

# The Gretzky trade and the hobby

While Wayne Gretzky's trade to the St. Louis Blues was one of the most anticipated trades to ever take place in hockey, the trade did send some collectors and insiders in the sports card and memorabilia industry into a frenzy.

One of the men caught in the middle of the frenzy was Bruce Bennett of Bruce Bennett Studios in New York.

Bennett, one of hockey's top photographers, supplies many magazines and card companies with photos. He went out to Vancouver to shoot Gretzky's first game as a member of the St. Louis Blues.

"It was a hectic week," explained Bennett. "There were immediate demands for Gretzky photos. I went to the first game, primarily for *The Hockey News*, but within 48 hours we had serviced the demands of three card companies, three other licensees and a handful of other publications, including *Canadian Sportscard Collector* and *Les Héros du Hockey*.

"I shot the first and second period of the game in Vancouver, and I had to leave halfway through the third to catch a cab to the airport. I took a plane to Toronto where I had my film processed, and by noon the next day, *The Hockey News* had their images."

How would Bruce Bennett possibly be able to service all the requests for Gretzky photos?

"In a little more than two periods," he said, "we got 180 shots of him. We were sitting on a mound of requests, so we knew we had to get as many shots of him as we could."

Among the clients that Bennett serviced was Fleeer/SkyBox International, who were able to squeeze Gretzky into their Ultra Extra card set that was released in late March. Having Gretzky as a St. Louis Blue was a major priority for the company once the trade took place.

"We had to do everything we could to include him in this set," said Fleeer spokesman Rich Bradley. "From a business standpoint, having the first card of Gretzky in a St. Louis uniform will certainly attract a lot of collectors and fans. Gretzky is easily the top player in the hockey collectibles market, and just the fact that he will appear on cards in a new uniform will give the hobby a bit of a lift, especially for the late season product that he will be included in."

Card companies are not the only licensees that will benefit from the trade. Sporting goods manufacturers have reported an immediate demand for St. Louis Blues merchandise, particularly game and replica jerseys with number 99 and "Gretzky" on the backs of the sweaters.

"Obviously, there is going to be a whole new barrage of memorabilia and merchandising that goes on," said Gretzky. "This is a capitalistic country. If I am going to be successful, the Blues are going to be successful, and individual store owners will be more profitable. I think everybody is going to win in this case." □

