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## THE VERDICT BOB VERDI COMMENTARY

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### The Verdict: Orr Will Cherish Olympic Experience

Friday, 02.19.2010 / 9:13 PM / [The Verdict](#)  
By Bob Verdi - Blackhawks Team Historian

Bobby Orr skated as if his car was double parked. Prior to his retirement from the NHL as a member of the Blackhawks in 1978, he had revolutionized what it meant to be an offensive defenseman. No, he didn't waste time. If only he had more time. When that left knee finally caved in, Orr was merely 30 years old.

Now, Orr is as deft with words as he was with the puck. Carefully addressing those who fret about potential perils of the Winter Olympics, he exercises an economy of rhetoric. Orr conducted rink-length dashes that seemed effortless and lifted people from their seats. Now, he can talk worrywarts off the ledge and still make points.

"That is a great tournament they've got going up there," said Orr of the ongoing Games. "It can be a grind, shutting down the league and getting all of the regular-season games in. But it's terrific hockey and the players who are there are excited to be there. Don't forget that: they love it."

Orr is back at his winter residence in Florida after sampling the buzz in Vancouver, where he was among a chosen few Canadian icons participating in the Opening Ceremonies. A month or so ago, Orr was asked to be a flag-bearer. He gladly accepted the honor and a vow of secrecy.

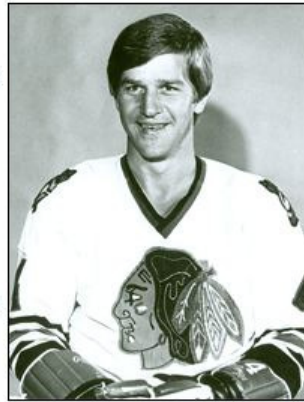
"I told my wife, Peggy, and our two sons, Darren and Brent," said Orr. "But that's about it. We weren't even told who else was involved. I got to Vancouver Tuesday and there was a rehearsal Wednesday with stand-ins. We just watched to see what they wanted. Then Thursday, we had our own rehearsal and Friday... was I nervous? Yeah, I was nervous. It was a wonderful experience. I'll cherish it for the rest of my life. If somebody saw me around the hotel and asked what I was doing, I just said I was there to watch the Olympics. But I didn't go far."

In Orr's day, pros were not part of the Olympics, but international competition among world-class talent was available. The storied victory by Canada over Russia in the 1972 Summit Series is still a source of immense pride for our neighbors to the north. But four years later, another series in late summer decorated the sport. Unlike '72, Canada's roster was not restricted to just NHL players, so Bobby Hull joined his country's formidable roster from the Winnipeg Jets of the World Hockey Association.

"That might have been the best hockey team ever put together," said Hull, and Orr is not one to disagree. "I finally got to play with Orr, who was the best I ever played against," continued Hull. For that compliment, Orr extends humble thanks.

In a way, sadly, that was Bobby Orr's last hurrah. He played well—"I didn't have to do too much with all that talent we had," he recalled—and Canada won. Orr then headed to Chicago and the Blackhawks. He had arrived in Boston advertised as the savior for the franchise, and he was sensational. He became the first defenseman to lead the NHL in scoring (120 points in 1969-70) and was Most Valuable Player during the playoffs for both of the Bruins' Stanley Cup championships in 1970 and 1972. For eight consecutive years, he won the Norris Trophy as the league's best defenseman.

But all the while, his left knee was wearing down, and in 1975-76 he played just 10 games for the Bruins. That summer, the Blackhawks signed him as a free agent—\$3 million for five years. The signing was held at the Bismarck Theater at high noon, open to the public. It was big money and it was even bigger news. President Bill Wirtz, crossing his fingers, admitted his franchise erred in Hull's escape to the WHA. Perhaps Orr would bring some of his genius to the Stadium and sell some tickets. While Boston mourned, Chicago anticipated.



**"Bobby Orr. No question."  
- Blackhawks head coach  
Joel Quenneville when  
asked to name his hockey  
idol.**

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**The Verdict: Kuenster, '61 Hawks get to feel like kids again**

By Bob Verdi

Tuesday, 01.11.2011 / 4:42 PM

**Rockford's Connelly named to AHL All-Star**



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Alas, it wasn't to be. Orr played only 20 games for the Blackhawks in 1976-77, then underwent his sixth knee operation that April. After taking the entire next season off to rehabilitate, he tried again, but after six games, it was over. His final appearance was Nov. 1, 1978, a 1-0 loss to the Vancouver Canucks before 9,257 fans at the Stadium. A week later, he announced his retirement at a press conference.

"We took a gamble and as far as I'm concerned, we didn't lose," Wirtz said. "We got Bobby Orr, the greatest hockey player in the world, and he's working for only one organization."

At a salary of \$150,000, Orr joined the Hawks' front office as No. 2 to general manager Bob Pulford. But in 1980, Orr returned to Boston, where he is still a legend and maintains a summer home, as well as the Orr Hockey Group. He and his staff represent several players—"call me an advisor, not an agent, please," quips Orr—and No. 4 clears enough time on his schedule encompassing other business interests to keep a 10 handicap on the golf course.

Bobby and Peggy are busy in another fashion, too. They recently became grandparents when Darren and his wife, Chelsea, welcomed their first child, Alexis Brooke. "Everything you ever hear about how great it is to have grandkids, it's all true," Bobby said. "Only it's even better."

Hull recently mused about No. 4, stating that "in today's game, if it weren't for that damn knee, Bobby Orr could still score 30 goals a season with his eyes closed... which isn't too bad when you consider he's 60 years old." Orr heard that and laughed.

"I didn't have many disappointments as a player," he concluded. "But one of them was the Blackhawks. Billy Wirtz stuck his neck out for me. He knew I was hurt. I just wish I could have played more than I did in Chicago. It's a great city with great fans, but I just didn't have anything left. I couldn't do it anymore. I'm happy with what I'm doing now. If only I could figure out golf. Some days I just want to..."

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6:00 PM	17	18	19	20	21	1:00 PM
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