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Legend of number 4 grows stronger

PARRY SOUND - It was definitely Bobby Orr's Day. Throngs of people gathered outside the Charles W. Stockey Centre for the Performing Arts and Bobby Orr Hall of Fame, some on trampolines, and many decked out in Boston Bruins jerseys on July 18. They all gushed about how they've followed Bobby Orr's career from the beginning. One of the managers of the Stockey Centre, Laurence Follows, said earlier that sports heroes are like spiritual leaders, that they only get bigger over time. The day only seemed to prove his point. Adoring fans came from all over to see him, from Detroit, Minnesota and Halifax, carrying bits and pieces of memorabilia for him to sign. There



Bobby Orr and Don Cherry. Bobby Orr and Don Cherry pause to examine one of the exhibits.

was a fervour when they spoke of him. "I just want to meet him, to shake his hand. I hope I get a picture with him," said Sean Thomson who flew in from Nova Scotia to see his hero. Garry Anderson from North Bay booked the day off of work to come and try to get a photo of Bobby Orr. "I've followed his career from 1966 to 1976. It was my dad that turned me on to Bobby Orr." One fan even painted a truck bright yellow, and painted a number 4, and the Bruins' logo on it, and wanted to give it to Bobby Orr. The language people use in reference to Bobby Orr is interesting. "There's an aura about him," said Don Cherry. Premier Ernie Eves mentioned "the Bobby Orr that quietly slips into Sick Kids hospital. He does a lot of things that he doesn't receive credit for but he does them because they're the right thing to do." There's an awe that people have for Bobby Orr, fans and friends alike. "I've come because of Bobby," said Ron McLean. "Growing up in Red Deer Alberta, Parry Sound was this mystical place that produced this messiah, so he put Parry Sound on the map for me, as a Western Canadian, there's no doubt about it." And then there's the masses who came to adore, to see their hero, to shake his hand, to get an autograph. Maybe because he left the game at such a young age, 29, in what Don Cherry calls a blaze of glory. "The last year he played, he got 46 goals [and] 89 assists. The same year we won the Canada Cup in '76' Bobby Clark said that was the greatest team of all time. He won the MVP of the Canada Cup and that's the last year he played. You can't go out much better than that." All seem to agree on what kind of hockey player he was, and what kind of man he is. "Even Don goes out of his way to run the Bobby Orr video every one or two years so I think both of us know what a great human being he is and what an unbelievable player he was," said Mr. McLean. "That legend's going to grow exponentially. I think Brantford and Parry Sound are sort of meccas for Canadian hockey fans. It'll be a spot you have to come to." Bobby Orr along with Don Cherry and Ron McLean, received a grand tour of the Stockey Centre and the Festival Hall. They also got a tour of the Bobby Orr Hockey Hall of Fame. When Bobby Orr entered the Hall of Fame and saw his old Shamrocks jersey, he was laughing and smiling. Don Cherry and Bobby Orr went through the Hall of Fame, heads together, talking quietly. It was easy to tell it was a deeply personal moment. What's it like to tour your own life? What goes through Bobby Orr's mind when he's standing in front of a section of his life entitled Sadness and Revenge 1970 to 1972? What does he think when he sees a statue of himself? Or all his hockey paraphernalia behind glass? The mood became less reflective when he saw the interactive games and the kids manning them. In suit and tie, he entered one of the games and shot at the net with the puck machine, much to the joy of 14 year old goaltender Sean Beasley, who came out of the net with an ear to ear grin. "That was fun." The ribbon cutting ceremony was attended by over 2000 people, most of them there to see Bobby Orr. He thanked everyone for their support. "Thanks for all your affection over the years. This is one of the most difficult things I've done in my life, to stand here and tell you how I feel. "I'm a lucky guy. I played on championship teams, I played for Canada, I've won some awards and I'm very proud of those accomplishments, but I don't think there's anything nicer than to come home and be recognized at home." It was an emotional day for Bobby Orr. He thanked his dad for never putting pressure on him, and just letting him play and have fun. He started to cry when he mentioned his mom and his grandmother, who have both passed away. "I know they're watching. I know how thrilled they would be." He talked about all his wonderful memories of Parry Sound, of skating on the river, and was overwhelmed by the occasion. "This is the most marvelous day of my life. This hall is for the whole community. I hope you feel that same love and passion I had for the game in whatever you're trying to do. I'm thrilled." After the ribbon cutting ceremony Bobby Orr signed autographs for over three hours. "When you have the greatest hockey player in the world, I don't think anybody will ever forget him," said Mr. Cherry.

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