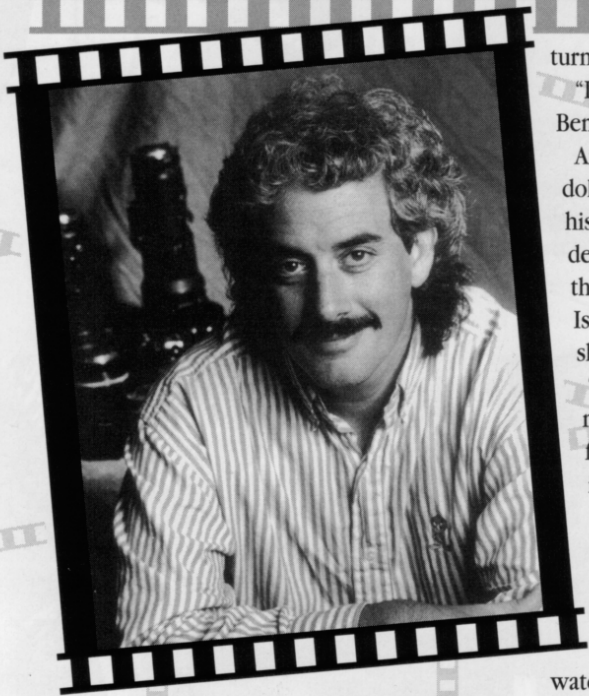


From Levittown, the World's Most Prolific Hockey Photographer

Bruce Bennett and his camera have been rinkside at the Coliseum for 24 seasons

by Alan Hahn



In some ways, Bruce Bennett can be considered an original Islander. He was here in 1972, sneaking around Nassau Coliseum with his camera, watching and cheering on the new NHL hockey team on Long Island.

At the same time he, too, was trying to build a winner.

"I grew up a Ranger fan until the Islanders began," Bennett said. "Being from Long Island, I'm an Islander fan born and bred."

After two decades of photographing some of the greatest moments in hockey history, Bruce Bennett Studios, Inc. has become the world's largest provider of professional hockey photographs. Many of those moments came right here at Nassau Coliseum, fifteen minutes from where he grew up in Levittown.

"The Stanley Cup in 1980 is the best," Bennett said. "I have a shot of Bobby Nystrom in the air after scoring the goal."

Bruce Bennett Studios—now down the block from Cantiague Park in Hicksville—has shot 18 Stanley Cup-winning games, including all four Islander victories. They have been at almost 3,000 NHL games (pre-season through playoffs) and have had over 47,000 hockey photographs in print.

Probably the most recognized photo of them all was the Time Magazine cover shot of Wayne Gretzky's record-breaking 77th goal in 1981. Bennett caught the puck just as it was crossing the goal line, with Gretzky's back

turned and coiled for celebration.

"It wasn't that it was so much the shot," Bennett said. "It was the moment."

An avid hockey fan, Bennett earned three dollars per photo from The Hockey News in his first job at the age of 18. As a college student at C.W. Post, Bennett took classes during the day and then traveled between Long Island, New York City and Philadelphia to shoot games.

"1974 was the first year I actually made money," Bennett said. "In 1980 I hired my first assistant." Today, Bruce Bennett Studios is 15 employees strong, yet Bennett still personally shoots about 140 hockey games a year.

"I've always loved hockey," Bennett said. "I'm just a fan."

As all fans have favorite players to watch, Bennett's favorite player to shoot was former Islander John Tonelli.

"He was always great," Bennett said. "He was always moving, his arms and legs were always in exaggerated positions. He showed a lot of emotion. You could tell he was always in the game."

His first cover photo came after the 1976 Stanley Cup Final in Philadelphia, where his photo of Montreal's Yvan Cournoyer holding the Stanley Cup made the front page of The Hockey News.

"I drove home, processed the film and took it to the airport so it would get to the magazine in time," said Bennett. "It's always fun. I still get a kick out of scoring a cover."

Today, Bennett lists Pittsburgh's Mario Lemieux and Boston's Cam Neely as his favorite players to photograph, along with Zigmund Palfy.

"Palfy is good to photograph because of his skating style and the way he controls his body," Bennett said. "The balance of the shot is good."

But shooting hockey games is a lot harder in the modern-day NHL. "In the old days, we used to be at center ice with no glass in front of us," Bennett said. "From there, you could see the entire ice."

Today, Bennett takes a seat near the Islanders' entrance to the left of the goal. "When you're down this low, you can sense the speed of this game," he said.

Bennett has had photos published in almost every major publication, including Sports Illustrated, Life, Time, People, Us, the Sporting News and Newsweek. He is currently affiliated with six different world-wide hockey publications, including The Hockey News, Hockey Illustrated and Rinkside. His photos also appear with five of the top six trading card distributors in the world: Fleer, Donruss, Topps, Parkers and Score/Pinnacle. He is also the team photographer for the Islanders, New York Rangers and the Philadelphia Flyers.

Not bad for a kid from Long Island.

Now, Bruce Bennett Studios of Hicksville, Long Island, is a major corporation in the sports photography world. But things haven't changed much for Bennett.

"If there's a game," he said. "I'll be there."



Bennett and staff outside of his studio in Hicksville