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'Very humble' Orr finally takes a bow in Oshawa

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By Dave Feschuk Sports Columnist

It's been nearly half a century since Bobby Orr, 14 years old and 125 pounds, arrived in Oshawa and began to bloom into hockey's greatest genius.

But for all Orr's accolades – a nearly 30-year residency in the Hockey Hall of Fame, two Stanley Cup rings and a boatload of Norris and Hart and Art Ross Trophies – one honour had gone un-given. Though his famous No. 4 has been hanging in various Boston rafters for most of a few decades, the No. 2 he wore during his four storied junior seasons with the Oshawa Generals, out of circulation since he left for the NHL, had yet to be retired.

That changed last night, when Orr, once a high-scoring defenceman who electrified crowds as he reimagined his sport, was feted with an emotional number-raising at General Motors Centre.

Orr was joined by no end of well-wishers, from siblings to ex-teammates to 83-year-old Wren Blair, the scout who convinced Doug and Arva Orr, the legend's late parents, to ship their scrawny boy from Parry Sound to begin his journey to the heights. And he was joined, too, by Don Cherry, the former Bruins coach and national blow-horn, who jokingly took a little credit for Orr's gifts.

"He was a good player," said Cherry, "but he had a great coach."

In between a stirring video tribute to Orr's highlight-reel rushes and a series of standing ovations from the franchise-record crowd of 6,253, somebody might have been excused for wondering: Why did it take so long for his number to find its way to the local ceiling, this when Eric Lindros's No. 88 rose last year?

"That's my fault. It wasn't the Generals, I can assure you," said Orr, 60. "It just wasn't something I wanted to do. It just wasn't my thing ... I guess I'm a little strange."

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Orr, now a player agent and a corporate spokesman, credited Colleen Corner, the Generals' office manager of more than 40 years, with turning him.

"She threatened me," said Orr.

"I did threaten him," said Corner. "I told him, 'I'm very upset, because you should have been the first one up there.' And that was the first time he didn't say no to me, a year ago

November ... He'd been asked many, many times. This has been ongoing for 20-something years. He's just a very humble man. He does not like the pomp and the attention at all."

Last night's pomp was appropriate. The Bobby Orr Public School choir laid into a rousing version of "O Canada." The Generals took their pre-game warm-up before a 5-1 win over the Peterborough Petes wearing throwback jerseys, black with yellow shoulders, all of them with Orr's No. 2 on the back.

And another player who arrived as a 14-year-old, John Tavares, the high-scoring Oshawa captain expected to be a top pick in next year's NHL entry draft, presented Orr with a custom watch. "From Tiffany's," said Tavares.

The Generals don't play in their Orr-era haunts any more, old Bowmanville Arena with its chicken-wire cage, and the Oshawa Civic Centre. And their namesake automotive giant, General Motors, is troubled. But Orr was driven on to the ice last night in a Chevy.

And 30 years on from his injury-induced retirement at age 30, perhaps Orr's accomplishments inspire more awe than they ever did. Generations have come and gone, after all, without a reasonable facsimile.

And maybe Orr, strange though he says he is, has even warmed a little to the pomp and attention.

"It's been a fun night," he admitted after it was over and his eyes were red from a few tears. "This is where my career started. To be honoured in this fashion is something I'll never forget."

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