

Dave Stubbs: Iconic Gainey, Lafleur photos featured among legendary shooter Bruce Bennett's greatest hits



DAVE STUBBS, MONTREAL GAZETTE

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Future Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin, here in Julius Caesar garb as coach of the Primus Worldstars during the 2004-05 NHL lockout, prepares his team for their game against the Norwegian All-Stars on Dec. 21, 2004, at the Oslo Spektrum in Oslo, Norway. Bergevin's Worldstars won the game 7-5. *BRUCE BENNETT / GETTY IMAGES*

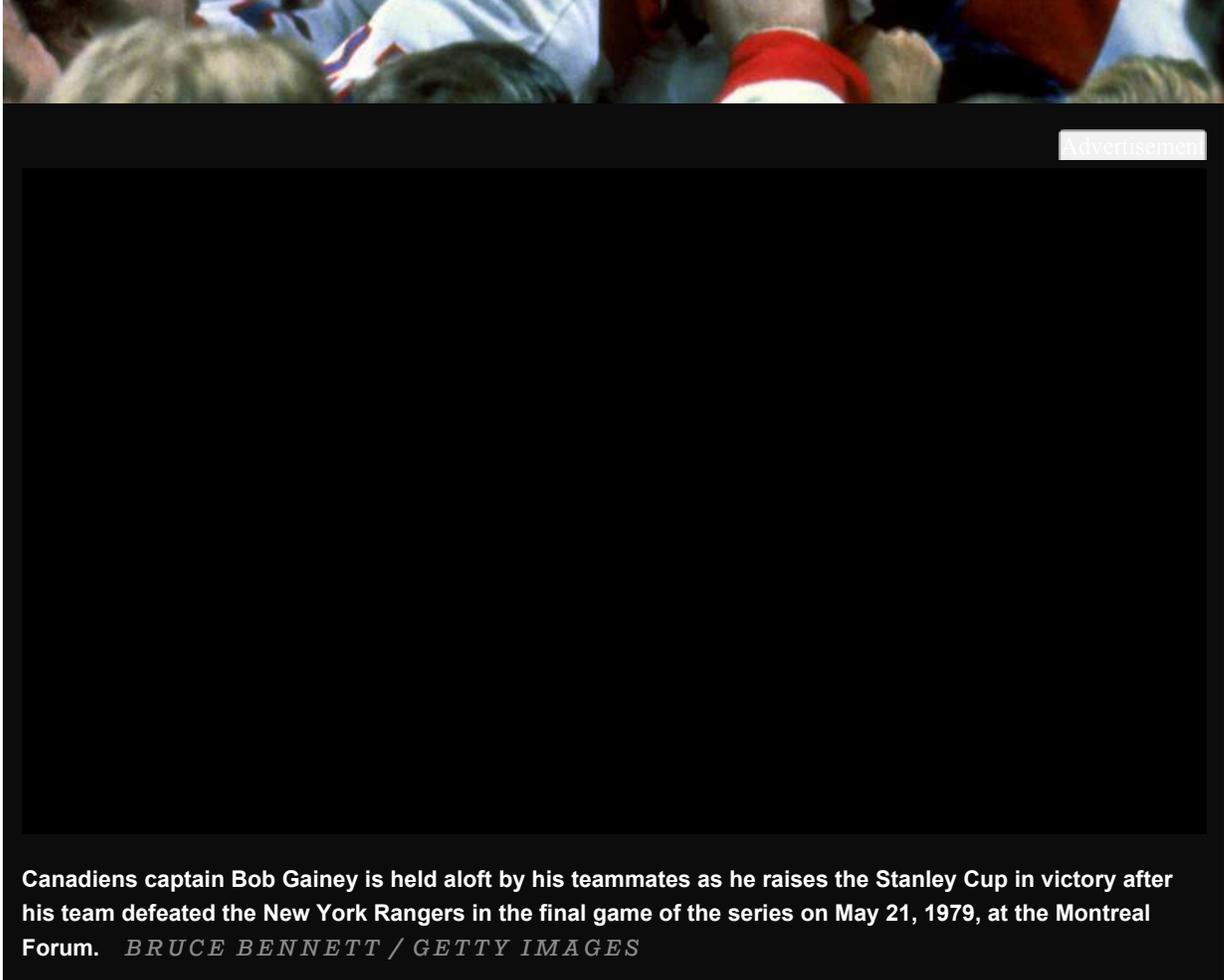
One of acclaimed hockey photographer Bruce Bennett's most iconic images, a May 21, 1979, shot of Canadiens captain Bob Gainey pressing the Stanley Cup overhead, does not appear on the cover of his own bestselling new book.

That's because, at least in part, another author beat him to it three years ago.

"It's quite possible that shot would have been my cover photo if it hadn't been the cover of Stanley Cup," Bennett said Saturday on the cover of Eric Zweig's 2012 Hockey Hall of Fame-licensed history of the game's greatest trophy.

In the end, Bennett had one less image from his portfolio of 2 million photos from which to choose for the cover of *Hockey's Greatest Photos: The Bruce Bennett Collection*, and its companion French edition, *40 Ans de Hockey en Images* (The Hockey News, \$39.95).





Canadiens captain Bob Gainey is held aloft by his teammates as he raises the Stanley Cup in victory after his team defeated the New York Rangers in the final game of the series on May 21, 1979, at the Montreal Forum. *BRUCE BENNETT / GETTY IMAGES*

A moody, black-and-white 1979 dressing-room shot of Wayne Gretzky, stripped of his World Hockey Association Edmonton Oilers jersey, is on the cover of the English book; a boisterous Canadiens goalie Patrick Roy, hoisting the 1986 Stanley Cup in Calgary, is featured on the French version.

Bennett's enormous catalogue cannot be defined by a single image. Indeed, the native New Yorker has a staggering body of work, having begun in hockey photography as a naïve — his word — 18-year-old in 1973-74, shooting from the balcony of Madison Square Garden and selling images for \$4 each to Ken McKenzie, publisher of then Montreal-based *The Hockey News*.

"They were really bad photos," Bennett said with a laugh. "But Ken asked me in a letter, which I still have: 'Can you get into the games on your own, or do you need a press pass?' I opted for the press pass."

Countless press passes and 2 million pictures later, Bennett is still shooting, using his two camera bodies, a fish eye lens and a 28mm-300mm zoom to take roughly 1,000 images per game.

He'll edit his work during play stoppages and file wirelessly to Getty, for syndicated deadline and archival media use, and to Twitter.

If there is a single Bennett shot that might be his signature, look to the 1979 Gainey image. With its interesting backstory, this surely is a photo that's familiar to countless hockey fans who likely don't know it was this man, five years into his career, who snapped it almost by accident.

The photo appears on Page 253 of Bennett's English book, three pages from the back, a perfect endpiece to a gallery of remarkable, dramatic, often emotional moments he's frozen during four decades of shooting hockey.

Bennett twice tried to get onto Montreal Forum ice after the Canadiens' Game 5 win over the New York Rangers, which had given the Habs their 22nd Stanley Cup. Stopped by security, he wound up standing on a chair, braced by a couple of fans, shooting over the low Forum glass to freeze Gainey from behind, the Cup overhead, with hands of teammates, including those of defenceman Larry Robinson, visible lower left, supporting their captain.

If shooting a scene from behind — with Robinson's almost obscured profile the only face in it — doesn't seem like a recipe for success, this image became one of Bennett's best-selling photos ever.

"It shows the glory of winning the Stanley Cup and how it's a team effort, with all the hands holding Gainey up," Bennett writes in the book. "It became a symbol for the team sport that hockey is."





Canadiens forward Guy Lafleur is spectacularly dumped by New York Islanders defenceman Denis Potvin at Nassau Coliseum in 1983. *BRUCE BENNETT / GETTY IMAGES*

Bennett photographed the first of his 35 Stanley Cup finals in 1976, the Canadiens stunning the Philadelphia Flyers in four straight. His resumé includes 26 NHL all-star games, 375-plus international games, including four Winter Olympics, and now more than 5,100 games.

After selling his enormous archive to the international Getty Images agency in 2004, Bennett signed on with the company as a staff photographer, his name by then on an illustrious list of gifted hockey shooters through the decades.

In Montreal, James Rice was the Canadiens' first official shooter almost from the birth of the team. He was followed by the legendary David Bier, who shot the Habs for 45 years and 18 Stanley Cups, then two greats in Denis Brodeur and Bob Fisher.

In Toronto, brothers Lou and Nat Turofsky were doing brilliant work at Maple Leaf Gardens from the 1920s through the '50s, Harold Barkley subsequently pioneering the use of flash photography, his strobes bolted to the top of the glass in the rink corners, to revolutionize what was being shot for glossy hockey and newspaper-insert magazines.

During his four decades, Bennett has moved from rolls of film to digital photography, streamlining the process. And just as well.

"Newspapers used to have a 10 or 11 p.m. deadline," he said. "Now, basically there's a deadline every minute. Websites need to be fed immediately. The immediacy of the entire industry, brought on by Internet needs, has really changed our workflow tremendously through the years."

Bennett speaks affectionately of another Canadiens-related photo in his book, among the shots of Roy, two of Ken Dryden and another of Yvan Cournoyer. It's a 1983 black-and-white shot of Guy Lafleur essentially standing on his face, his skates where his head should be, after having been hip-checked by New York Islanders defenceman Denis Potvin.

The image was the only frame in a series of five motor-driven images, shot on film, that he said was workable.

Bennett cherishes memories of working with and talking shop in Montreal with Bier and then Brodeur, whose son, New Jersey Devils goaltending legend Martin Brodeur, has written a foreword in both books, alongside Gretzky's tribute.

"I always loved (Bier) personally and professionally," Bennett said of the photographer who covered the Canadiens dynasties from the 1950s through the '70s. "I loved coming to Montreal and sitting with him at a little café after games to talk about the industry.

"But No. 1 in my heart and my memory is Denis Brodeur. You need only look through his books to gain an appreciation for his sense of timing."

Shooting a Canada Cup tournament in the Montreal Forum, Bennett one night was loaned use of Brodeur's ceiling-installed strobe lights. He quickly learned it took the strobes 12 seconds to recycle between shots — shoot a single frame, wait 12 seconds, shoot again, wait 12 seconds.

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"In hockey time, that's an eternity," Bennett said. "For Denis to be such a prolific shooter, photographing only 30 to 40 games a year and to come up with so many great moments, proves what a truly great photographer he was."

Bennett's book — he winces at its bold title, which was insisted upon by his publisher — features 250 of his finest photos. There are exquisite action shots, candid dressing-room images, portraits, penalty-box shots and frames taken away from the rink of some of the game's greatest players and coaches.

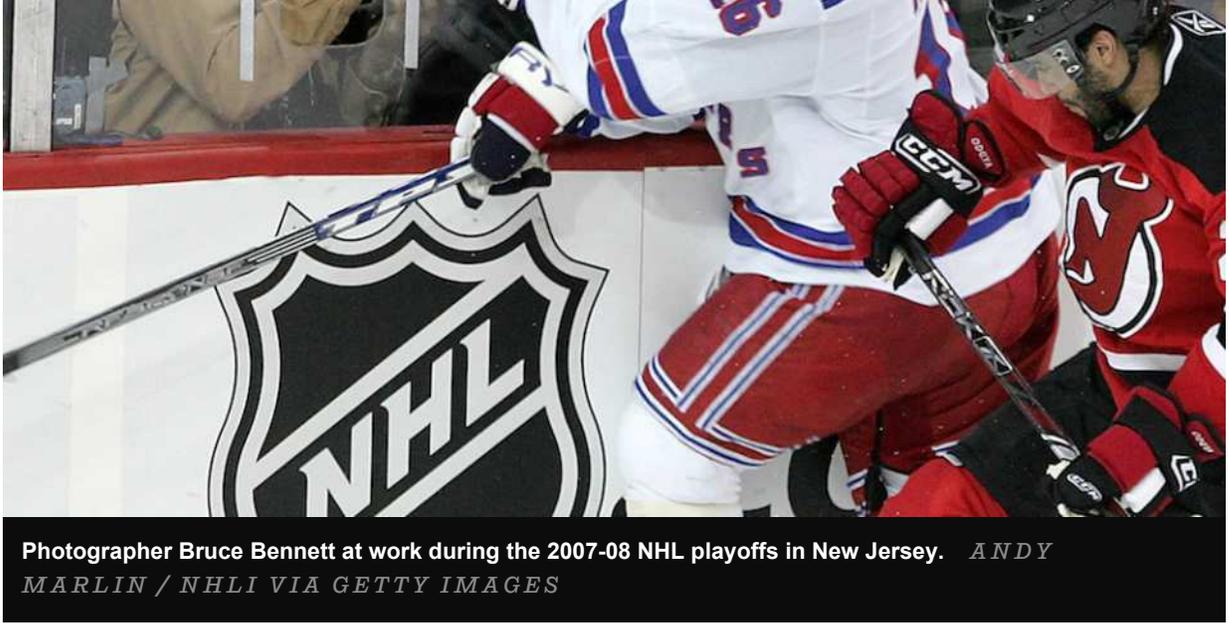
Now 60, Bennett is uncertain how long he'll be hauling his kit to arenas, pressed up to holes in corner glass to shoot the mayhem and the beauty of the game he's forever loved.

"It's still fun," he said. "A golfer will always tell you it's that one shot in a round that brings him back to play the next day. With hockey photography, it's exactly the same thing: you think about the next game and you come back because you never know when you're going to get a stunning shot."

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Photographer Bruce Bennett at work during the 2007-08 NHL playoffs in New Jersey. *ANDY MARLIN / NHLI VIA GETTY IMAGES*

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