

= Zimbabwe women 's national field hockey team at the 1980 Summer Olympics =

The 1980 Zimbabwe women 's national field hockey team won the gold medal in women 's field hockey at that year 's Summer Olympics in Moscow , the capital of the Soviet Union . The squad of 16 women , all from Zimbabwe 's white minority , was assembled less than a month before the Olympics began to help fill the gaps the American @-@ led Olympic boycott created in the women 's hockey competition . Zimbabwe 's subsequent victory in the round @-@ robin tournament with three wins and two draws was regarded as a huge upset , particularly considering the team 's lack of preparation and experience ; it has been called an " irresistible fairy story " . Won at a time of great political transition in Zimbabwe , the gold medal was the country 's first Olympic medal of any colour .

The 1980 Olympics were first to feature women 's hockey , and the first to include Zimbabwe under that name ? barred from the last three Olympics for political reasons , the country had last competed as Rhodesia in 1964 . The women 's hockey matches , held between 25 and 31 July , were all played on artificial turf , which none of the Zimbabwean team members had ever seen ; they had also never played together until that month . After beating Poland and the USSR and drawing with Czechoslovakia and India , the Zimbabweans won the competition on the final day with a 4 ? 1 victory over Austria . Dubbed the " Golden Girls " by the media of Zimbabwe , they were met by cheering crowds on their return home , and were briefly national celebrities . Zimbabwe did not win another Olympic medal until 2004 .

= = Invitation and team selection = =

The 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow , the capital of the Soviet Union , were the first to include a competition in women 's field hockey . Pre @-@ tournament favourites included Australia , the Netherlands and West Germany , but the American @-@ led Western boycott of the Moscow Olympics led to these teams and others withdrawing , leaving only the Soviets in the women 's hockey event . The Soviet and international Olympic authorities filled the gaps by inviting teams from countries that had not qualified . Among the nations invited was Zimbabwe , which had become an internationally recognised country in April 1980 following seven years of civil war . Moscow marked the southern African nation 's return to the Olympics after 16 years ; as Rhodesia it had been excluded from the 1968 , 1972 and 1976 Games for political reasons following the mostly white government 's declaration of independence from Britain in 1965 . The Zimbabwe Olympic Committee received the invitation to send men 's and women 's hockey squads to Moscow on 14 June 1980 , 35 days before the Olympics were due to start . They were taken totally by surprise ? they had not prepared hockey teams for the Games ? but nevertheless agreed to send a women 's squad . No women 's hockey team representing the country had ever played overseas before .

A squad of 16 members , built around the core of the former Rhodesia team , was hastily assembled by Liz Dreyer , the president of the national women 's hockey association , who became the team 's manager . Every player and official was white . Ann Grant , the team 's 25 @-@ year @-@ old sweeper , was appointed captain . Anthea Stewart , who had played for South Africa 25 times before retiring in 1974 , both coached the squad and played herself . Liz Chase , the only other team member with international experience (having also represented South Africa) was made vice @-@ captain . At 35 years old , Stewart was the team 's oldest player , while Arlene Boxall , the 18 @-@ year @-@ old reserve goalkeeper , was the youngest . The squad included twin sisters in Sandy Chick and Sonia Robertson .

Entirely amateur , the team mostly comprised players with professions unrelated to sport ? Grant , for example , was a bookkeeper , while Boxall was an operations clerk in the Air Force of Zimbabwe . Several had sporting relatives , most prominently Grant , whose brother was the international cricketer Duncan Fletcher . Audrey Palmer , a seasoned hockey official and referee who had played for Rhodesia from 1953 to 1961 , travelled with the team as a medic , trainer and general supervisor . The squad left on 7 July , travelling first to the Zambian capital Lusaka and then to Luanda in Angola , from where they flew to Moscow on an aircraft usually used for freighting meat . " The

stench was terrible " , Grant later said . " There were no seats , so we all sat on the floor , strapped in and set off into the unknown . We didn 't even have the right shoes to play on the artificial hockey surface . "

= = Tournament = =

The event was organised as a round @-@ robin tournament in which each of the six teams would play each other once between 25 and 31 July . Two points were awarded for a win and one for a draw ; the team with the most points at the end would be the winner . The other competitors were Austria , Czechoslovakia , India , Poland and the USSR ; apart from the Soviets , all of these teams were competing as a result of the boycott , having failed to qualify initially . All of the matches were played at Dynamo Minor Arena in Moscow . Zimbabwe arrived two weeks before the hockey tournament was due to start , and warmed up with a number of matches against local teams . The players ' lack of preparation and unfamiliarity with artificial turf ? " none of us had ever seen it before " , Chick recalled ? were offset by what several members of the squad have described as a very strong team spirit . They considered themselves serious underdogs and did not expect to win a medal .

Zimbabwe played in the first women 's Olympic hockey match , facing Poland on 25 July . Pat McKillop scored the first goal to put Zimbabwe ahead before Pat Davies , Linda Watson and Chase each added one more to round off a 4 ? 0 victory . On 27 July , Zimbabwe and Czechoslovakia drew 2 ? 2 ; McKillop and Chase scored . The next day , the Zimbabweans beat the Soviets 2 ? 0 , McKillop scoring both goals . A 1 ? 1 draw with India on 30 July put Zimbabwe in first place before the final round of matches on the 31st . Zimbabwe had to beat Austria to be sure of winning the gold .

Stewart declared the team 's first @-@ choice white @-@ and @-@ blue outfit " lucky " on the basis that both Zimbabwe 's victories had been won wearing it (as opposed to the two draws wearing green) , and expressed joy that they would again be wearing white and blue in the deciding match . According to Glen Byrom , covering the event for the Herald newspaper , the Zimbabweans appeared nervous during the opening stages of the game , and were fortunate not to go behind after 15 minutes , when Austria missed a clear chance . Chick opened the scoring after 28 minutes , receiving the ball from a corner before cleanly stroking it into the net . Austria 's Brigitte Kindler equalised two minutes later from a penalty stroke , flicking the ball beyond Zimbabwean goalkeeper Sarah English into the top @-@ left corner of the goal . With the score 1 ? 1 at half time , Brenda Phillips replaced Christine Prinsloo at right @-@ half .

Urged on by a small but loud group of fellow Zimbabwean Olympians , the Zimbabweans improved after the break and , according to Byrom , " ke [pt] the Austrian goal under siege " throughout the second half . With 50 of the match 's 70 minutes gone , McKillop powerfully stroked a short corner that deflected off an opposing player 's stick and flew high into the net to give Zimbabwe the lead . Now appearing supremely confident , Byrom reported , the Zimbabweans " simply overran Austria with a splendid display of fast , attacking hockey " , forcing eight short corners and four long corners during the second period to Austria 's one long corner . Gillian Cowley made it 3 ? 1 on 60 minutes , following up to score after Sandy Chick 's free hit was blocked . McKillop rounded up the win four minutes later , collecting a through pass from Chase and smashing the ball home . Byrom reported " incredible scenes of unrestrained joy " at the final buzzer ? " the Zimbabweans , tears streaming from their eyes , danced about the field hugging and kissing each other " . Finally they hoisted Grant onto their shoulders and carried her off the field .

A few hours later , the Zimbabwean players returned to the field wearing their blue skirts and blue Zimbabwe Olympic blazers for the medals ceremony . After the third @-@ placed Soviets and second @-@ placed Czechoslovakians had received their medals , Grant led the team up to the podium to receive the first ever Olympic gold medal for women 's hockey . It was their country 's first Olympic medal of any colour . All 16 players received medals ; they then led the Czechoslovakian and Soviet teams on a walking lap of honour around the field .

Zimbabwe finished the tournament undefeated , having scored the most goals and conceded the

fewest of any team . The six goals from Pat McKillop , a housewife from Bulawayo , made her the competition 's joint top scorer with the USSR 's Natella Krasnikova . Chase , despite nursing a knee injury , played in all five matches and scored three goals . All of the Zimbabwean squad members played at least one match except for Boxall , who never came off the bench , but still received a gold medal .

= = Reactions and legacy = =

The victorious hockey players were immediately dubbed the " Golden Girls " by Zimbabwean reporters . They were greeted by huge crowds on their return to Zimbabwe and briefly became national celebrities . Prime Minister Robert Mugabe welcomed them home at an official function . Each member of the team was promised an ox by the Prime Minister 's wife Sally , but ultimately received a polystyrene package of meat instead at a ceremony hosted by Mrs Mugabe . Many of the players emigrated over the following years , mostly to South Africa . Their victory continues to be celebrated in Zimbabwe today . The country did not win another Olympic medal until Kirsty Coventry won three swimming medals in Athens in 2004 . Robert Mugabe promptly applied the " golden girl " nickname to her on her return home .

The Zimbabwean hockey team 's victory at the 1980 Olympics was widely considered a great upset . Sports historians have called it a " fairytale " and an " irresistible fairy story " . While the Zimbabweans were overjoyed by their unlikely status as the first ever Olympic gold medallists in women 's hockey , some , including Robert Sullivan of Sports Illustrated , felt that the Zimbabwean victory epitomised how the Western boycott had lowered competitive standards and , in their opinion , " ruined " the 1980 Olympics . While acknowledging this to an extent , Cathy Harris asserted in her 2008 retrospective on the team , published in The Sunday Times , that the victory still deserved to be recognised as a great achievement . " They freely acknowledge that they won the gold medal without competing against the best in the world " , she concludes , " but , like many athletes in Moscow in 1980 , they seized their chance . "