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Bobby Mines The Mother Lode

Richer than his most extravagant admirers believed' Boston's vein of Orr is producing a run at the scoring title that is astounding for a defenseman

Mark Mulvoy

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What has gotten into **Bobby Orr**? Already the **National Hockey League's** best defenseman—the alltime best, most people would say—the **Boston Bruins'** superchild entered the new year leading the league in scoring. We can now expect a pitcher who will win a batting championship, a quarterback who will gallop for more yardage than **Gale Sayers** and a guard who will lead the **NBA** in rebounding. Before **Orr**, or B.O., as Bostonians date their ante-Bobby remarks about the Bruins, no defenseman ever led **NHL** scorers after the first few games of the season. Defensemen, after all, are supposed to help keep pucks out of the net, not put them in.

Orr is doing both. He has scored 11 goals and assisted on 45 more for a total of 56 points, seven more than **Phil Goyette** of **St. Louis**, the No. 2 scorer. Altogether, Bobby has been on the ice for 88 of the 131 goals the Bruins have scored—68%. And with the season reaching the halfway mark, **Orr** needs only nine points to establish a new season record for scoring by a defenseman. And consider this: if **Orr** can maintain his pace of 1.5 points per game, he will finish the season with about 115 points. In its 52-year history the **NHL** has had only one 100-point player, **Orr's** teammate **Phil Esposito**, whose 126 just last season was considered phenomenal.

Defensively—and defensemen must be defensemen first—**Orr's** statistics are more impressive than ever, and he has been brilliant, of course, since first skating onto the **Boston Garden** ice in 1966 at age 18. Despite playing about 65% of every game, Bobby has been on the ice for only 42 of the 103 goals the opposition has scored on the Bruins—40%.

Primarily because of **Orr's** class, the Bruins are only four points behind the first-place **New York Rangers** in the East Division. "Considering everything that has happened to us so far," said **Boston Coach Harry Sinden** last week, "I really couldn't be any happier. Second place looks pretty good right now." The Bruins started the year by losing **Teddy Green**, their intimidating All-Star defenseman, went without the fiery mod center, **Derek Sanderson**, for five

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weeks, and are still awaiting Winger Ron Murphy's recovery from a shoulder injury.

What the Bruins would have done without Orr is frightful to contemplate. During the crises he rallied them. "Here's a kid who's only 21 years old," says Boston Goalie Gerry Cheevers, "and he's keeping us all alive and well. He's got to win the Hart Trophy as the most valuable player, the Norris Trophy as the best defenseman and the Vezina Trophy as the best goaltender." Best goaltender? "Yeah," Cheevers said. "Bobby has stopped more shots this year than any goalie in the league."

Such remarks have not brought any displays of temperament or conceit from Orr, although he is probably the No. 1 superstar in his game and the youngest superstar in professional sports. "I'm in my fourth season now," Bobby says, "and I think it's only natural that I've learned some things about people. I'm wiser now, I know that, and I handle situations more assertively than I did last year or the year before that. And don't forget, I'm very lucky."

There are sound reasons why Orr has become more assertive this season. For one thing, he has played almost entirely injury-free, although at the moment his lower lip looks like a piece of raw hamburger. The lip has been sliced open three times in the last two weeks, requiring a total of 28 stitches to keep it closed, even temporarily. However, Bobby has skated without any trouble from his vulnerable knees. "I don't think about them anymore," Bobby says. "Early in the season I went through two players, and they cracked me good. Real good. If the knees didn't go then, they never will."

As a result, Orr has become not only a stronger skater but also a shiftier skater. "Bobby's like O. J. Simpson on skates," says Gary Bergman of the Detroit Red Wings. "He is the fastest and the strongest skater the National Hockey League has ever seen," adds St. Louis Goaltender Jacques Plante. Esposito, not a very graceful skater because of his height, agrees: "If I could skate like Orr I'd be All-Week every week of the year."

Another reason for Orr's new aggressiveness is that he has slightly altered his style of attack. In previous years, instead of shooting the puck or trying to break for the goal himself, he too often would pass the puck to a teammate. "I was always after him to shoot the puck more himself," says Sinden, "but then he'd go out and pass it. He scored his goals, but he could have scored a lot more." This year Orr has become more of a shooter, although not necessarily at the expense of his passing. So far Bobby has taken 195 shots. Only Esposito, a gunner's gunner who spends a lot of time near the goalmouth, has shot more often. Twice Orr has made 11 shots in a game—an extraordinary number. And when Bobby is not shooting he is setting up goals; in a game in which he shot only once, he made four assists.

It has become clear, too, that Orr is the real leader of the Bruins. He does not wear a C for captain or A for assistant captain on his jersey, but there is no doubt among the Bruins that Bobby is the spark. "He hasn't had to say anything to make this leadership thing felt," says Sanderson. "He has an innate quality that doesn't require words."

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