

"Everybody thought it went in before time expired," Lacroix says. "But again, are you going to argue in Russia? I don't think the referee was going to get out alive if he'd changed his mind. How are you going to get back to the airport if you make the call in our favor in those days?"

GAME 8

"THE STATEMENT HAD NO CLASS. I HOPE THE RUSSIAN OFFICIALS INVOLVED ARE ASHAMED OF THEIR ACTIONS" - 'Wild' Bill Hunter

Unlike in '72, there would be no climatic Game 8 in '74. Team Canada had lost the series. An official protest was lodged with Soviet officials, and even the Canadian ambassador Robert Ford waded in, calling Hull's non-goal "absolute robbery," though he ignored demands to issue a formal diplomatic protest with the Kremlin. When it failed, there was talk of boycotting the final game, but, ultimately, it went ahead.

"We knew the series was over," Mark Howe says. "But I remember the guys in the locker room talking, 'Hey, we've got a lot of pride in this room. We know people may have given up on us and stuff, but don't quit on yourselves. Let's go out and perform, and let's try and win this hockey game.'"

Harris dressed a strong lineup, with only a few minor changes, while Kulagin rested five regulars, including Tretiak. Yet, even with the series secured, Soviet officials were intent on winning it off the ice, too. Ahead of the game, the Soviet Ice Hockey Federation sent a letter to Team Canada's organizers stating its players would leave the ice at the

first sniff of dirty play. During the warmup, the public-address announcer then read the letter to the crowd in both Russian and English, garbled grammar and all:

"Taking into consideration the fact that the players of Team Canada '74 have repeatedly broken the agreement signed by the World Hockey Association and the USSR Ice Hockey Federation on adhering to the rules of the International Ice Hockey League, which was expressed by dirty play, appeals to the referee and spectators, the USSR Ice Hockey Federation states that such competitions in the spirit of the best traditions of sport and friendship, is forced, that at the first infringement of the above-mentioned agreement, to stop play of the last game."

According to one report, when Gordie Howe heard the announcement, he leaned over to a Canadian scribe, smiled and said, "This is liable to be a short f---ing game."

In the end, the game went ahead and was played until the end, though not without more incidents. In the second period, Jim Harrison cracked Vladimir Lutchenko across the face with his stick, and then Vladimir Shadrin did much the same in a collision with Stapleton. Both drew blood, and both received five-minute majors from German referee Josef Kompalla.

Hull got his seventh goal of the series to lead all players in scoring, but Team USSR won the game 3-2, for a 4-1-3 series victory. After scoring three consecutive game-winners to close out '72, 31-year-old Henderson went pointless in Moscow in '74.

The Howes combined for 14 points in the series. Gordie, with half of those points himself, including three goals, had given his all in the seven games he played. Only Hull, Yakushev and Backstrom, Team Canada's MVP, produced more points. Gordie later called the series the second-biggest thrill of his career, after playing with Mark and Marty in Houston.

In the dressing room after the game, Mark was sitting next to Gordie when a reporter came over and asked his father how he felt. Mark recalls the exchange going like this:

*"How do you feel, Gordie?"
"Well, I feel like a winner."
"But you lost the series!"
"Yeah, but I get to go home."*

Gracious in defeat, with the game of life always in view, Gordie Howe had seen enough of the Soviet Union. At one point in the series, Gordie and Mark watched in horror from the bench as a doctor lifted up the thigh pad of an injured Soviet player, slid it up his leg, pulled down his hockey sock,



then whipped out a needle and jammed it into his flesh from two feet away.

"I know how Dad was," Mark Howe says. "Dad always tried his best and did whatever he could, but when the game's over, the game's over. I'm sure he was disappointed he'd lost, but you have to put life in perspective, and he kind of did that in one little sentence. He had an incredibly quick wit and sense of humor."

50TH ANNIVERSARY

Fifty years later, the easy out would be to blame the refereeing, and on the surface, it's an easy argument to make. Team Canada was assessed 44 minutes in penalties through the first four games and then 100 in the final four, while Team USSR was assessed 32 in Canada and 36 in the Soviet Union. But the numbers are misleading. Half of Team Canada's PIM in Moscow were 10-minute misconducts. Granted, this meant Team Canada played the equivalent of nearly a full game with a short bench, but the power-play chances were almost identical in the two countries. In Canada, where the Canadians outplayed the Soviets, the power plays were 18 to 12. In Moscow, they were 18 to 11. Both in favor of Team USSR.

"Part of what the Russians did, they kick you, they spear you in the back of the leg, they kick your legs out from underneath you, they did all sorts of s---," Mark Howe says. "Then you go do something back. And the refereeing over there, there's no way you can't say it wasn't partial. But as a group, we just fed right back into it. And it's not just in penalties. Your overall discipline in playing, when you run out of position to

VIOLENT NIGHTS

Slashes, jabs and cheapshots became the norm as the series shifted to Russia for four games.

go hit a guy, and even though you got him really good, and you didn't get a penalty, now somebody else has to chase. We lost a lot of the composure and discipline we had. In the four games, for me, that was the biggest difference over there."

Fifty years on, the hatred is long gone on both sides, especially for Mark Howe, who calls his Russian teammates from his time with the Detroit Red Wings some of the finest people he ever met. But the two nations that waged war on ice in the 1974 Summit Series are remembering it much differently. With the Soviet Union no more, Russia is honoring the series with an ascent up a mountain, an alumni game and a documentary on Mikhailov ahead of his 80th birthday. In Canada, a handful of Canadian and Russian players will take part in a podcast of hockey historians called *Hockey Time Machine*, but there are no plans to summit the 17,257-foot Mount Lucania, the country's third-highest peak, or to remember the sequel after reliving the original two years ago. The enduring story of the Summit Series, so central to Canadian history, will remain half-written, with eight of the 16 games erased from the country's collective memory.

"Those games were interesting," Tretiak says. "But they're simply forgotten. Why? Because the Canadians lost. If Canada won, they would've remembered them. They would've forgotten '72, too, if we won. Because Canadians forget their losses, but when they win, they have a tough opponent." **H**



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