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This Is Orr Country—orr Is It?

Boston's superstar was alternately hero and goat as the Bruins engaged the Montreal Canadiens in a furious Stanley Cup series

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Serene as Pearl Harbor on a Sunday morning, Boston awaited the Montreal Canadiens. A heavy wind ruffled the Charles and picked at the corners of countless bumper stickers that proclaimed, "God Bless ORR Country." Teen-agers gave a last satisfied spin to the town's favorite rock record:

Born to be the nation's craze;
 Wondrous Bobby, wondrous ways.

And, indeed, it was a treat to count the ways as Orr began to victimize the Canadiens. He tires a mighty shot from the blue line and yes! the red light is on. The game not four minutes old and hockey's greatest player is hurling thunderbolts. Boston's quest of a second consecutive Stanley Cup is well begun. Dreams of dynasty to rival Montreal's own are surely coming true.

Poor Montreal: Beaten by Boston in five of six regular-season games, twice slaughtered in the last week. Feeding a rookie goalie to the hungry Bruins: Ken Dryden, lately of the Cornell nets, veteran of but six NHL games. A law student even now! Plenty to feast on there, for Dryden goes 6'4", 210 pounds. Ken is "a little nervous." Who could blame him? On his side are a most un-Canadienlike mixture of old warriors and fuzzy-cheeked kids. Against him are arrayed not only Orr—the one-man array—but gunners like Phil Esposito, highest scorer the league has ever known.

So Orr began the feast and kept the courses coming. They speak of his "control" of a game. He controlled this one. At one point, with Boston a man short, he played keepaway with the puck for what must have been 30 seconds. Once, coming out of the Boston end, he skated directly at two forecheckers and parted them as sweetly and magically as Moses parted the Red Sea, the puck clinging to his stick all the while.

Under Orr's generalship the Bruins led 3-1 halfway through the third period, and though Dryden was proving to be a gristly mouthful—his fast hands, stick and skates diverted many a good Bruin shot—Boston kept the pressure on. At the Bruin end, Goalie Gerry Cheevers was magnificent.

Then came a moment of shock for the Boston fans. Among Bobby Orr's wondrous ways, no one had counted his capacity for anger. Referee John Ashley called him for holding little Yvan Cournoyer. Up to now, Ashley's calls had ranged from the obvious to the marginal. Orr was incensed. Skating alongside the referee to the penalty box, Orr screamed at him. "You miss 14 penalties on them and then call a cheap one on me." Something else Orr said caused Ashley to hit him with a 10-minute misconduct penalty. Now thoroughly enraged, Orr, who had displayed nothing like such temper since the playoffs of 1969, charged out of the box, shoved Linesman Ron Ego and started after Ashley.

Appalled, the crowd understood at once that should he reach Ashley and so much as touch a linger to his striped shirt, their beloved Bobby might be thrown out of this game and conceivably out of the rest of the playoffs.

Fortunately for Orr, six Bruins intercepted him, and there was the astonishing sight of his teammate Rick Smith literally punching him back toward the boards with blows to the chest.

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Boston breathed again. Bobby later was profoundly apologetic; **Ashley**, who should now be called St. John in **Beantown**, later told newsmen that he did not see **Orr** leave the box—a serious matter—or touch **Ego**—a more serious one. Said one Canadian, "If it had been **John Ferguson**, he'd have been suspended for a few games."

Maybe so, maybe not, but for the first time Bostonians had a sense of unease.

The game ended 3-1 **Boston**. On the next night the Bruins proceeded to shell **Dryden** and run up a 5-1 lead, the swift, sharpshooting **Cournoyer** having scored for **Montreal**. Bruin Coach Tom Johnson had switched goalies, starting **Ed Johnston** rather than **Cheevers**, and so far had no cause to regret it. Not even when **Montreal's** terrier-quick little **Henri Richard** stole the puck from **Orr** and scored an unassisted goal late in the second period. **Johnston** had no chance.

But that seemingly harmless goal inspired the Canadiens to something like the perfection and power of their most glorious days. Early in the third period, 39-year-old **Jean Beliveau**, the last remaining superstar of a tattered dynasty and probably the finest center ever to swing a stick, scored a power-play goal. Two goals to go to tie. Moments later **Beliveau** scored again. **John Ferguson** had wrestled the puck from (gulp!) **Orr** near the boards and passed it to Big Jean. With Dallas Smith draped over him, **Beliveau** neatly maneuvered the puck onto his backhand—no small feat but one of Jean's specialties—and beat **Johnston** cleanly from in close. One to go.

In the seats, hearts sank a long way down because they had started a long way up; everyone smelled defeat. Here it came. **Jacques Lemaire** broke past the **Boston** defense and beat **Johnston** easily. 5-5. Then **Beliveau** was lighting for the puck behind the **Boston** net and flicking it out with that radar-assisted backhand—precisely onto the stick of **Ferguson**, who fired it past **Orr** and **Johnston**. 6-5. And then, to rub it in, **Frank Mahovlich** broke away to score for **Montreal**, too. 7-5.

Instead of the expected consecration of **Orr** and all the Bruins, the playoffs had become a bitter test of their character in adversity. **Orr** had played the worst 30 minutes of his career and had been on the ice for six of the seven Canadian goals. **Esposito** had gone scoreless, tied in unseemly knots by the tireless **Richard**.

In the dressing room **Beliveau** wiped a bead of sweat from his nose and said. "Psychologically, the Bruins have to remember what happened here. When you lose a four-goal lead you don't forget."

Nor could **Boston** forget that it had lost its home-ice advantage in the 2-2-1-1-1 distribution of games in the best four-of-seven series. The next two would he played in **Montreal**, not a hospitable town to upstart dynasties.

Saturday night in **Montreal** the largest crowd in the Forum's history—18,904 habitants—was disappointed in the first minute of play when **Esposito** broke away behind the Canadian defense and heal **Dryden** with a 20-foot ice-skimmer. But that was the last **Dryden** would let through. He stabbed one of **Wayne Cashman's** drives with his glove. He robbed **Orr** from inside 25 feet. "The kid is keeping us in the game," said **Claude Ruel**, who started the season as **Montreal** coach but was replaced by **Al MacNeil** in December. "He's mine, you know. I drafted him. They all thought I was crazy."

Textbook-perfect, the Canadiens thereafter frustrated the Bruins with a seamless defense and got goals of their own on crisp passing and deadly shooting. With Mahovlich scoring twice and **Defenseman Jacques Laperriere** bouncing a puck off **Orr** and past **Cheevers** for another goal, the Canadiens won 3-1. "We didn't hit anyone," mourned **Boston's Tom Johnson**. "We'd better play a Bruins game soon."

"I think perhaps the Bruins thought we would lay down and die for them in the playoffs," said **Ferguson**, the rambunctious wing, who was throwing more solid checks than all the Bruins combined. "But, hey, the Canadiens are proud. We don't play dead for anybody."

No, not even **Bobby Orr**, who mumbled, "What a nightmare, what a nightmare. I still don't believe it. Cripes, I'm out in left held somewhere."

The next night in **Montreal** **Orr** skated out of the nightmare and through the Canadiens for three big beautiful goals. It was the first time since 1927 that a defenseman had scored the hat trick in the **Stanley Cup**, but that item for the records was not lung compared with what **Orr** did for **Boston's** morale. By spurring the Bruins to a 5-2 victory on enemy ice he made it possible for them to even the series. **Boston** had regained the home advantage and any doubts about the Bruins' ability to tough it out were put to rest.

Orr got No. 1 on a sort of golf shot along the goal line from **Dryden's** left. No. 2 popped in off a drive from 15 feet inside the blue line. No. 3 went into an empty net to seal the victory after the Canadiens had pulled **Dryden** in the last moments.

Orr was at center stage in one of the most remarkable showdowns in hockey. The week ahead might tell whether he and the Bruins had the makings of the dynasty they all wanted so badly.

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