

# BOYZ TO MEN

Fast Start, Tough Finish Leaves U.S. Team Wanting More From Olympic Experience // *By Harry Thompson*

**THEY CAME FROM SOME OF THE FINEST COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES** in the country. Schools like Harvard, Michigan and Boston College.

They take challenging classes in subjects such as philosophy, chemistry and English literature as they juggle the demands of life as student-athletes.

But there are some lessons they don't teach in school. Such as you don't have to win all the games in an international tournament, you just have to win the right ones. Or it takes a full 60 minutes to knock out an Olympic opponent.

Welcome to the school of hard knocks, boys. You may have aced the early quizzes, but you didn't fare so well on the final exam.

After winning their first three games in impressive fashion and earning the top seed in the tournament, the U.S. couldn't seal the deal against Slovakia, surrendering the tying goal just 43.7 clock ticks away from the semifinals before losing in a shootout.

Call it the curse of Olympic quarterfinals past. This marked the second straight Olympic exit for the boys in the red, white and blue by a cruel twist of fate courtesy of the hockey gods.

"You can't script how you want things to go in life or in hockey," said Straus Mann, who teamed with Drew Commesso to form a formidable duo between the pipes for the U.S.

"It's about learning things and taking what life gives you and trying to make lemonade out of lemons. We'll let it sink in for a bit here and I think everyone will learn something

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**DAVID QUINN**

at the end of the day, especially the young guys on this team, that will serve them well moving forward.”

With an average age of 25, the U.S. came to Beijing with the youngest team in the tournament, a fact that was thrown in their face well before they even hit the ice. If it's true what they say that youth is wasted on the young, someone forgot to tell that to these high-flying Americans.

They overmatched a Chinese team packed with North American homegrown talent before flying past a bigger, stronger and older Canadian squad, and gutted out a hard-fought, physical battle against Germany, the defend-

ing silver medalists to claim the top seed and an important bye into the quarterfinals.

With a day to rest and wait for their next opponent, the comparisons sprang up to another group of college kids who staged some kind of miracle on the ice in Lake Placid, N.Y.

That was 42 years ago, and the U.S. has long proven on the international arena that they are no longer in the miracle business. Not to mention some of these kids were barely out of diapers when Disney released the movie “Miracle” in 2004.

“I don't really have any specific memories of the Olympics, but I will say I've seen that movie a thousand times, and it gives me





After cruising through the preliminary round, the U.S. Men's Team was 43.7 seconds away from a spot in the medal round before falling to Slovakia in a quarterfinal shootout.



goosebumps every single time," said Nathan Smith, a 21-year-old Florida native who is living proof of the 1980 team's impact on hockey around the U.S.

"It's pretty unbelievable to think that I had a chance to go there and do the same thing."

They came oh so close to writing their own miracle chapter into the hockey history books. A favorable puck bounce here and a hit post there and the next thing you know we could have heard the familiar refrain of "U-S-A, U-S-A" echoing through the rafters of Beijing's National Indoor Stadium.

"It was a lot of fun watching them become a team in a short period of time," said head

coach David Quinn. "Obviously losing this game hurts, and it hurts a lot, but I think we represented our country exactly the way USA Hockey wants our team to represent our country."

More than just their speed and youthful exuberance, this was a team that came together quickly and meshed well as the veteran players discovered a second dip in the fountain of youth courtesy of the 15 collegians on the roster.

It's a formula that worked well four years ago in PyeongChang, South Korea, and if a little is good, more must be better.

"I could see it from 2018 with [former collegians] Ryan Donato, Troy Terry and Jordan Greenway so I knew the impact the college kids could have," Brian O'Neill, the only returning member of the 2018 team, said about this year's team.

"Most of those college players are going to have a better pro career than I ever had. They have their entire careers ahead of them. A lot of us are at the end of our careers. That's what is so exciting about playing in this tournament with them."

It didn't take long to discover that these kids can play. As if there was any doubt. And they did it against the big boys on the biggest stage in the game. No stage is too big and no situation is too daunting for the next generation of American stars.

"I think the game's in safe hands. If anything the last few years have shown that age in terms of youth is irrelevant," said 29-year-old Kenny Agostino.

"You see it in the NHL and you saw it in a tournament like this on the big stage. If you could play, you could play. Age is just a number."

Years down the road, maybe less, Andy Miele will be sitting at home with friends watching an NHL game or maybe a future Olympic hockey tournament and point out Jake Sanderson or Brendan Brisson or Matty Beniers and say, "See that guy? I knew him when he was a just a college kid. We played together on the 2022 U.S. Men's Olympic Team. We're good friends."

Then he'll think back to his time inside the Beijing Olympic bubble and the opportunity of a lifetime that fell in his lap when NHL players stayed home. He'll think about how much fun he had leading this team and how close they came to staging their own "miracle."

"I'm just sad it's over. This was probably the last big thing in my career," said the 31-year-old team captain who is also a former Hobey Baker Award winner.

"I'm happy that I got to know these guys. They're going to have great futures ahead of them. I'll be able to follow their careers and I'll definitely enjoy that." ☆





By Harry Thompson

# AN OLYMPIAN FOR LIFE

## Pride And Passion Push David Quinn Past Own Olympic Disappointment

**LIKE ANY RED BLOODED AMERICAN HOCKEY PLAYER, DAVID QUINN GREW UP WITH THE LEGEND OF THE 1980 U.S. OLYMPIC TEAM.** He was a 14-year-old hockey nut watching the taped-delayed ABC broadcast at his friend Jack Capuano's house in Cranston, R.I.

Years later Quinn would get to know a number of players from that 1980 team during his coaching tenure at Boston University.

"I remember being in Jack's living room, watching the U.S. team beat Russia and what a feeling that was," said Quinn, the pride pouring through the phone during one of his many interviews leading up to the Games.

"Then I was fortunate to get to know Mike Eruzione, Jim Craig, Jack O'Callahan and Dave Silk from our BU ties and have become friends with all those guys."

Cranston's favorite son was able to write his own Olympic story as the head coach of the U.S. Men's Hockey Team competing at the 2022 Beijing Winter Games.

"Olympic hockey has meant an awful lot to me," Quinn said. "Being an Olympian and being part of the Olympic experience was something that was always a goal of mine as a player."

A promising prospect with the BU Terriers, he was a member of the U.S. National Junior Team that claimed the country's first-ever bronze medal at the 1986 IIHF World Junior Championship.

As a first round pick by the Minnesota North Stars in 1984, things were looking up for the slick-skating defenseman. And then came the news that a rare blood disease would not only scuttle any thoughts of a professional career but his dreams of making the 1988 U.S. Olympic Team.



While David Quinn's Olympic odyssey as a player was derailed, his experience behind the bench with the U.S. Men's Team at the 2022 Olympic Winter Games was the honor of a lifetime for the long-time USA Hockey coach.

the world stage, Quinn brushed off any talk of Olympic redemption for himself. He preferred to keep the focus on a new crop of players looking to write their own stories.

"I don't think our players care about my story about making it or not. I really haven't had a chance to think about that," Quinn said.

"Being named the head coach was an incredibly humbling honor but we didn't have a lot of time to sit there and reminisce about the coulda, shoulda and what could have been."

Originally tapped to serve as one of Mike Sullivan's assistant coaches when NHL players were slated to compete in the Olympics, Quinn jumped at the chance to move up the coaching pecking order and take the reins. He immediately went to work with USA Hockey's John Vanbiesbrouck to create a team on the fly.

When it came to finding players to suit up, Quinn didn't look beyond his college roots, selecting 15 current collegians to represent the U.S. combined with a group of seasoned veterans playing in the various pro leagues in the U.S. and throughout Europe and you had a team that has some similarities to the team that took the ice in Lake Placid, N.Y., more than 40 years ago.

But alas, miracles don't seem to travel well outside of U.S. soil. Unable to seal the deal in

a 3-2 shootout loss to Slovakia, the previously top-seeded and unbeaten Americans were left to explain the inexplicable.

"I told them just how much I enjoyed coaching them," Quinn said after leaving the U.S. locker room one last time to answer for his team's heartbreaking loss.

"It was a lot of fun watching them become a team in a short period of time. It was a selfless group that represented our country very well as a team. I think all of America be proud

of. Obviously losing this game hurts and it hurts a lot, but I think we represented our country exactly the way USA Hockey wants our team to represent our country."

There will be plenty of time to ponder his place among the growing list of American coaches having an impact on the game. His focus for those magical two weeks in February was to tap into the unbridled energy of a

group of wide-eyed college kids that remind their head coach of a team he watched on his friend's couch.

"When you're an Olympian, you're an Olympian for life," Quinn said. "There's nothing I could have said that would make them feel better right now. I'm sure they'll look back with fondness of the friendships they created and the fact that they are Olympians." ☆

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After the setback, Quinn turned to friend and mentor Ben Smith, who recruited him at BU, to plot a course on a coaching journey that would include stops at USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, the NHL's Colorado Avalanche and with the Terriers, where he served as both protégé and successor for the icon Jack Parker. Most recently he spent three years behind the bench with the N.Y. Rangers.

At every stop along the way, Quinn was dedicated to helping the next generation of players fulfill a dream that was so abruptly taken away from him.

All these years later, as he prepared his squad of high-flying youngsters to step onto