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December 11, 1972

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Overdue Orrgy For The Bruins

Belatedly recovered from a third knee operation, hockey's most commanding player scores seven goals in eight games to lift bedraggled Boston into strong contention. Bobby tells how it is in Orland

Mark Mulvoy

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In his 25th-floor luxury apartment in downtown **Boston**, **Bobby Orr** is boiling shrimp for lunch, answering the two telephones that keep ringing and talking with a visitor.

What's the telescope on the terrace for?

"I'm not a peeping Bobby, if that's what you mean."

How bad is your left knee, anyway?

"It's as good as any knee that has been operated on three times. I never had any trouble after the first two operations, but then last March—a few days before the start of the playoffs—I got hit in a game in **Detroit** and the ligaments came undone again. The knee was terribly sore all during the playoffs and kept swelling up. I lived with an ice pack taped to the knee. In June the doctors cut the knee open and tightened up the ligaments. At the same time they cleaned up the insides and smoothed out the rough surfaces around the cartilage area. People keep saying that bone rubs against bone in my knee, that I creak when I walk, but they're all wrong. The doctors tell me there's some lubrication in there that makes the joints slide smoothly."

Bobby Hull has a bad knee but refuses to let the doctors cut it open. Do you regret having your operations?

"If I hadn't let them open the knee, I know I wouldn't be playing today. I played for a long time when the knee was sore, and it was unbearable. I couldn't play the game the way I wanted. In fact, I could hardly play at all. I had to have the operations. They were my only hope."

This time, though, the knee did not respond the way the doctors expected, did it?

"No. And I worried. Did I worry. Hockey is my life, you know, and you can't survive for long with a bad knee. I wanted to play against the Russians, and I was sure that the knee would be strong enough for me to play at least the games in **Moscow**. Instead it got worse. I'd skate during Team **Canada** practices, and then afterward the knee would swell up. One time the doctors even had to drain fluid from it. I called Dr. [Carter] Rowe in **Boston** and he just told me not to worry about it, that it would get better in time. But I worried. One day in **Stockholm** the knee locked on me while I was walking down the street, and I almost fell over."

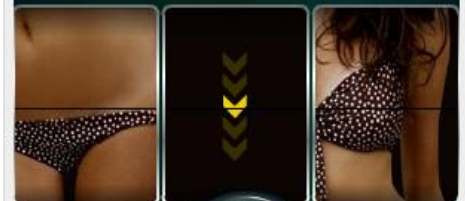
Maybe you should have stayed home and worked out with the Bruins instead of going overseas with Team **Canada**?

"A lot of people say that, but it's a pile of junk. I worked harder in **Sweden** and in **Russia** than I would have in training camp with the Bruins. Besides, Karl Elieff—one of Team **Canada**'s trainers—is one of the best physiotherapists around, and he worked on my knee every day."

Why did you try to play so soon once the season started? Everyone figured you wouldn't play until Christmas, yet there you were in the lineup on Oct. 21.

"I wasn't ready to play. I knew it. The Bruins knew it. The doctors knew it. But I had to see for myself. On the ice I just couldn't do the things I used to do without any effort. Like pivot, for instance. The knee really bothered me. One problem, the doctors said, was my weight. I was carrying eight or 10 extra pounds and..."

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You really mean 12 or 15 extra pounds, don't you?

"As I said, I was carrying eight or 10 extra pounds and neither my left leg nor my left knee was strong enough to support the burden. So after three games—most of which were spent at the end of the bench—we all agreed that I should quit for three weeks and concentrate strictly on building up the leg and the knee. We set a definite target date for my return: November 18th against the Islanders in **New York**."

What did you do, go to your place in **Florida** and run in the sand?

"Don't I wish. I worked out at least four hours a day for the next three weeks, and not in **Florida**. In the morning I'd skate for about 90 minutes with the Bruins or the **Boston Braves** or just by myself. Then I'd ride the exercise bike for five or 10 miles. After that I'd take a whirlpool and get some heat. In the afternoon I'd drive out to Lynnfield and exercise on a mini-gym under the supervision of Gene Berde. He's the physical culturist who got **Carl Yastrzemski** into fantastic shape the year the **Red Sox** won the pennant. I watched my diet pretty carefully, too. In those weeks I lost all my excess weight and strengthened the leg and the knee to the point where I felt I could take a regular turn on the ice without any real problem."

Did you go to all the games when the Bruins played at home?

"I'm not a good spectator. Heck, I was so nervous in **Moscow** I stayed at the hotel and watched the last game on television. Yes, some hotel rooms in **Moscow** do have television sets. Here, I tried watching our games from beside the bench, but the fans were giving our guys a hard time and I couldn't stand it, so I watched them on television in the dressing room. The fans forget awfully quickly, I tell you."

So you returned on schedule against the Islanders and scored a goal on the first shot you took.

"It was a coincidence, strictly a coincidence."

Late in the first period of that game Jim Mair of the Islanders caught you on the left knee with a good hip check and flipped you into the air. The old Orr—or the young Orr—would have gone around Mair without any problem, wouldn't he?

"Maybe, maybe not. But I'm glad he hit me. Actually, he lifted me up more than he hit me, but he still caught me squarely on the knee. It was a good test, but I got right up—yes, I was a little mad—and skated back into the play."

Have you found that you can't do certain things on the ice anymore? No one has seen you pirouette yet.

"I still can't pivot the way I'd like, but I'm sure that it will come again when I get in top condition. You don't get into shape until you've played a dozen or 15 real games. Right now I'm doing a lot of stupid things—like holding the puck too long and giving it away too easily—because I'm not in top mental and physical condition yet."

Maybe you'll have to restrict certain movements because of your bad knee?

"You're talking about carrying the puck—or maybe not carrying the puck. I didn't carry the puck very often in **Montreal** the other night—only once, if I remember correctly—and the people all said that something has to be wrong with **Orr**. The only thing wrong with me in **Montreal** was **Yvan Cournoyer** and **Frank Mahovlich** and **Jacques Lemaire** and all those other speedy Canadian forwards. You don't rush the puck very often against Montreal—you'll get burned. I do think I carried the puck well the next night when we beat Buffalo, though. Another thing. I'm a smarter player now—or at least I think I am—than I used to be. I have found out that you can save a lot of energy by being smart on the ice, by passing the puck more. Why crack through two defensemen yourself when you can pass the puck to a teammate, then sneak around behind the defenseman and get a return pass? Also, why go between a guy and the boards when the odds are that you won't make it? I'm just learning those things."

You don't wrap tape around the blade of your stick anymore. Are you trying to start a trend? Or do you own a stick company and want kids to start breaking their sticks by the dozen?

"It's funny. I always thought you had to put tape on your stick. Then I found out you don't. So I don't."

Derek Sanderson, John McKenzie, **Gerry Cheevers** and **Teddy Green** are all gone to the WHA now. Has the Gas House Gang spirit gone with them?

"No, we're still a crazy bunch, though not as crazy as we used to be."

How many more years will you play? You've put in six years now. Will you be another **Gordie Howe** and stick around until you're 50?

"I'll play at least three more years because I have three years left on my contract. Then, who knows?"

According to the rumors, **Bobby Orr Enterprises** wants to buy the Bruins, who are for sale. Do you want to be the game's first player-owner?

"The shrimp's ready, let's eat."

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