

Bandy - The Enigma Of Winter Sport:

"A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma"
Winston Churchill about Russia



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In 21c most western sport lovers have heard about the mysterious forgotten hockey sport. They know it is the national sport of Russia and have a vague idea about a football – ice hockey crossover. For them bandy has been as enigmatic as Russia. So Winston Churchill's description of Russia fits well also on bandy: "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma". In his book Chris Middlebrook introduces the riddle for the broader public.

Historically ball hockey was played in North America and Continental Europe, but in 1924 and later, the IOC purged bandy unfairly by rejecting its natural Olympic position. Defying the IOC, in the 1970s bandy commenced its brick-by-brick re-growth internationally. On its own steam (unsubsidized) bandy grew and grounded de facto popularity - and Americans soon joined.

In 1980 the enigmatic bandy sport appealed and intrigued a young US ice hockey skater and law student: Chris Middlebrook. So captivated he became, that he went on a life-long pursuit for the forgotten medieval ice hockey sport. Swedish royals played bandy, as did Peter The Great on river Neva. Middlebrook realized that bandy is the battle between the true North European winter sport powers. It's Peter the Great versus Karl XII, occasionally disrupted by The Finnish Sisu, the Kazakh Hordes and Norwegian Vikings.

Four decades later Middlebrook shares his wonderful insights in 119 essays where the reader will feel on the entire spectrum of emotions; defeat, endurance, triumph, laughs, smiles, and some unavoidable tears.

The reader is invited along his pursuit. Young Middlebrook finds himself skating versus superstars like the Johansson brothers, Vladimir Plavunov and Ari Holopainen. So long is his skating career that he both played versus father Sergey Lomanov senior in the 1980s and later son Sergey Lomanov Jr in the 1990s. Unbeknownst Americans will in this book realize that he actually skated versus the peers of Wayne Gretzky. I guess this is the beauty of bold and contrarian choices.

The reader is taken back in the USSR, follows its collapse and beyond. The short story format is wisely chosen, as it is easy, accessible and most importantly captures the stealthy bandy folklore. The short story mythos is associated with Russia; it has a central place in Russian culture and literature. It was the very format of literature leviathans like Alexander Pushkin, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Lev Tolstoy.

So late in life, possibly an American essayist is born. At least counterfactually though, he could have been. Not unlikely, literature lovers will find it sad that the young multi-

talented Chris Middlebrook in 1980 did not chose a writing career. Possibly he could have reached fame by following the footsteps of fellow American chroniclers like Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway. We will never know. But what's a writer without real life experiences anyway. Involvement in the conundrums of the bandy sport gave the author covert content not accessibly to most writers.

In 1980 Chris Middlebrook instead chose a Law PhD degree, followed up by a successful law career. As if that wasn't enough he combined it with an astonishing hockey career – an unfathomable hockey-with-ball career. He even had time to marry Cathy and get two children. As he ones wrote: There are three things I love in life: My wife Cathy, my children and bandy.

Living in the Hockey State Minnesota and his insight and contacts in high level ice hockey, his personal friendship with the super stars of US ice hockey, including the Olympic 1980 Miracle On Ice skaters, Middlebrook has probably the best platform to convey the potential of bandy to America. George Washington should on full-scale challenge Peter The Great and Karl XII.

Bandy fans, however, have reaped the benefits of Middlebrooks's 1980 life choice: He has contributed in close to all aspects our sport: top skater, trainer, manager, official and sponsor of US Bandy. With the Bandy Chronicles Middlebrook applies his writing talent to explain and popularize bandy. At the end of the day he is an American. And sport is about popular culture. He knows the power of pop-culture and that Europeans and Eurasians love the icons of America. To reach out broadly, he therefore popularize with famous quotes and headlines from iconic Hollywood films. My favorite is Groundhog Days. Although it ends in bitter defeat for me as a Norwegian – the final triumph for USA was a special day for bandy.

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