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BUICK REGAL

Sport: More for Orr

Monday, May. 22, 1972

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The way the Boston Bruins figured it, they had no business being in New York. They should have won the Stanley Cup days before—on home ice before home-town fans—but the feisty New York Rangers had engineered a surprising upset. Embarrassed to have to hit the road again before they could wind up the playoffs, the Bruins wasted no time mauling the Rangers for their second National Hockey League championship in three years.

The brawling Bruins combined skill with scare tactics. Their dexterous centers controlled face-offs; their defenders flung themselves purposefully in front of net-bound pucks; their penalty killers not only frustrated good Ranger scoring chances but managed to score three times themselves. So much for their skating and stickhandling talents. Beyond that, the Bruins used shoulders, hips, elbows, knees and fists to intimidate the less aggressive Rangers. New York had finished second in the N.H.L.'s dominant eastern division, ten points behind Boston. The way the Rangers trounced Montreal and Chicago to gain the final round gave their fans hope that New York might win its first Stanley Cup in 32 years. But against the Bruins, who had breezed through the regular season with only 13 losses in 78 games, the Rangers skated into a face-off with reality.

For most of every game, most of that reality was Bobby Orr. Soon after he broke into the National Hockey League in 1966 at the age of 18, Orr began to build a reputation as the best defenseman ever to play the game—and probably the best all-round player as well. He may well be the most accomplished professional athlete currently active in any sport. Unassuming off the ice, Orr takes command when he is on it. And he often seems to be all over it. Sighs Ranger Coach Emile Francis: "Hell, I see him make a fantastic play on our goal, and when we skate back up the ice, he's there to meet us."

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Orr played much of the Stanley Cup series with an injured left knee, but neither he nor the Rangers seemed to notice. On defense, the puck seemed magnetically drawn to his stick. Once, when the Rangers had a man advantage in the fourth game, Orr controlled the puck for 20 seconds, literally skating circles around the frustrated New York attackers. The New York fans, who lived up to their reputation by directing a steady stream of obscenities and litter at the Bruins, could think of no solution for Orr's heroics other than to urge the Rangers to "Hit him, stupid!"

On offense, Orr scored more points (four goals, four assists) than anyone else in the series. One of his goals—in the final game, which Boston won 3-0—was scored with one of his classically daring efforts. With Ranger Bruce MacGregor swooping in to steal the bouncing puck for a breakaway at the Ranger blue line, Orr could have played it safe by swatting the puck out of danger. Instead, he coolly trapped it inches from MacGregor's stick, pirouetted on his left skate and snapped a 30-ft. wrist shot into the net.

To no one's surprise, Orr was named winner of the Conn Smythe Trophy as the most valuable player in the entire playoffs, an award he also won in 1970. Earlier this year, at the end of the regular season, he was also named the league's most valuable defenseman for the fifth consecutive year and the most valuable player for the third consecutive year.

The next big challenge facing Bobby Orr is the scheduled September tournament—the first ever—between a Canadian team made up of the N.H.L.'s best players and a team from the Soviet Union. Like most Canadian N.H.L. players, Orr has been looking forward to a chance to show the Russians who plays the world's best hockey. Orr, who now makes more than \$200,000 a year with Boston, has said, "I played Russia once, for an Ontario junior all-star team, and we lost 3-2. I want another crack—and I'll play for nothing." But possible surgery on his injured knee may make him unavailable. The Russians should be so lucky.

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