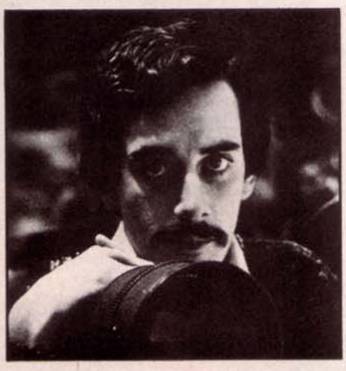
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU WANT TO BE A HOCKEY PHOTOGRAPHER WHEN YOU GROW UP?

BY BRUCE BENNETT



Fighting frostbite and fumbling with f-stops, fans who shoot hockey can't just focus and click. Here's a pro's guide to a more productive season.

A veritable veteran of the ice wars, Bruce Bennett has been shooting hockey for more than seven years. He has published about 4000 hockey pictures, including more than a few in GOAL. Here he shares some thoughts on the do's and dont's (and maybes) of the game.

AT THIS POINT YOUR GOAL magazine collection is probably nothing more than a ragged stack of magazines pockmarked by holes where some very good pictures once appeared. Chances are these photos are now hanging on your den wall.

Wouldn't it be a bit more exciting taking those pictures yourself—Guy Lafleur stickhandling up ice, the Great Gretzky slapping the puck past the goaltender? Experts say that hockey is the toughest sport to photograph, so pay attention and we'll take you through the basics step-by-step.

Selecting a camera is no simple task. The best and most versatile type of camera would be a 35mm SLR (single-lens reflex). This means that the camera will allow for the use of interchangeable lenses, preferably of the longer variety. The other type of camera, the rangefinder, will allow for only one degree of magnification that won't be sufficient for zeroing in on your favorite players. There are many reasonably priced camera models made by Canon, Nikon, Minolta, Olympus, and many more. The cameras range from $150 to $400 and most will adequately cover your needs.

Most professionals use Canon or Nikon cameras such as the Canon A1 or F1 models, and the Nikon F2 or FM. Most pros also equip their cameras with motor drives which shoot between three and six frames per second.

Motor drives probably are the most useful camera accessory for the sports photographer. They allow you to shoot sequences, and to shoot continuously without taking your eye off the action. Hockey players move so quickly, and the plays are so hard to anticipate that a motor drive is needed just to capture the players moving with the puck.

The most important piece of camera hardware is the lens. Even if your camera is a lower priced model, if the lens is top-quality, your pictures will be sharp and clear.

Most pros use either a 200mm or 300mm lens made either by the camera manufacturers or independent lens makers such as Vivitar or Soligor. Nikon produces a 180mm f/2.8 lens as well as a 300mm f/2.8 and 300mm f/4.5. Canon produces a 200mm f/2.8, 300mm f/4 and a 300mm f/2.8. We'll compare the differences between the two 300mm lenses later.

You can also use zoom lenses but these are not ideal because their maximum lens opening is too small for most dimly lit arenas.

FILM

For black & white shooting you should use high speed ASA 400 film such as Kodak Tri-X or Ilford HP-5. Most pros push-process the film by exposing at ASA 1600, thereby gaining a film speed increase of 200%. This enables the photographer to either freeze the action more effectively, or increase depth-of-field by closing the lens another F-stop or two.

If you process your own black and white film you can use your normal developer at double the ASA 400 time to achieve the proper negative density when shooting at ASA-1600. The disadvantage of pushing the film to 1600 is a large increase in grain, however there are several specialty developers on the market that will limit grain clumping. These include Rodinal, Edwal FG-7, UFG, and Acufine, the most widely used push-processing developer.

Most publications use color transparencies for reproduction, so photographers who shoot for a living use Kodak High-Speed Ektachrome film either 'daylight' or 'tungsten' variety. These color films can be push-processed one F-stop by Kodak, or your local color lab can push the film even further. But the more you push, the heavier the grain.

Most NHL arenas are lit either with either Carbon-arc and Mercury vapor lights, or with tungsten lamps. Many newer arenas such as the Nassau Coliseum and the Hartford Civic Center are 'daylight' balanced with carbon-arc lamps. In arenas such as these, you can use Ektachrome 400 film, and if the light is too weak or your lenses maximum opening insufficient, you can push the film to ASA 800.

Arenas such as the Philadelphia Spectrum and Madison Square Garden are tungsten illuminated and require the use of Ektachrome Tungsten ASA 160, which can be shot and processed at ASA 320 or higher if necessary. To find out what the lighting is in your arena you might ask the team's public relations office, or a local newspaper photo department. If you shoot daylight

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remember that the corners are usually darker than the rest of the ice.

5. With a motor drive you can capture sequences that tell a story on film, such as an attack on net, a game winning goal, or a team's power play strategy.

6. Try to get in as tight as possible on the action, eliminating wasted space on your film. The closer in, the more dramatic your shot is likely to be.

7. If your camera will allow it, shoot multiple exposures on the same piece of film. A good idea for this would be a close-up shot of a player combined with the same player in action.

And a few absolute don'ts:

1. Hide in Barry Beck's uniform and, as he prepares to level an opponent, pop out of his jersey and yell "Cheese!"

2. Place yourself in the net and with a motor-drive equipped camera, start shooting as Guy Lafleur starts his break-away. Don't flinch!

3. Suspend yourself from the rafters for a different angle on the action.

4. Yell "SMILE" to Tiger Williams.

5. Scream "Get out of my way bub," to linesman John D'Amico.

The professional hockey photographers that you will notice near the ice can be identified in several ways. They're usually the guys with the scars from the errant pucks and sticks, and they're the ones picking ice cream covers and popcorn out of their hair. Here's a brief description of the working photographers:

Newspaper Photographers—The acrobat of the photo-journalistic world. Three or four cameras with motor drives dangle from his arms and shoulders. All are equipped with lenses to shoot to zero in on the action.

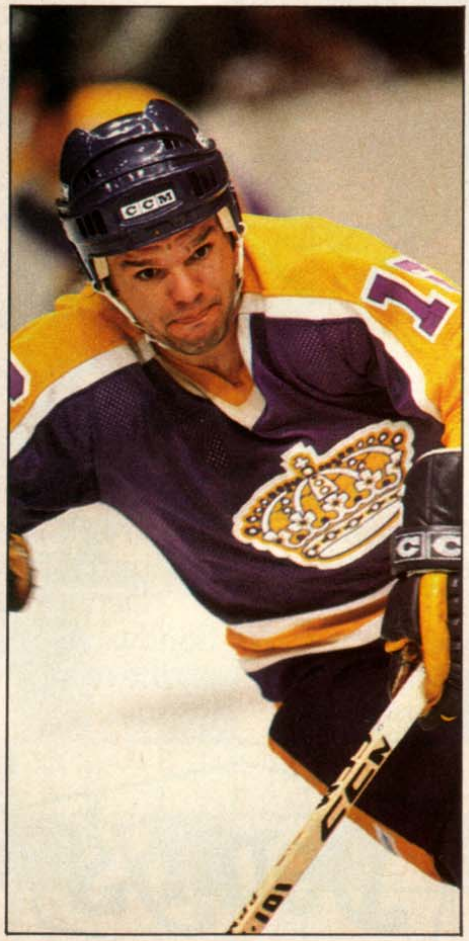
Wire Service Photographers (Associated Press, UPI, CP)—These are the photogs that show up for one period and split. Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines. Equipment has beat-up look. Dress: Bush jacket and Sassons.

Freelance Photographers—Can be readily identifiable by the holes in their Levis. Known for their ungodly manners around press room food. Looked down at by news photographers, and are given worst shooting position. Paranoid.

Newcomers—Can be found looking over the shoulders of others to find proper exposure settings. Cheers for the home team.

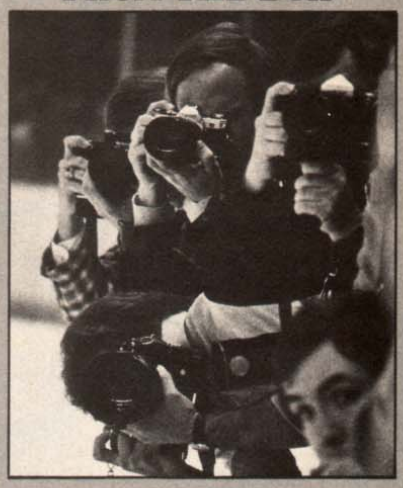
In general, you will find that anticipation is the secret ingredient in the making of a good hockey photographer. Anticipation is the product of experience and knowledge of the game, so the more you shoot, the better your pictures will become.

Tungsten film in a daylight area



Tighter in the better

AND A VIEW FROM THE BOX



Besides the obvious benefits of shooting hockey professionally (free admission and front row seats), you also can sample the food at the various press rooms around the league. However, this experience can leave a bad taste in your mouth.

The disadvantages of the profession are few, but it does become difficult to view an entire game through a photographic lens. It's also hard to see the plays develop from ice level. And another obvious problem is the weight, density and speed of the puck, especially when it's shot in my direction! Through a 300mm lens, the puck looks like a tire seconds before it strikes. This adds to the trauma of being hit, along with the knowledge that the fans seated directly behind me are hoping for this to happen.

By being situated so close to the ice, you can hear the verbal abuse that is so commonplace. In a game between the Rangers and the Soviet Army a few years back an NHL linesman asked Phil Esposito what he thought about "this ugly egghead" referring to Vladimir Petrov. Espo and the linesman smiled as they spoke. Petrov nodded in agreement and smiled back.

As much fun as hockey is, photographing one hundred hockey games a season can become tedious, especially when Ray Scapinello asks you to send pictures home to his mom fifty games a year. But it certainly is different, playing trivia quizzes with a linesman skating by at 20 miles per hour.

The benefits of shooting hockey besides those listed previously, are twofold. Firstly, I'm no longer a hockey fanatic, going crazy over my chosen team; rather, I'm a fan of the sport in general. There can be no cheering from the photo box. The second benefit that comes from sitting so close to the action is that I now know all the curse words in French.

B.B.

film and your slides are too yellow, try tungsten film. If you use tungsten film and your transparencies are too blue, daylight film should help. Some arenas have mixed lighting or flourescents (especially in minor league cities) which means that you'll need filters on your lenses to alter the light for your film.

If you want to shoot negative film for color prints, you'll need a high speed print film such as Kodacolor 400. You can use color filters to balance the film for use in tungsten lit arenas, or you can take the chance that your color processor will filter out the excess yellow when they make the prints. Kodak lab processing is usually acceptable under most lighting conditions.

Taking accurate meter readings in hockey arenas is just as difficult as getting good exposures with automatic cameras around the bright white ice surface. The higher up you are in the stands, the more misleading your reading. If possible, move down close to the ice to take a reading off a neutral colored jersey or face tone. Otherwise, the bright ice will throw off your reading and the result will be a highly underexposed picture. The same thing will happen with a camera set on automatic, so rangefinder camera users should be cautious.

There is one way to overcome this problem if your camera *only* operates on automatic. Set your camera's ASA dial at double the film speed and process *normally.* This will compensate for the underexposure that will normally occur.

The average exposure in most pro hockey arenas at ASA 400 is 250th second between f/2.8 and f/4. You will probably find that the corners of the arena are about one-half f/stop darker than at center ice. Remember that if you're using color-correcting filters you must compensate for the loss of exposure. Most flash units won't help unless you're within ten or 15 feet of the player. Generally, you'll only succeed in annoying the fans around you (not to mention the players) and your pictures will show brightly lit backs-of-heads, a very dark ice surface, and blurry hockey players.

At a setting of 250th of a second you will need to hold your camera as steady as possible to avoid blur, so lean against a railing or brace yourself in anyway possible. As mentioned earlier most pros use lenses that open to f/2.8-180mm, 200mm or even 300mm, so that even if the light is low you can get in as close as possible to your subject. In many arenas a 300mm f/2.8 lens can be used for the lower ASA color film, but a 300mm f/4.5 lens won't let in enough light and can only be used for black & white film. Hence a difference in price between the two 300mm lenses of over $1500.

When given enough light to work with, most pros will opt for 500th of a second, to insure that there is no blur, before they will close to lens aperture for more depth-of-field.

THE HUNT

Hockey is more difficult to shoot than outdoor sports because of the low light level and the speed of the players. Shooting with the lens wide open provides little depth of field and therefore it's more difficult to get the speedy players in focus. If you prefocus on the goalie or the crease area and wait for the action to appear there, your pictures should be in focus. You can also focus on the players who are waiting for the puck to be dropped. Once it drops, the players start to move, but not so far that they move out of your range or focus.

If you're so close to the ice that you must shoot through the glass, keep the camera as close to it as possible to avoid reflections and distortion. If you are sitting that close, don't put your camera down, as condensation caused by proximity to the ice can form on your lens, and the chill and dryness of the hockey ice can cause static marks to form on your film. Depending on your rinkside location, you will find that the linesman and referees can block your view.

Some shooting ideas to follow:

1. Shoot dejection as well as joy.
2. If you can get in close enough, concentrate on facial expressions.
3. Shoot at slow shutter speeds such as 30th of a second and pan your camera with the action. The photo will convey a feeling of motion as the background will be blurred. This works best when the player is moving across your field of focus, and not straight toward you.
4. Focus on the crease especially on power plays as this is where the action is. The corners also provide good action shots, but