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Neate Sager February 24, 2011

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Orr bows out of coaching in Top Prospects Game

By Neate Sager

The most notable absence from the CHL/NHL Top Prospects Game is probably behind the bench more than on the ice.

It has been a bone of contention that Bobby Orr, as an active player agent, is one of the honorary coaches in the annual contest between the best draft-year players in Canada. Perhaps you had to be there, but there were few uh-huhs when Canadian Hockey League president David Branch explained why Doug Gilmour — and not Orr — would be behind the bench on Jan. 19 in Toronto.

"Bobby has an exciting new development with his family," Branch said on a conference call, referring to Orr's family expecting a grandchild in January.

"We felt it was what was best for Bobby," Branch added.



As someone who expects sports executives to get creative instead of issuing no-comment, that was pretty admirable. Questioning it automatically (project, much?) makes one run the risk of being a churlish jerk. However, in the cutthroat agent game, Orr's presence was bound to cause resentment and suspicion. Coaching in a game involving the 40 best draft-year players in the country while being an agent, yeah, that's a conflict of interest.

As for the rosters, Team Cherry is stacked: top prospects Sean Couturier, Gabriel Landeskog, Ryan Murphy and Ryan Strome are each on the same side.

Team Orr has at least three players with legitimate shots at being top 10 picks next June: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Brandon Saad and defenceman Dougie Hamilton.

Surprising omissions? Windsor Spitfires centre Alexander Khokhlachev and Ottawa 67's left wing Shane Prince, to name two. Edmonton Oil Kings centre Michael St. Croix, fourth among draft-year players in scoring in the Western Hockey League (and 13th overall), was also bypassed.

Neate Sager is a writer for Yahoo! Canada Sports. Contact him at neatesager@yahoo.ca and follow him on Twitter [@neatebuzzthenet](https://twitter.com/neatebuzzthenet).

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