

## **Miracle**

Rated G

Many of us remember television announcer Al Michaels' excitedly shouting, "Do you believe in miracles?" Yes! In the last seconds of the 1980 Olympic Hockey Game, this rousing question and all the accompanying action are recaptured in the movie "*Miracle*," a Disney film starring Kurt Russell as U.S. Ice Hockey Coach Herb Brooks. The movie is directed by Galvin O'Conner, best known as the co-writer and director of the film *Tumbleweeds*.

The film opens by recounting the political events of the time including the oil embargo and gas rationing, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and, to make matters worse, the hostile take-over of the U.S. Embassy in Iran. What we witness is America at a stressful and uncertain crossroads and in need of something to hope and feel proud about. The answer, although not apparent at the time, comes in the form of Herb Brooks, U.S. Ice Hockey Coach who has a burning desire to win the gold at the 1980 Olympic Hockey Game. Brooks was on the 1960 Olympic Hockey team, only to be cut just before getting to the Olympics, thus he had much at stake in coaching the 1980 team.

In order to win, Brooks concocted a hybrid plan to out-skate the reigning Olympic champs - the Soviets. For all practical purposes, the U.S.S.R. was considered the one team no one could defeat. They won 42 straight games prior to the 1980 Olympic Games, including beating the best players from the National Hockey League. Undeterred, Brooks set about picking the best college players in the country and put his unlikely plan into action.

One does not have to be a hockey fan, or even knowledgeable about hockey, to enjoy the drama, excitement, and the dream of overcoming unbeatable odds. Still, the film is more a documentary of Herb Brooks than a film about the team or about the Olympics. The tension and struggles between Herb and his wife, Patti, (played by Patricia Clarkson) are an integral part of the drama. Herb's near obsession with preparing his team places him at odds with his responsibilities as a husband and father. Staying focused without jeopardizing his marriage and his own identity are real battles that Brooks must face.

In the closing dialogue of the movie, Herb points out the sport of hockey in the Olympics have considerably changed. He laments that instead of using college hockey players as he did, the U.S. team is comprised of professional "dream teams." In Herb's view, that takes the magic out of Olympic hockey and ruins the dream.

Kurt Russell is impressive as Herb Brooks, so much so that one could imagine Herb giving Kurt the thumbs up for not only replicating his intensity, but also showing his humanity. This is a movie well worth seeing especially since it is suitable for the entire family.

*By Curt and Natalie Levang*