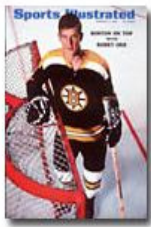


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February 03, 1969

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It's Bobby Orr & The Animals

Boston's top rock group features an incomparable young defenseman, a nifty scorer and a supporting ensemble of hard noses. That is enough to make the Bruins a threat to end Montreal's reign in hockey

Mark Mulvoy

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Snoopy was standing there at the blue line, gritting his teeth and snarling as he listened to the last few words of the national anthem before the start of the hockey game. "Ten more seconds," he thought, "and I can clobber somebody." The **Boston Bruins** tacked the comic strip onto the bulletin board in their dressing room, and a player penciled in a final caption: "Snoopy could play for us."

So he could. The Bruins are the biggest, toughest, roughest, meanest, most penalized team in the **National Hockey League** this year. Led by the wondrous defenseman **Bobby Orr** (see cover) and **Center Phil Esposito**, who is on a scoring binge, the Bruins can also play hockey. They have a strong grip on first place in the East Division and are threatening to win their first championship and their first **Stanley Cup** since 1941. And this is only the start of what seems certain to be the next dynasty in the **NHL**.

The Bruins have lost only one of their last 21 games, despite a heavy run of injuries that **Coach Harry Sinden** hopes reached a climax last Thursday night when seven **Boston** regulars were unable to play in a 2-2 tie with the **Red Wings** in **Detroit**. Forward **Tommy Williams** (knee) and Defenseman **Gary Doak** (mononucleosis) both have been lost for the balance of the season. **Derek (Turk) Sanderson**, the brash 22-year-old center with the longest, thickest sideburns, the widest bell-bottoms and the biggest Cadillac in the league, did not play for a month because of an injured hip. And volatile **Eddie Shack** has been in only one game since he suffered a mysterious hand injury just before Christmas.

During this siege, neither **Sinden** nor **General Manager Milt Schmidt** has cried poor mouth. Instead, they have reached down to **Hershey** of the **American League** and **Oklahoma City** of the Central Pro League and recalled some of their prize young prospects. According to hockey experts, the Bruins have more potentially outstanding young pros in the minor leagues than any other **NHL** club—not forgetting **Montreal**.

Oklahoma City, as usual, is leading the Central League. After scouting the **Blazers** one night a **St. Louis Blues** official decided that **Oklahoma City** right now probably could finish third in the West Division of the **NHL**. **Toe Blake**, retired coach of the **Canadiens**, challenged the Russian national hockey team, which is trying to schedule a grudge match against the **NHL**, to "go down to **Oklahoma City** and beat them first."

The young players called up during the injury crisis, particularly **Don Marcotte**, **Wayne Cashman**, **Rick Smith** and **Jim Harrison**, have performed like hardened Bruins. They have been rough and mean and not afraid to pick up penalties. **Cashman** started **Boston** to one victory when he smashed **New York's** **Reggie Fleming** with an elbow thrust. **Smith** has replaced **Doak** as the team's regular fifth defenseman. **Harrison**, who has been centering **Sanderson's** line the last month, has been the most adventurous replacement of all.

Harrison wears his sideburns almost as long and thick as **Sanderson** and plays with the same disrespect for his elders. During his first shift in a game against the **Canadiens** in the Forum, **Harrison** successively ran at **John Ferguson**, **Henri Richard** and **Ted Harris**. **Harrison** spent six minutes in the penalty box that night, but he so angered the **Canadiens** that they spent most of the game trying to retaliate and almost forgot about hockey. The Bruins won easily, and **Harrison** made the **Montreal** headlines.

Then, last week in **Detroit**, the 21-year-old rookie confronted **Gordie Howe**—the man you do not challenge—and the

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Red Wings for the first time. Slam. He put **Howe** into the boards. Later they collided again, and this time **Howe's** stick fell to the ice. **Harrison** looked at it, paused and then kicked it 30 feet down the ice. "He's what you'd call a disturber," says **Milt Schmidt**.

Such disturbances have helped the Bruins to accelerate their momentum during what could have been very difficult times. **Orr**, the 20-year-old marvel who gradually is replacing **Bobby Hull** as the league's most exciting player, and **Esposito**, who leads all scorers with 73 points and may become the first player ever to get 100 points in a season, have manipulated the assault so well that the Bruins are the league's highest-scoring team. Meanwhile, there has been the usual pugnacity by the other Bruins. **Teddy Green**, the team policeman—and an All-Star defenseman—has enforced law and order according to the Bruin code, with considerable help from **Ken Hodge** (who also has scored 26 goals), **Johnny McKenzie**, Don Awrey and both **Cashman** and **Harrison**.

The Bruins also have the league's most vociferous fans. They do not tolerate timid players. The fans particularly dislike players who wear helmets—the Bruins have none—and when they urge the team on, their choice of verbs is not Beacon Hill.

The Bruins have opened a sound seven-point lead over the faltering Canadiens, and that margin is likely to increase during the last two months of the season. When their regular players return from the sick list, the Bruins should play even better hockey. While the Bruins win and win, **Montreal** and the rest of the East Division seem to be groping.

The Canadiens have serious defensive deficiencies. Neither **Gump Worsley**, who gets along poorly with **Coach Claude Ruel**, nor **Rogatien Vachon** has been playing well in goal. The defense, once the best in the league, cannot seem to clear the puck from its own zone with any regularity. J.C. Tremblay, once so brilliant, has had a disappointing year, and the Canadiens sorely need **Terry Harper**, who is out with knee troubles. For some reason **Montreal** cannot win at home in the Forum. The Canadiens have done better on the road. "Maybe we'll move to **Detroit** or someplace for the rest of the year," **Ruel** says, trying to manage a smile.

The four other East teams are battling for the last two playoff spots, and **Toronto's** young Maple Leafs are improving with every game. **Chicago** needs a fit **Bobby Hull**. **Detroit** has defensive problems, while **New York**, whose coach, Boom Boom Geoffrion, is "in seclusion" recuperating from a stomach attack, lacks muscle up front and stability on defense.

Boston, however, has it all. The goal-tending just now is superior. **Gerry Cheevers**, the team wit, had to play 28 straight games through the first part of the schedule while **Eddie Johnston**, the No. 1 Bruin goalie, was recovering from a severe concussion, and he was good enough to make the All-Star team. **Johnston** returned Thursday night and made 38 saves, a dozen of them larcenous, in the tie at **Detroit**.

With **Orr** and **Green** anchoring the defense, the Bruins easily have the best backline group in the league. They are strong and deep at center, with **Esposito**, Fred Stanfield, Sanderson and **Harrison**. "The key position on a team is center," says **Esposito**, "and I think we've got the best around. When **Montreal** won all those cups, they were always strong down through center. Now we've got the strength and the balance."

Esposito centers the first line for **Hodge** and Ron Murphy. It is the highest-scoring line in the league. Stanfield works between **Johnny Bucyk** and John McKenzie, both injured during parts of the season and still not playing back to their usual form. Eddie Westfall, the Bruins' supersub, skates right wing for either Sanderson or **Harrison**, and whoever is well enough plays the left side.

Some improper Bostonians still find it difficult to believe the Bruins really are a quality hockey team. After all, they went eight years without making the playoffs before finishing third last season. Once in the playoffs, they were eliminated by **Montreal** in four straight games. "We were congratulating ourselves for finishing third," **Orr** says, 'and before we knew it we were on our way home."

That is not likely to happen this year, for a number of reasons. First of all, the Bruins use their size and muscle (five of them weigh more than 200 pounds, four more better than 190) to establish the tempo of a game right at the start, and the opposition often loses its sense of purpose. Says Bud Poile, general manager of the **Philadelphia Flyers**, "When they drop the puck to start the game, the Bruins think it is a piece of raw meat. Do they go after it! I'm afraid my guys will desert the place some night." Sinden calls it "intimidation." **Gordie Howe** says, "If you find you can push someone around, then you push him around."

To fans in other **NHL** rinks Defense-man Green is the epitome of the bad guy. He is still the Bruins' cop, but now he patrols the beat with somewhat less crunch than during the Bruin years in last place. "We're playing for first place," he says. "I can't spend all my time in the penalty box. Oh, I still like to hit, but I'm trying to play good hard hockey all the time. And, besides, that other life left its toll on my body. Four knee operations. Broken fingers. Broken

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knuckles. Broken a lot of things. I think, I know, I can play good hockey without being a nut on wheels. Maybe I'm mellowing. I'm not as punchy now. I get my kicks making a good pass or lugging the puck up ice." Wherever the Bruins play on the road, Green is always a special target for the fans' abuse. Last month, after a game in **New York**, some "leather throats," as Teddy calls New Yorkers, went after him. Green and two other Bruins jumped into a taxicab. About 35 fans surrounded the cab and started to rock it. Suddenly one of the Bruins kicked open the door and sent half a dozen leather throats sprawling to the ground. "You must be able to adapt to all situations," Green said.

One great adapter is **Phil Esposito**, who has developed into a center to rival the Canadiens' **Jean Beliveau**. "He's got a big reach and he's so strong," says Imlach. "My guys stand around and watch him move the puck like they're mesmerized." **Esposito** centered for **Bobby Hull** in **Chicago** two years ago, and every time Phil scored a goal he was called a "garbage player." "Let them say what they want," he shrugs. "I don't care if the puck goes in off my head. Here in **Boston**, though, I'm carrying the puck more. In **Chicago** we gave it off to the wings. And my wings here are getting me the puck from the corner. A center can't ask for anything more."

Esposito has become point-conscious as he battles the Hulls and Howes and Mikitas for the scoring championship. In **Detroit** last week he clearly set up the Bruins' first goal—passing to **Cashman**, who in turn passed to **Hodge** for an easy score. But the official scorer gave the second assist to **Orr**. After the game the Bruins protested the scoring, but the official was adamant and refused to change the call. "That might cost Phil \$1,000"—the value of the scoring title—**Orr** said after the game. **Esposito's** remarks could not be printed.

Finally, there is **Bobby Orr** himself.

There was some question six months ago whether Bobby would even be able to play hockey this season. He had seriously injured his knees during his first two years in the league. Doctors were huddling over his left knee more often than over **Joe Namath's** right. There were two operations, countless examinations and considerable worry, and Bobby could hardly skate when the Bruins went to training camp in September. He did not play in any of the team's exhibition games. However, he played opening night and has taken his regular shift ever since, about 37 minutes of ice time each game. "The knees get sore and stiff and sometimes they will swell up on me," **Orr** says, "but I can usually work it out pretty quickly."

Bobby already has scored 13 goals this year. He may become the first defenseman in 24 years to score 20 goals in a season. One night he turned the hat trick in **Boston**, and the Bruins' admirers covered the ice with some 75 hats—all sizes, shapes and colors. "Too bad I've never worn a hat," Bobby said. **Orr** is the darling of the **Boston** fans, except for one man who yells to him from the Garden's third balcony: "Hey, **Orr**, why don't you play defense for a change?"

When Bobby starts away on one of his rink-length rushes, the Garden—and any other arena—has an electric feeling. Bobby starts behind his net. If the opposition forechecks closely, he will weave his way through the traffic. Otherwise he charges out and moves either straight up center ice or down the right wing. He is a sure stickhandler who can control the puck at his fastest speed. "When he goes by my bench," says **Punch Imlach**, "I turn away so I won't have to watch."

Past the blue line, Bobby has two choices. He can try to set up a teammate with a crisp pass or he can stick-handle through the defense. Invariably he makes the right decision. At the completion of his rush **Boston** fans scream as if he were a **Beate** or a **Namath**. Bobby has a hard, low shot from the blue line, and he aims the puck as if through the cross hairs of a gun scope. When goalies do stop him, they find themselves susceptible to rebounds; it is easy to see why **Orr** already has 31 assists this year.

Despite the worshipful atmosphere his artistry creates, **Orr** is a sensible young man—and is one of the five highest-salaried players in the **NHL**. Earning more than \$50,000 a year from hockey, he has invested in a boy's camp in **Orillia, Ontario** and owns a car wash in **Toronto**.

"Money," he says, "I don't like to talk about. I don't know what you make; I don't think you should know what I make."

A bachelor, Bobby lives with Goalie Johnston and Trainer Frosty Forristal in a rented home in Little Nahant, a shoreline suburb about 20 minutes north of the Garden. Bobby dates stewardesses, models, beauty queens (like the girl from **Chatham, Ontario** who waited for him outside the **Detroit Olympia** last week). No doubt he will remain a bachelor for some time to come, "I haven't traveled yet," he says. He introduced one stewardess friend to Johnston, and now he will be at their wedding in June.

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On the ice Orr's travels frequently get him into scrapes, and he has proved to be one of the league's better fighters. He was tested by all the pugilists as a rookie and won more decisions than he lost. "I never had a fight in my life until I came to Boston," Orr said. "Some people think fighting is terrible, but I think the odd scrap—without sticks—is part of the game."

In his early fights Bobby always got in the first punch. He would throw his glove in the face of his opponent; then, while his man was trying to cover himself, Bobby followed with his best right. He has had a running feud with the Rangers' Reggie Fleming. One night Fleming bloodied Bobby's nose. "I was really mad," Bobby said. "I didn't want anyone to see me bleeding, so I kept sniffing, sniffing, sniffing. I don't know if it worked, though."

Orr has decided that Ted Harris, the Canadiens' defenseman, who is the best one-shot puncher in hockey, does not really like him. "We've been at it a few times, nothing serious, really, just the usual," he says, "I don't know what will happen next."

Well, if Bobby ever does experience any unexpected trouble, he can always call for Snoopy. The way the Bruins are playing, though, they will not need any extra help this year—and maybe not for several more years. Bobby Orr is only 20 years old. The Boston reign is just beginning. Snoopy may be a pretty old dog when it ends.

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