



GREATEST MOMENTS IN SPORTS HISTORY

By Kerry Schmidt 07-17-2005

The above headline can result in millions of hours over millions of beers arguing over this topic.

But since this is my column, I will pick my personal choices. If I get a million arguments from readers, I want the million beers also.

Space limits the number and descriptive length, but the memories are still long and forever etched in my mind.

Football.

I am more an NFL fan than college, and since college football is a religion here in the south, and SEC football is its "Pope," I will avoid incurring your wrath by sticking to the NFL.

Super Bowl XXIII, January 22, 1989.

Partly because the 49'ers are my team, but still fantastic.

With 3:12 left in the game, SF was 92 yards away, trailing Cincinnati, 16-13.

A player on that team told me the great story.

As Joe Montana looked upon his hushed and huddled flock, he quietly said, "After we score, there will still be about 30 seconds left, so no celebrating."

With 34 seconds remaining, Montana hit John Taylor with the winning TD pass.

"The Ice Bowl," the '67 NFL Championship game between Green Bay and Dallas. Many purists say this was the best NFL game ever, but not me.

On New Year's Eve, the temperature in Green Bay was 13 below zero, wind chill minus 36.

With the Packers trailing 17-14, 4:50 left, Bart Starr marched his team within two feet of the goal line. With 16 seconds left and no time outs, instead of a tying FG, Starr ran behind "the block of the century" by Jerry Kramer to give GB the title, 21-17.

The only double over-time playoff game, January 2, 1982, San Diego versus Miami. The picture of Chargers tight end Killen Winslow on the cover of "Sports Illustrated" told the ultimate warrior story. Winslow was carried off the field four times with cramps and dehydration. Quick IV's and he struggled back in. He blocked a potential winning field goal and caught 13 passes as SD won, 41-38.

A single more incredible performance I have never seen.

NBA.

As a Lakers fan, this game tops my list.

May 16, 1980, game six of the NBA finals in Philadelphia. With Kareem Abdul-Jabbar sitting at home with a badly sprained ankle, 20-year old rookie guard Magic Johnson started at center. He ended up playing all five positions, scored 42 points, grabbed 16 rebounds, 11 assists and five steals, leading his team to the NBA Championship. It remains today as "the best singular demonstration perhaps in the history of basketball," quoting "Sports Illustrated."

Second would be the famous Willis Reed game. The injured Knick center limped onto the court and inspired his team to defeat the Lakers for the 1970 title.



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Third, game 7, 1998, Michael Jordan's last second steal and shot to defeat Utah for the Bulls' "three-peat."

Baseball.

I was there for this top choice. Dodger Stadium, October 15, 1988, game one of the World Series.

Two outs, bottom of the 9th, the Dodgers' Kirk Gibson pinch hits. Gibby could barely walk due to a bad knee, and rib injuries caused "excruciating pain" when he swung. Falling quickly behind, 0-2, to A's All-Star closer, Dennis Eckersley, Gibson hung tough, and on a 3-2 pitch, he homered to right field. He limped around the bases, fist pumping, as CBS' radio announcer Jack Buck said, "I don't believe what I just saw."

Others.

Bill Mazeroski's 9th inning homer in game 7 of the 1960 WS gave the Pirates a 10-9 win over the Yankees.

Though not the WS, perhaps even better was "The shot heard 'round the world," October 3, 1951. With his Giants trailing the Dodgers, 4-2 in the 9th, Bobby Thompson hit the second pitch for a 3-run homer to give the Giants the pennant.

I remember, as a 7-year old kid listening on Armed Forces Radio in Tokyo, Japan, as Giants' announcer Russ Hodges kept repeatedly screaming, "The Giants win the pennant."

And what list can not count the only WS perfect game, pitched by the Yankees, Don Larsen in game 5, 1956. The picture of Yogi Berra jumping into his arms is one of the most famous sports photos of all time.

College basketball.

North Carolina State, coached by the late Jim Valvano, upset highly favored Houston, led by Clyde "The Glide" Drexler and Akeem "The Dream" Alajuwon. Valvano later died of Bone Cancer. But what a moment!

In 1966, the mighty Kentucky Wildcats met Texas western for the NCAA Championship. Kentucky's legendary coach, Adolph Rupp, openly acknowledged as a devout racist, had thoughts of not playing, since Texas Western had mostly black players.

A 19-point favorite, Kentucky lost, 72-65, and Rupp refused to shake hands.

Golf.

Jack Nicklaus, at 46 years of age, winning the 1986 British Open, his 18th major.

The old man pulled off a spectacular performance.

Hockey. (What's that?)

The NHL announced that they had an agreement and would start playing again, but no one noticed.

But the world most certainly noticed a bunch of college kids at Lake Placid in the 1980 Winter Olympics. Playing against an "invincible" Russian team that had defeated the US, 10-3 just a week before the Olympics, Chuck Eruzione's winning goal set of a spontaneous celebration like no other. Strangers hugged, people all over America openly wept, and groups across the nation broke into stirring renditions of our National Anthem and "God Bless America."

Announcer Al Michaels immortalized the moment with his comment, "Do you believe in miracles?" and it thus became known as "The Miracle on Ice."



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One unknown writer wrote that, “like when Armstrong walked on the moon and when Kennedy was shot, everyone remembers where they were on this day.”

In a sport that has tried to ruin itself, and may have already succeeded, it’s ironic that this one distant game was arguably the single most incredible moment in all of sports history. Only Jesse Owens’ four gold medal runs, sticking the “Purist Aryan Nation” in Hitler’s face, had the political impact that the Miracle on Ice had, but there was no TV back in 1936 and track was not a major sport, so yes, I believe this was the No. 1 greatest moment in all of sports.

So, let the arguments, e-mails and hate letters begin if you must. But I’d rather discuss these over a few cold ones. You buy.