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How Getty Photographer Captures Olympic Hockey's Defining Moments

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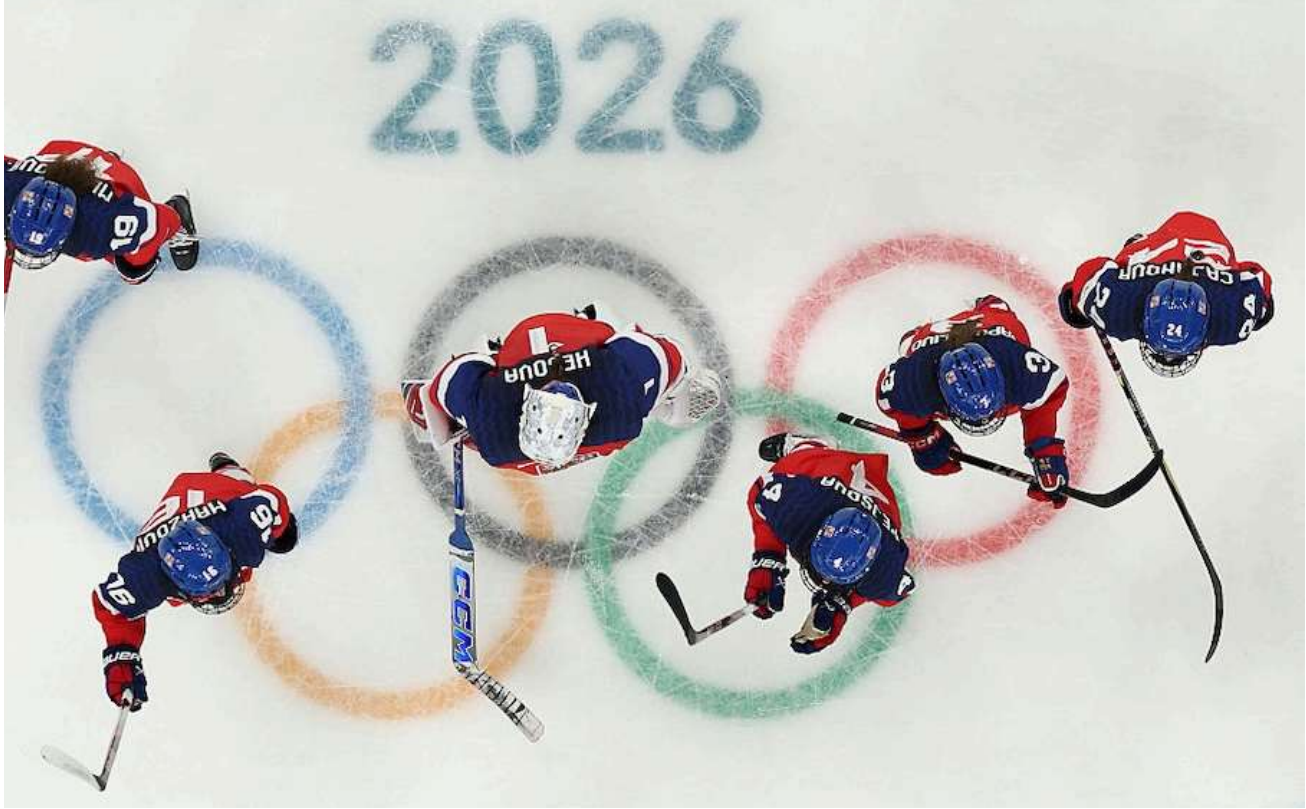
Getty Images' hockey specialist Bruce Bennett has spent five decades framing the sport's most electric split seconds. He shares what it takes to make an image iconic in real time



When the puck drops at the Winter Olympics, Getty Images' Bruce Bennett isn't watching from the stands. He's wedged against the boards, boots planted on ice creeping out beneath the rink, cameras layered around his shoulders, firing 20 to 30 frames per second as elite athletes hurtle past, just feet away.

A self-described frozen-toed "Bruce-icle", Bruce is director of photography, Hockey Imagery at Getty and one of the most experienced ice hockey photographers in the

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comes down to instinct, anticipation and the ability to shut out everything but the play.

With NHL stars back on Olympic ice for the first time since 2014, attention on the sport has intensified – and so has the pressure to capture the moment that defines these Games. Here, Bruce reflects on spending five decades at the rink, the physical and creative demands of Olympic hockey, and how truly iconic sports images are made.

LBB> What was your journey to becoming a hockey-specific photographer and eventually ending up as director of photography, Hockey Imagery for Getty Images?

Bruce> I got my start in hockey photography shooting NHL games at Madison Square Garden and Nassau Coliseum in 1974. Two years later, in 1976, I shot my first Stanley Cup final in Philadelphia when the Montreal Canadiens defeated the Philadelphia Flyers. Since then I've covered over 6,000 hockey games and 45 Stanley Cup-deciding games, and have served as the team photographer for the New York Islanders, New Jersey Devils, Philadelphia Flyers and New York Rangers. I've also photographed six Winter Olympic Games, 33 All-Star Games, and over 470 international hockey games. I ran a photography company, Bruce Bennett Studios, which by 2004 had amassed a library of over two million hockey images dating back to 1900. This content included a mix of acquired hockey collections and production of new photography. The studios was acquired by Getty Images in September 2004, which is how I joined the company as director of photography, Hockey Imagery.

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LBB> How much does photographing ice hockey differ from shooting other sports or subjects?

Bruce> I have been working as an ice hockey specialist my entire career, so I can only speak to my experience covering the sport. A lot of the creative decisions I take on shoot angles, positioning and remote camera placement – such as net cams behind the goals – comes from many years of trial and error. Saying that, all sports competitions are linked by many of the same characteristics, so sometimes I draw inspiration from what my peers are doing in other sports. Some ideas could also work for ice hockey, or at least lead me in a direction that I haven't thought of previously.

LBB> You're often shooting Olympic ice hockey rinkside, what's it actually like working in those conditions?

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Bruce> I've had a long career working rink-side indoors, where it can be a bit brisk and your feet linger a bit too long on the ice that creeps out under the boards in our photo positions. Each venue, whether indoors or outdoors, presents different challenges. At NHL rinks, the temperature usually hovers around 16°C. But at the Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena – the ice hockey venue for the 2026 Winter Olympics – heat seems not to be an option, as is typical in most European ice hockey rinks.

Although there are seats at the arena in Milan, I prefer to stand as I have much better control of the camera. Hockey arena cold is a very different kind of cold as up in the mountains, but standing for hours in a cold arena while juggling cameras to have the right lens at the right time is just as demanding physically. And the physical demands do build up over the years and take a toll on your body.

LBB> What qualities do you think make a great hockey photographer?

Bruce> To be successful in hockey photography, you need to have a strong knowledge of the sport. You need to be flexible and keep an even keel. Sometimes you are working from challenging photo positions which make it less than ideal to create decent images.

It's important to remember that it's about you and the game. You need to hone your ability to shut out distractions. You need to be constantly learning to advance your career. As the sport evolves, you may need to change how you shoot – for example, choosing lenses or photo positions.

LBB> How do you prepare to shoot the Olympic games? How much of your prep is planned versus reactive?

Bruce> There is no single way to prepare or shoot. I'm shooting 20 or 30 frames per second, so I have to expect the unexpected. In highly unpredictable situations, such

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leaning on the shutter button increases your chances of success. This approach helps me mitigate any potential issues, which can be as simple as the camera falling out of focus, or having players, limbs, sticks or game officials blocking the shot.

Timing and anticipation is everything. Over the years, I've learnt to trust my instincts – deciding when I need to be flexible and when I need to commit to the exact moment. I also need to keep in mind that every frame that I shoot is then sent to our remote editing team before it goes up on our website. Taking a spray and pray approach to capturing big match moments, such as at the Olympic Games, isn't helpful. The editors working on getting that image ready to distribute to the world will pay the price by wasting a lot of time on the editing process.

LBB> What makes an Olympic image iconic? Do you know in the

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Bruce> I believe that outside forces dictate whether an image is deemed iconic. There are some great photos that we as photographers have captured that are sometimes lost. But a photo that goes viral, for one reason or another, can catapult its status and viewership to audiences across the globe.

For an Olympic image to be iconic, it needs to be well executed and embody the core principles of the Games. This can be any image that shows unity, promoting fair play and assisting in mutual understanding. Generally speaking, it's about the photograph evoking emotion, whether that's showing the unbridled joy of a medal victory, a crushing defeat, or a view of sportsmanship which forms a large part of the Olympic experience. And sometimes that image needs an extra push by the media for it to become iconic.

LBB> What have been the biggest challenges shooting this year's Winter Olympics so far?

Bruce> The challenges are similar at each Games. In general, travelling to and from venues with all our gear, as well the distance between each venue can be taxing. In the rink, shooting images through Plexiglas is extremely tough. In the NHL, we have 4" x 5" cutouts for our lenses, but at Olympic venues, there's simply too many outlets to provide each photographer with a cutout. A lot of images, especially if they're from the father end of the ice, simply cannot be saved.

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