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An Iceman Too Hot To Handle

Boston's incomparable Bobby Orr, though playing with a damaged left knee, destroyed New York to regain the Stanley Cup

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And so Bobby Orr ended up with the puck and the Stanley Cup. There were only six seconds left to play in Game 6 when Ken Hodge dutifully slid the disk back to Orr at his blue line. Bobby turned around to look at the clock at the end of the rink, and he began to smile. Then he reached down and picked up the puck. "The guy always had it," said Vic Hadfield, captain of the defeated New York Rangers, "and when he had it there wasn't a thing we could do about it."

Which is one way of saying that Orr on 1 leg was better than any other player on two last Thursday night in Madison Square Garden as Boston won its second Stanley Cup in three years by shutting out the desperate Rangers 3-0. "The way I saw it," said Derek Sanderson, the hairy analyst-in-residence of the Bruins, "Bobby controlled the puck for 40 minutes and was nice enough to let the other 35 players in the game use it for the other 20. He's not a selfish kid, you know."

Maybe not, but one aspect of Orr's genius is not to let the spotlight stray from him at the big moments. Here he was, hockey's best player, Bobby Bad Knee, soon to enter the hospital for another operation, personally settling the bloody war between the sport's top teams—just as he had in the final Stanley Cup game against St. Louis two years ago. That time he scored in overtime; this time he simply got hold of the game early and never let go.

Boston had a man advantage in the first period when the puck came back to him ("Doesn't it always?" Defense-man Brad Park of the Rangers says) at the blue line. Bruce MacGregor, a New York penalty killer, skated at Orr and the puck. "If I could have knocked it off his stick I probably would have had a breakaway," MacGregor said. But as MacGregor poked his stick at the puck, Orr pivoted on his sore left knee and wheeled away. "I don't know if that was a new move I put on MacGregor," Orr said later, "but I do know I almost lost the puck." Cradling it on the slightly curved blade of his stick, Orr moved to within 35 feet of Gilles Villemure and fired a low, hard shot between the Ranger goalie's left leg and the goalpost for the game's first score.

After spending 10 minutes in the penalty box for saying something ungracious to Referee Art Skov, Orr returned to the ice early in the second period and stymied the Rangers with a masterful demonstration of penalty killing. Boston had to play shorthanded for a stretch of three minutes and 22 seconds, including 48 seconds when the Rangers had a two-man advantage, and Orr spent much of that time in a typical game of keepaway. He would get the puck behind his net and skate slowly into center ice, then turn around and return to square one as the Rangers chased him in an agony of frustration. When they closed in, he would flip the puck to the end of the rink. After two periods it was still 1-0.

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Orr was the trigger man on the second **Boston** goal, which came early in the third period. **Phil Esposito**, who was destined not to score a goal in the series despite taking 41 shots, beat **Walt Tkaczuk** on the face-off during another Bruin power play and got the puck to **Orr**, who darted to his left and drew back his stick for a slap shot. "Bobby had told me he was shooting to Villemure's right too often," said **Boston** Winger **Wayne Cashman** later. "He said Villemure was handling these shots without much trouble. So he told me to stay to Villemure's left side, as close to the goal as possible, and be ready for a tip-in." **Orr** shot—and the puck was aimed at Villemure's left side. Sure enough, **Cashman** was there. The puck deflected off his skate, ricocheted off the post and fell into the goal. "That was the real killer," said Park.

Cashman scored again in the closing minutes, converting a perfect pass from **Esposito**, and moments later **Captain Johnny Bucyk** was taking the big silver **Stanley Cup** for a short skate around the Garden. "Eat your hearts out," **Boston** Goalie **Gerry Cheevers** kept yelling at his tormentors in the crowd. In Game 3 they had served him a bag of nuts to the back of the neck—hard. Now they were beaten and subdued, for not only had **Orr** hypnotized the **Rangers**, **Cheevers** had made some saves that were near miraculous. And though **Esposito's** big stick was silent, his tough checking, face-off control and threatening presence continually upset the **Rangers'** precarious balance.

For a time last week, though, it appeared that the Bruins might be en route to a replay of their ignominious collapse in the opening cup round a year ago against **Montreal**, when all their scoring records failed to impress a rookie goalie, **Ken Dryden**.

The Bruins led the series three games to one. Champagne was on ice. A private room across the street from the **Boston Garden** at the Branding Iron restaurant awaited the victory festivities. The television cameras and the radio wires were installed in the dressing room. The cup was polished and on hand. A mayor's reception for the conquering warriors was set for Thursday at 1:30 p.m. At 7:11 p.m. on Tuesday, as the Bruins and **Rangers** warmed up for Game 5, a delivery man showed up at the Garden pushing four cases of champagne. "These are for the Bruins, compliments of the mayor," the man told an usher, who promptly let him in.

Denis Ball of the Ranger staff turned red at the sight of the champagne. "I wish he would wheel that stuff past our players," he said. The delivery man pushed his way into the **Boston** dressing room, where Coach Tom Johnson directed him to the weight-lifting room instead. "Leave it there," Johnson said, not wanting his players to see the bubbly before the game. Right then the top of the stacked cartons burst open and a head appeared. "Ahhhh," said the delivery man, "we just wanted to get into the game." The stunt so impressed the Bruin management that the two gatecrashers were allowed to stay.

They should not have bothered. The Bruins led 2-1 after two periods, but then their mind's-eye corks abruptly stopped popping as Bobby Rousseau, an old enemy via **Montreal**, scored two goals and led the **Rangers** to a 3-2 victory. "We had our holiday before we earned it," said **Johnny McKenzie** of the Bruins. "We were awful."

"We did nothing, absolutely nothing," **Orr** said. "Cripes. We beat **New York** all year by going after them and staying after them—and here, with a chance to end the season, we do nothing." But the old cocky spirit soon resurfaced. "If the **Rangers** think they're going to beat us in the next two games, they're full of Park spelled backwards," **Esposito** said.

As the teams returned to **New York**, **Sanderson** summarized the **Boston** situation. "This is an ego trip for us now. If we don't win this one, we'll be what the **Dallas Cowboys** were for years. We've got to stick it to them in their building. We don't want to be known as the choke champions."

Thanks principally to **Orr**, the Bruins have avoided any such sobriquet. They played what Bobby called a "perfect game" in the other team's building for the decisive shutout. "We were on top of them for 60 minutes," he said. "They had no place to go."

Despite **Orr's** heroics, it was obvious throughout the series that his movements were restricted by his injured knee. "Sure, it got sore," he said, "and it gave out sometimes when I made a sharp cut to change direction. It even locked on me at times. So I didn't rush the puck as often as I used to. Maybe I'm just getting lazy." **Sanderson** laughed at that remark. "Bobby's going more for brains and instinct than skating and speed," he said. "He can beat you any way he wants."

"I spent an aggravating summer," summed up **Orr** when he got home to his apartment in midtown **Boston** after the real victory festivities had been held. "People kept asking me what happened against **Montreal**. This summer should be a lot better."

Orr is only 24, so lots of summers should be better. But not all of them. The heavens will be pitiless indeed if, in **Orr's** days, Coach **Emile Francis** does not take the cup downcoast once or twice to **New York**.

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