

Ice War Diplomat: Hockey Meets Cold War Politics at the 1972 Summit Series

Gary J. Smith

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Gary J. Smith recalls how he helped to organize a historic hockey tournament between Canada and the Soviet Union in his memoir *Ice War Diplomat*.

In 1972, with the Cold War still in full swing, the relationship between Canada and the Soviet Union began to defrost. Hockey's importance to both cultures made it a natural venue through which to come together, improve relations, and show off national talents. In the middle of it all was Gary Smith, a young Canadian diplomat tasked with helping the two nations settle their differences and ensuring that all of the games—four in Canada, four in Moscow—went off without incident.

Despite his youth, Smith was already a veteran of the “pressure-cooker” atmosphere of diplomatic life. He was involved in the Prague Spring and Prime Minister Trudeau’s much-vaunted visit to Moscow. He learned how to deal with constant surveillance and attempts at entrapment by Soviet spies. Before and during the hockey series, he navigated endless diplomatic and political maneuverings regarding details over team sizes and compositions, press coverage, hotel accommodations, uniform design, and fan behaviors. Even after agreements had been reached and the games were underway, bombastic personalities fought (sometimes literally) for supremacy, both on and off of the ice.

Fifty years later, the series remains a point of personal pride for Smith, and of national pride for both Canadians and Russians. As relations between the two countries once again grow strained, the book calls “sports diplomacy” more important than ever for keeping lines of communication open, and for reminding citizens of both countries that people across the ideological divide are just as human as they are.

Ice War Diplomat is a detailed account of the first professional hockey matches between Canada and the USSR, as told by someone who experienced them firsthand.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2022)

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