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Mr. O And The Sack Of New York

Bobby Orr of the Bruins left the Rangers in ruins with Stanley Cup play so overwhelming that he resembled a one-man team

Mark Mulvoy

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The big sports question at the **Colonial Country Club** near **Boston** last Friday was this: Would **Bobby Orr** develop a case of the yips at the 17th green, miss his sidehill seven-foot par putt and lose the hole for his team—or would The Kid score again? **Orr** carefully surveyed the putt from behind, noticing that it would break about 12 inches right to left. What Bobby really needed now was his curved hockey stick, not his putter. He walked confidently to the ball and bent over to inspect it, just as the pros always do. Then he picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"That's a three," **Orr** said. "Good three," said **Johnny McKenzie**, one of Bobby's partners in a low-stakes match. **Phil Esposito**, a rival this day, screamed foul. "Since when are seven-footers gimmes?" he yelled at **Orr**, who had started for the next tee. "Cripes, Bobby, just who do you think you are, anyway, **Billy Casper**?"

Orr, who has approximately a 20 handicap, definitely cannot play golf like **Billy Casper**, but then **Casper** cannot play hockey like **Bobby Orr**. Nobody can. It was **Orr**—and **Orr** alone—who rallied the struggling **Boston Bruins** past the scarred **New York Rangers** last week and into the East Division final against the **Chicago Black Hawks**. When the Bruins needed a goal **Orr** either scored one or set one up. When they needed a big defensive play, he blocked a shot or stole the puck or killed time by skating in circles with the disk nailed to the blade of his stick. Bobby played a game that most hockey players are unfamiliar with. Understandably so, because it is unique.

"That **Orr**, he is impossible," said **Rod Gilbert** of the **Rangers**. "Hockey is a team game, right? One man is not supposed to beat a whole team, right? But what else can I say. You saw it. One man beat the **Rangers** in this series."

The Bruins and **Rangers** were tied at two wins apiece when the teams returned to the **Boston Garden** for the fifth game last week. Early in the first period **Orr** skated the length of the ice, split the **New York** defense and beat **Eddie Giacomin** cleanly for a 1-0 lead. After that the **Rangers** checked the Bruins closely and took a 2-1 lead midway through the second period. Soon, however, the complexion of the game—and the series—turned abruptly in **Boston's** favor. **Esposito** was penalized for five minutes when he accidentally cut **New York's Jean Ratelle** with his stick. "I wanted to take a gun and point it at my temple," said **Esposito**.

However, **Orr** nonchalantly played keep-away with the puck for almost three minutes and, in fact, had the two best goal-scoring opportunities during **Esposito's** penalty. Relieved, **Phil** scored early in the third period to tie the game. Moments later he scored the winning goal. **Orr** had the puck in the **Boston** zone, while **Esposito** was retreating slowly from the **New York** end—a stride behind the **Rangers'** defense. Spotting **Esposito**, **Orr** nodded—signaling for **Esposito** to be ready for a pass. Bobby crossed his own blue line and put the puck on **Esposito's** stick as big **Phil** hit the Ranger line. The Ranger defensemen could not react in time and **Giacomin** was beaten again.

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Back in **New York** Thursday night for the sixth game, the clincher, Orr got a goal to tie the score 1-1 early in the second period with an artistic deflection of **McKenzie's** shot from the blue line. Orr initiated the play with a rush up ice. He passed off, then skated for the net. **McKenzie's** shot was low. Orr curled the puck into the hooked part of his blade and pulled it to **Giacomin's** right—and into the goal. "It looked accidental or lucky," Orr said, "but it wasn't. I was in the right place and the puck was in the right place." Two minutes later **Wayne Cashman** got another goal for **Boston**.

The score was still 2-1 at the start of the third period, and the **Rangers**, who were not terribly keen to be eliminated from the series on home ice, were still alive—until Bobby administered the coup d'Orr. **Esposito** won a face-off and slipped the puck to **Ken Hodge**, who passed it back to Orr at the right boards. Bobby slapped at it, and the puck shot toward **Giacomin**. The goalie did not see it until it was behind him. That goal was Bobby's seventh of the series, and it damaged the **Rangers** beyond repair. **Derek Sanderson**, who had been vilified by the **New York** fans throughout the series (page 22), scored for effect a few minutes later.

The last two games of the Boston-New York confrontation were sharply different from the first four, at least down on the ice. Although the teams set a **Stanley Cup** record of 375 penalty minutes in their six games, they limited the rough stuff in the last two to solid, close-checking, hard-hitting positional hockey. Even so, at the end the **Rangers** were depleted by injuries. **Boston**, meanwhile, dispelled the myth that it always won the Pier 6 brawls but lost the hockey games.

As Bobby hacked his way through Friday's golf, he gave some thought to the Bruins' critics. "Look at our lineup," Bobby said. "We're supposed to be the big, bad Bruins. The animals. Well, we don't have one guy on our club who wouldn't be in the **NHL** if he didn't fight. We've got good, solid hockey players, and it's time people recognized that.

"The **Rangers** started as many fights as we did. In that first game in **New York** they came out and told Derek they were going to get him. Then there was the big fight and Derek was kicked out of the game. But I haven't read anything about the big, bad **Rangers**. And all this stuff about how bad the **Boston Garden** is. Look how bad **Madison Square Garden** was. What they did to Derek was incredible. But I knew he'd give it to them at the end, and don't think we all didn't like that."

After finishing his 18 holes of golf Orr drove to the home he rents in Lynnfield, Mass. The houses along the streets reveal that Lynnfield is Orr country. Signs such as "Thanks Bobby" and "Go Bobby" and "Score with Orr" hang from porches and trees. Bobby's neighbors rarely bother him, but local children often ring the doorbell to return his dog, Keoki, even when he is not lost.

Between interruptions Orr tried to find the words for what he does on the ice. "I can't explain it," he said. "In **New York** they all asked me, 'What were you thinking when you started up ice?' and things like that. Hockey is not that type of game. Things happen too fast. We don't have any real planned plays, like in football. I skate up ice and look. I don't know what I'm going to do until it's done. You just adjust to the situation. If the defense is split too wide, I'll try to go through. If the defense is closed tight, I'll pass the puck. But I never know what's going to happen until I get there."

This, of course, creates a hardship for the rival defensemen. "Bobby changes his mind 15 or 20 times when he's skating up the ice," said **Derek Sanderson**. "Imagine what those defensemen must be thinking."

Friday night at dinner Orr was interrupted 17 times for a total of 38 autographs. A busboy who said he was a defenseman for Maiden High stopped his cart at Bobby's table, took his own hockey gloves from the bottom shelf and asked Bobby to sign them. "I've had them here every night," he said. "You came here once, and I thought you'd come again." The organist asked Bobby if she could play his favorite song. He thought for a moment. "**Chicago**," he said, and smiled.

"Two years ago we got into the playoffs," Orr said, "and while we were congratulating ourselves the Canadiens beat us in four straight. Last year the Canadiens beat us in six games. I think all that is behind us. We've been here before—and lost. Now we're ready to win."

On Sunday, in **Chicago**, Orr was routinely magnificent as the Bruins clubbed the Hawks 6-3 in the first game of the East final; he scotched three potential goals when **Gerry Cheevers** scrambled out of the **Boston** net and he assisted on two Bruin goals. **Phil Esposito** scored the hat trick on his brother Tony, the Hawk goalie. That's the new Bruins for you—clean but mean.

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