

BEST OF THE BRUINS by Jonathan Weeks

EXCERPT

BOBBY ORR EXCERPT

Orr did not invent the archetype of the offensive defenseman, but he elevated it to a new level. A masterful skater with unparalleled acceleration, he knew where the puck was at all times and could almost always be found carrying it, pursuing it or redirecting it. Teammate Phil Esposito recalled a game in which the B's were on a penalty kill against the Oakland Seals. Orr took the puck behind the Bruins net and lost a glove in a scuffle with an opponent. Retaining possession of the puck, he skated over the blue line then back into the Bruins zone, where he picked up his glove and killed off a full minute of the penalty. Concluding one of the most astounding sequences Esposito had ever seen, Orr glided into the offensive zone and scored a short-handed goal.

Though Orr's detractors claimed that he was soft on defense, others begged to differ. B's goalie Eddie Johnston, who played with Orr for several seasons, remarked: "They say Bobby doesn't play defense. Heck, he makes a forty-minute hockey game for us. He's got the puck twenty minutes by himself. What better defense is there?" On a similar note, coach Harry Sinden crowed: "You can have all the Bobby Clarkes of the world. I'll take one game from Orr. He'll make thirty moves no one has seen before."

Orr established himself as a cultural icon in the same manner as Joe DiMaggio. More than just a player—he became a hero to the New England masses and a legend to hockey fans outside his primary fan base. His greatest seasons were packed into a relatively short span, but his star burned brightly long after he retired as a player. To the present day, he receives resounding ovations at every public event he takes part in. Interestingly, Orr never basked in the spotlight during his playing days. After Bruins victories, he would often hide in the trainer's room and avoid reporters so that his teammates could receive credit.