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**The incomparable Orr**

*Former Generals teammates remember his traits on and off the ice*

Nov 28, 2008 - 09:00 AM  
 BY BRIAN MCNAIR

OSHAWA -- From the day Bobby Orr arrived to play for the Oshawa Generals at the age of 14, there was little doubt he would be a star.

Brought in from Parry Sound to play for the Generals, then an affiliate of the Boston Bruins, Orr adjusted immediately to playing with junior players as many as six years older.

Nobody could have imagined just how good he would become -- how do you conceive of a player winning the Norris, Art Ross, Hart, Conn Smythe and Stanley Cup trophies all in the same year, as he did with the Boston Bruins in 1970? -- but it was evident he was destined for greatness.

George Vail, a teammate of Orr's in the first two seasons and a fan ever since, remembers being partly awestruck and partly embarrassed by the 125-pounder, who made the commute from Parry Sound that first year, not yet even in high school.

"It was kind of like, 'Look at this young kid, making us all look kind of silly,'" recalls Vail, who lives in Oshawa with his then sweetheart, now wife Sally. "He was so talented, he didn't know how good he was. He just went out and played."

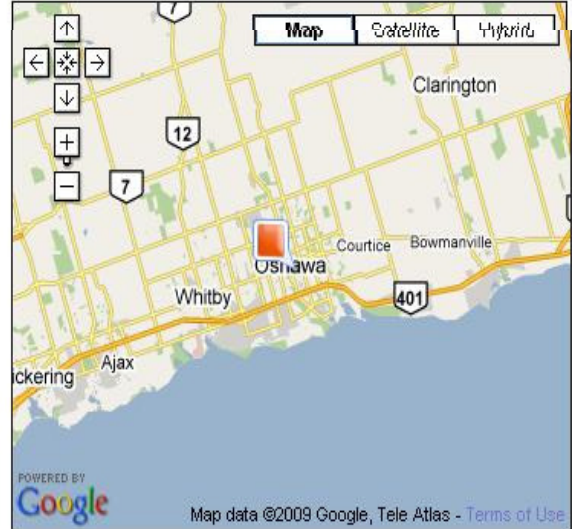
In fact, he played the game in a way never before seen, revolutionizing not only the defence position, but the game in general with his incredible array of talents.

He could do it all and it was a treat to behold for Vail and any of the other players who were fortunate enough to grace the same ice surface.

Ian Young, who introduced Orr for his number retirement ceremony last night at the General Motors Centre, appreciated him more than most, as the goaltender with the Generals during the final three years of Orr's stay in Oshawa.



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From the crease, Young not only witnessed the many ways Orr could protect him, but also the manner in which he could dictate the pace of a game.

"He just did everything right," Young recalls. "He was so gifted. He would stop the one-on-ones, he'd play the two-on-ones beautifully. When he wanted to carry the puck he did it and everyone just sort of stepped out of his way. He'd make the passes he had to make -- it wasn't all about Bobby -- but, I'll tell you, every time he took a shot, 95 per cent of them were on the net. It was uncanny."

No wonder then, that Orr went on to rack up 116 goals and 321 points in 222 games as a General, including playoffs. He saved his best for last, as he scored 38 goals and 94 points in 47 games in his final regular season in 1965-66, then added nine goals and 28 points in 17 playoff games, leading the Generals to an Ontario Hockey Association championship.

But well apart from the statistics, which only became more impressive in the National Hockey League, Orr's teammates remember him for the way he conducted himself.

He never was comfortable in the spotlight -- in fact, he was reluctant to have the retirement ceremony, which explains why his is the third banner to be lifted in Oshawa -- but he was a great friend to those he held near.

"What I remember most about him was that he wasn't in a league of his own personally with the players," says Young, who was visited by Orr in the hospital recently after he sustained a serious head injury while coaching a hockey practice.

"He was a very normal type of a guy to be around," Young continues. "Everybody really respected him for that. He didn't want to talk about how great he was. He just wanted to have fun and play the game."

Vail remembers another of Orr's admirable traits, although this one ultimately played a role in his premature retirement from hockey. In his determination to play and help his team, Orr would often ignore his body and in particular his knees, which would give out for good in 1979.

"You couldn't keep him off the ice," says Vail. "It didn't matter how sore he was, he's going out. In years to come, with his knee, he wouldn't tell anybody. He'd just go out and play."

He played his way into the Hockey Hall of Fame at 31, the youngest ever to be so honoured.

And now, 46 years after he first put on the Generals' No. 2 jersey, Orr's name is in the rafters in Oshawa where it always belonged.

- ◆ Bobby Orr night in Oshawa
- ◆ Bobby Orr finally gets his No.2 retired

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### Fans fondly remember Bobby

We invited fans to send in their memories of Bobby Orr on our website at [newsdurhamregion.com](http://newsdurhamregion.com). Following are two of the responses.

Brian McGill: As a kid I remember watching the Generals with my father. This particular night Oshawa was killing a penalty. My recollection of the play was Orr circling his own net a couple of times. In frustration the other team stopped forechecking. Orr simply came out from behind his net. As the forwards on the other team backed up to give Orr room he simply let a slapshot go from about the faceoff circle in his own end. He scored on the shot! Forty something years later I still remember the play.

Kathy Killen: Mother's Day, Sunday, May 10, 1970, my dad (Leon Killen) and I were watching the Stanley Cup final. This is my first memory of hockey. Because of that famous goal, the bond between my dad and I was priceless. Hockey was our favourite thing to talk about, not cars or politics or baseball, just hockey ... the 'coolest' game on earth. I will always be grateful for the wonderful memories, thank you Bobby! I met Bobby Orr after a Petes game in Peterborough a couple of years ago. He was very kind and gentle, commented on how he loved my jersey. As he was autographing my No. 4 sweater, he noticed my husband sporting his Montreal Canadiens attire, and said to me, "He's not with you is he?"

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