

# Lifelines

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Topic: Irrepressible Joy

## **Toothless Joy!**

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This past week the US Men's Olympic US Hockey team beat Canada to win the Gold Medal, 46 years to the day since the famous 1980 "Miracle on Ice" at Lake Placid. Back then a group of college hockey players faced down and defeated the dominant, perennial champion, the USSR professional men's hockey team. Now both our USA 'ladies team' and our 'men's team' won gold!

On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1980, a great and humble hockey coach named Herb Brooks led a group of young college USA hockey players to defeat a juggernaut, seemingly undefeatable Russian team, then defeated Finland for the Gold Medal. Before playing the Soviets, Brooks told his players: "You're meant to be here. This moment is yours. You're meant to be here at this time."

"When it came to hockey, he was ahead of his time," Ken Morrow said. "All of his teams overachieved because Herbie understood how to get the best out of each player and make him part of a team. And like everyone who played for him, I became a better person because I played for Herb Brooks." In the 1980 Olympic win, the coach and his team galvanized and energized the entire country. He developed a formula for developing the culture of winning teams, it wasn't all about him, and he wasn't interested in parades or gaining any special attention.

Brooks' leadership helped turn a ragtag team into champions, by hand-picking players with a team focus. "You're looking for players whose name on the front of the sweater (USA) is more important than the one on the back," Brooks once said. "I look for these players to play hard, to play smart and to represent their country." Interviewed years later about why he headed to the locker room shortly after the "Miracle on Ice," he said that he wanted to leave the ice to his players, who deserved it. "It was not my spot. Being on the ice after the game belongs to the players, to celebrate their accomplishment with pride. The players need to do that; it was their moment."

Fast forward 46 years to Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026 in Milan, Italy, where the USA Men's Team was playing Canada for the Gold Medal. Most believed that Canada would win. The USA goalie denied forty-some potential Canadian goals, playing a huge role in the win. In the third period, Jack Hughes got into a tie-up with Canada's Sam Bennet and Bennet knocked out a tooth, broke another and dislodged two others. Hughes picked his teeth up off the ice, showed them to the referee, and Bennet was penalized. In the decisive three-man overtime period, Jack Hughes swooped in and shot the puck under the goalie to win the game and the Gold for the USA team.

The arena erupted with shouts of elation and "USA, USA!" With his brother Quinn beside him, Jack's smile displayed his stamina, his tenacity, and his missing and broken teeth, while he beamed joyfully with a bloody smile. When asked how he felt about losing his teeth for the win, he joyfully told reporters: "I'm from the best country in the world. We've got great dentists there, too. So I'm lucky I'm American, and they're gonna fix me right up." Losing those teeth didn't deter Hughes one bit, as he went on to claim the gold for the U.S. in overtime.

The maturity and joy of the US players was amazing, as they celebrated as a team. And there was a former team-member absent, who had died when a vehicle hit him while biking with his brother the evening before their sister's wedding in 2024. Teammates skated to where Johnny Gaudreau's

widow was seated with their very young children, and with Johnny's parents. They had one of Johnny's jerseys, players took his two children in their arms to skate around the rink and celebrate with the team. This displayed something few of us have ever seen in a rough and tough sport: tenderness, sensitivity, humility, and love for all team members and their families.

Watching the spectacle reminded me of the Apostle Paul, who experienced many traumas as he served God. Like Jack Hughes, he got knocked down, but didn't stay down. In 2 Corinthians 4:7–10 (NIV84) Paul wrote: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."

Jack Hughes' toothless joy is an example to all of us!

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