

# **An Olympic Fairytale: The Zimbabwean Women's Field Hockey Victory at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games**

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## **Abstract**

In July 1980, an all-white Zimbabwean women's hockey team made history by unexpectedly winning gold at the Olympic Games in Moscow. The 1980 games had been overshadowed by cold war political tensions which manifested in the boycott by several western countries in protest over the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. This politicization of the Olympics set the stage for Zimbabwe's participation and the eventual politicization of the women's field hockey victory. This victory was unexpected partially because the Zimbabwean women's field hockey team had very little time to prepare for the tournament. The ramifications of the victory extended beyond the playing field as it became intertwined with racial and gender discourses that dominated the post-independence political narrative. Therefore, the events connected with this 1980 Olympic victory by the Zimbabwean women's hockey team demonstrate how the victory transformed women's field hockey from being a relatively obscure white minority sport, into a critical social space where political rhetoric was enunciated. This effectively increased the standing of the sport in the eyes of the ruling ZANU PF regime as demonstrated by investment in hockey infrastructure as well as attempts to continue its association with the 1980 Olympic victory.

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