

Bobby Orr's life after the NHL has been healthy, happy and successful

With two new titanium knees, Orr endures none of the pain that ended his career

BY ARPON BASU, FREELANCE OCTOBER 11, 2010

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Hockey Hall of Fame legend Bobby Orr, who is known for his career with the Boston Bruins, speaks with journalists at the Sportplex 4 Glaces in Pierrefonds in Montreal on Saturday, Oct. 9, 2010. As the official spokesperson, Orr was present to participate in the Chevrolet Safe & Fun Hockey program which promotes safe and fun hockey practice for children.

Photograph by: Dario Ayala, The Gazette

When Bobby Orr finally gave in to the excruciating pain from his shoddy knees and hung up his skates for good at age 28, ending a legendary hockey career in the midst of what should have been his prime, he was scared.

He had never known anything other than hockey, and he was faced with the prospect of taking on a brand new field of work. Or, more accurately, he'd have to work like the rest of us for the first time.

"I didn't know what to do," Orr said. "But I decided that I was going to apply to my job today what I applied to my game yesterday."

It's safe to say it worked out pretty well.

Among his many ventures, Orr and his partners Rick Curran and Paul Krepelka started The Orr Hockey Group in 2002, and today the sports agency has one of the largest client lists in the league, one that includes Eric and Jordan Staal, Jason Spezza, Cam Ward, Taylor Hall and Tomas Plekanec.

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But Orr, an intensely private man for such a public figure, is often reticent to talk about the business side of the game.

Much of the negotiating work is handled by Curran and Krepelka, and Orr's son Darren recently joined the business. Orr himself is not listed as a certified agent by the NHLPA, so he fills more of an advisory role with clients.

When asked Saturday if he could take a break from his role with the Chevrolet Safe & Fun Hockey program so that he could wear his player agent's hat and discuss some issues facing today's professional game, Orr hesitated for an instant, but finally agreed.

In this summer where many older, middle class free agents were unable to find jobs, players like Bill Guerin and the Canadiens' Glen Metropolit, Orr said it is simply a result of the difficulties of the current salary cap system.

"I don't think there's any question that under the new system, (teams) have to look after their dollars and some players get squeezed out," Orr said. "But it's the new system and everyone agreed to it."

A nasty byproduct of that system, at least in Orr's eyes, is the practice of hiding big mistake contracts in the minor leagues. The New York Rangers will be paying Wade Redden \$6.5 million to play in Hartford this season, while the Edmonton Oilers will shell out \$5.4 million to Sheldon Souray while he skates in Oklahoma City.

"What I don't like today is to see when you sign a free agent and it doesn't work out, so they put him on waivers and they send him to the minors," Orr said. "I don't want to get into a lot of discussion about that, but I'm not sure that's the thing to do."

It was suggested to Orr that perhaps a way to prevent teams from doing that would be to force teams to keep those salaries on the cap, but he didn't see that as a perfect solution either.

"Then what happens?" he asked. "It's not an easy system. Every team has a bean counter. So if you want to keep that guy on the cap, then someone else is going (to lose out). It's a difficult system and you really have to manage. If you make a bad move or two ... it's difficult. It's really difficult."

What isn't difficult for Orr today, at age 62, is skating or doing anything else involving his knees.

He had one replaced seven years ago and the other a year later. It gives him some issues with his balance and the titanium in his knees makes metal detectors go off at airports, but it's a minor annoyance after the years of anguish he suffered through when he was playing.

"They're unbelievable," he said. "There's no pain at all."

Orr is eagerly awaiting the birth of his second grandchild, and even though his knees don't hurt, he admits there is another widespread ailment that leads to other aches and pains.

"I have TMB," he says, grinning at the quizzical look his response triggered. "Too many birthdays."



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