



INTERVIEW WITH NHL PHOTOGRAPHER BRUCE BENNETT: ON COVERING OLYMPICS, NHL, AND 50+ YEARS OF SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

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Few photographers can say they've documented professional sports for more than five decades. NHL photographer and Director of Hockey Photography, Getty Images, **Bruce Bennett** is one of them. With over 50 years behind the lens, and seven Olympic Winter Games covering ice hockey, his career spans the transition from film to digital, manual focus to autofocus, and rinkside to remote robotic cameras in the rafters.

It was a true honor to talk to Bruce about what it really takes to photograph hockey at the highest level. In this interview, he shares the key differences between shooting the NHL and the Olympic Games, how his workflow has evolved, and what keeps him chasing the perfect frame after all these years.

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DIYP: How does shooting the NHL differ from capturing hockey at the Olympics? What has been new or different about this year's games? How large is the team onsite and how do you determine who will shoot what?

Many people likely aren't aware of this, but at an NHL game, the glass has 4" x 5" openings that help photographers to capture clear, unobstructed photos. While we hockey photographers often complain about how small those openings are, we certainly miss them when it comes time to work the Winter Olympics, because there are no openings at all. Even when freshly cleaned, the plexiglass inevitably creates a fair amount of distortion and loss of clarity while shooting. Fortunately, Getty Images has more than 20 live-editors, working in real time, doing an incredible job cleaning up the messy shots, and ensuring the most pivotal moments are distributed for the world to see almost immediately, even outpacing television replays.

We have a team of 100-plus (photographers, editors and operations staff) spread across Northern Italy, with a core group of us in the Milano cluster covering ice hockey, figure skating, speed skating and short track. I am leading the team covering the women and men's ice hockey competition, ensuring we have all angles covered and are prepared to pivot and adapt as the competition goes on. It's been exciting to have fans back at these Winter Games and also to have NHL players back at the Olympics since 2014.



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DIYP: Your galleries are filled equally with action-packed photos and quiet, intimate moments behind the scenes or even on the field of play. Do you find it hard to balance your creativity and portrait photography approach with the demands of editorial sports photography? Is there a particular photo from [the Olympic Games in Cortina-Milano](#) that sticks out to you as striking a good balance between these?

We always want to ensure we're getting the right balance of shots to ensure we have a breadth of coverage available, which can be challenging to navigate on a game-by-game basis. Preparation for events of this magnitude is a years-long process for Getty Images and then many hours, days and weeks for 60+ photographers like myself leading up to game time.

Our job isn't to only capture the action, but to also make sure we're securing stock-like images of individual players. Part of the planning is knowing who we need to capture, as well as the relationships between players that could lead to interesting interactions. We like to prioritize some of those stock images in preliminary games, so we can focus on the action during the biggest competitions. The team at Getty Images sees immense value in capturing images with creative flair; so as photographers we have full license to use our artistic eye to find unique angles and compositions, which allows us to build a well-rounded collection from each game.

Beyond that, concentration is key. Covering 29 games in 18 days can be mentally taxing. I have to balance the obligation of fulfilling image requests with intense concentration to capture every important moment when near the ice. Getting that balance 100% right is nearly impossible, but when the game is complete and I walk away satisfied, I feel an unmatched blend of accomplishment and relief. Then again, I am rarely satisfied, and that either makes me a really [good photographer](#) or just one unhappy human being.

An example of an image with “balance” would be a warm-up shot where we are tight on the Olympic logo on the ice, and a skater passes over it; due to the slow [shutter speed](#), the skater appears blurry, so much that it’s impossible to pinpoint which team they’re on. While this image can feel a bit more “generic,” the ambiguity works to its advantage, making it versatile while still highlighting the Olympics and exhibiting an artistic touch. It’s simple, creative and serves an important purpose.



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DIYP: You've been in sports photography for 50+ years. That's an impressive career and you've witnessed decades of changing technology. Which transitions had the biggest impact on how you work? Was it film to digital, or something else? What innovative camera technology are you using most often to capture unique hockey images? Is there any particular equipment or types of cameras that have been pivotal to your success at the Olympics?

Across that time span, the biggest change **was going from film to digital**. Ultimately, changes from that shift are ongoing. Once upon a time, 36 exposures for one fast-paced game made you feel trapped. Now, you can burn through 36 exposures in a second! Being able to immediately see what you shot is an incredible gift that I do take for granted.

The continued success of our Olympic Hockey coverage is due in no small part to our use of remote cameras placed around the arena. On any given night, we might have a camera in the net, on the goal light stanchion, and even three [robotic cameras](#) that are up on a truss just under the rafters. With these placements, we have protection and insurance when something exciting happens out of our handheld photographers' reach.

The cameras in the rafters can be triggered by the photographers in the arena or by a technician/photographer upstairs in the press tribune. Those team members are able to move the camera around, change exposure, click for the photo – whatever they need to capture the big play.

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DIYP: I always have a question for our gearheads: what's the piece of gear you rely on without exception? Your go-to lens and/or lens-camera combo? How does your typical gear pack change for a big event like the Olympics?

On a game-by-game basis, my typical equipment choices include Canon R5ii bodies and an old-style 28-300 mm lens. While at the Milano-Cortina Olympics, I have to

switch up my usual kit, since I'm in a different photo position than I'm used to, and as I mentioned earlier, I have to shoot through the glass. Here, I am using a 24-105mm f/2.8 lens on one camera and a 70-200 f/2.8 with a 1.4 adapter on a second body. In front of me on a ledge is another body with a 15mm f/2.8 Canon. The 28-300 can be rough with focusing and clarity when shooting through a hole and certainly is a disadvantage when shooting through the glass.

DIYP: How many photos are you taking each game? In one day? What makes a compelling hockey photo from the Olympic Games? What are you looking for in your coverage?

For these Olympic Games, I have increased my frame per second from 20 to 30m which allows me to average 4,000 to 5,000 images per game – multiply that across 20 games in seven days. The remote cameras are typically snapping around 1,500 per game. The Getty Images team as a whole will produce well over 6 million images across the Olympics from the opening ceremony to the closing ceremony.

I am responsible for tagging and sending images to our remote editing team based in London during each play stoppage and TV timeout. This ensures the priority moments are available on our website in under 30 seconds. We're actually tethered to an ethernet cord from our photo positions, so we can quickly scroll back through everything we've shot and push a button to transmit. Funnily enough, I have no fingerprint anymore on my scrolling thumb.

What I'm looking for during our coverage of the Olympics is the same thing I look for in everyday sports photography: celebrations and dejection in the same frame. That dichotomy can tell the whole story of a game in a single image.

DIYP: In fast-paced photography like sports or concerts, it happens that we just barely slip [the perfect moment](#). Is there a moment you almost captured that you still think about? Is there one you think back on that you're still amazed you were able to capture?

It's unrealistic to think that you'll capture everything that seems to be in your grasp during a [sporting event](#). There is simply too much happening to expect that you can get every single moment. I am wired to dwell on the misses, but those perfectly captured moments are a thrill.

During these Games, there was a moment where a goalie made what's called a scorpion save, but it was at the other end of the ice. I didn't see it or even know about it until a client asked if we had the shot. Among 8,000 shots, it would be tough to know if we had managed to capture it. So, I downloaded the images from the rafter remote, and there it was! We had exactly what they were looking for. There is a lot of guesswork involved when you're trying to visualize an area of the arena that you can't directly see, so I could've easily missed triggering the remote camera. But I did trigger it, and we got the shot!



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DIYP: During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sports and otherwise, were challenging to shoot. Knowing that you photographed the 2022 Winter Games when lockdowns and limited audiences were still in place, what was the biggest challenge of working to capture those games? Was it more difficult technically, logistically, or emotionally – or all of those equally?

There were fewer attendees, photographers and members of the media in attendance so it made some aspects of the job easier in terms of setting up, moving around venues and concentrating on shooting. There were new challenges though like trying to communicate through masks, but also standard struggles like transportation and getting around which, as you can imagine, is complex for any event of this nature & size. All-in-all, it was a unique experience, but it's definitely nice to have fans, as well as NHL players back this time, driving the energy, interest and excitement up throughout the competition.

DIYP: Is there a sport you've never photographed but wish you could? Is there a dream Winter Olympics game you haven't had a chance to shoot yet, but want to?

That's a good question. There are actually no other sports I wish to photograph. I always said I was Getty Images 'one-trick pony' and that sits well with me. However, I always loved photographing surfing, and we get very little of that on Long Island, New York, where I live. I hope to go back to Hawaii and photograph big wave surfing someday. Milan marks my seventh time photographing ice hockey at the Olympics and I love it. Although, I would go back to 1980 and photograph The Miracle On Ice USA hockey victory in Lake Placid if I could. Is that an option?

DIYP: If you could give one piece of advice to new sports photographers trying to make their mark today, what would it be?