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Aug 23

### The Greatest of All Time? Bobby Orr of Course!



by Mad Hungarian

Most lists I have seen all have Wayne Gretzky ranked as the greatest hockey player of all time. Bobby Orr is usually ranked in the top 3 of all the the greats.

One outspoken expert, Don Cherry has used his podium on Hockey Night in Canada to tell hockey viewers that Bobby Orr is the greatest of all time.

Don Cherry is right.

In many respects, both Gretzky and Orr have a lot of similarities. Both were phenoms at a young age and noticed by the hockey world while in minor hockey. Both excelled while competing with and against much older players. Interestingly enough, neither player could lead their junior teams to a Memorial Cup victory, although Orr did get his Oshawa Generals to the final.

In my opinion, Orr ranks as #1 because he is the more complete player, something Gretzky wasn't. Orr's offence talent was every bit as good as Gretzky's. He could score, his passing was second to none and Orr electrified crowds every time he touched the puck and began skating up the ice.

Orr was also much tougher than Gretzky. He could handle the rough stuff, he could take and make a big hit. Perhaps what sets Orr apart from all other great players is that he did what he did as a defenseman. Habs legend Doug Harvey was considered the first offensive defenseman, but it was Orr who took the role of offensive defenseman to heights never seen before and likely never to be seen again. Sure, some have come close like Paul Coffey, but none so far have surpassed Orr.

Just look at what Orr accomplished:

A record 102 assists by a defenseman in 1970-71. Only 2 players have since recorded more assists; Gretzky and Mario Lemieux. Orr recorded 100+ points 6 times in a 12 year NHL career! Orr also has the highest +/- of any NHL player, an incredible +124 during that same season of 1970-71. Gretzky's best ever single season +/- was a +98.

Bobby Orr dominated the Norris Trophy during his 12 year career winning it an incredible 8 times. What is more incredible about this is that Orr played hurt for much of his career. Every hockey fan knows the story about Orr's knee's and how continuing problems with them forced him out of the league much too early. I make this point because Orr's last 3 years in the NHL were all cut short due to injury. In his last 3 years, Orr played 10, 20 and 6 games respectively. Orr only played 9 seasons where he played the majority of games for his team and won the Norris in 8 of those 9 years. Orr also won the Hart as league MVP 3 times.

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Gretzky took offence to new heights when he played, but Orr revolutionized the game. Before Orr, defensive players were assigned to shadow the team's top scorer and best player, always a forward. But now, the best player was a defenseman. How do you shadow a defenseman? For the most part, defensemen before Orr played defense with a smattering of offence once in a while. Orr invented the offensive defenseman. On most nights during his playing career, he wasn't just the best defenseman on the ice, he was the best player period!

Wayne Gretzky dominated offence during his career, but Orr dominated defense and offence together. Who else has done that and to such a degree?

No one!

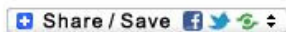
I think Orr gets the short end of the stick in this voting because his career was so short, although it did flame brilliantly during that time. The Hockey News ranked Orr as the second best of all time. This for a player who really only played 9 NHL seasons, since there is no point in counting his last 3 injury riddled seasons. Imagine if Orr's knees had been sound and he could have played 20 years. Imagine how many more times we would see Orr's name in the record books.

Orr simply dominated the NHL in the short time he was in the league. He dominated like no other has before him or like anyone after him. Orr, the defenseman could offensively do things only a very few elite forwards in NHL history could do. Former Bruins Coach and GM Harry Sinden once said of Orr "He's the perfect hockey player".

So, is Bobby Orr the greatest of all time?

Yes!

Sorry Wayne.



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