

WE'VE GOT THE ISLES COVERED!

SAY "CHEESE!"

BY BOB STAMPLEMAN

This is the third in a series of articles focusing on the members of the media whose job is to keep fans up-to-date on the fortunes of the New York Islanders.

You might find them "firing away" from the penalty box or in the corners, or maybe even high up in the rafters above the Coliseum ice. They are the photographers who cover the Islanders and can be heard to proudly boast that, indeed, "a picture is worth a 1,000 words!"

Often seen loaded down with cameras and lenses of all makes and models, rolls of color and black and white film, tripods and miscellaneous equipment, these fellows not only have to be agile to stay on top of the play to capture the action, but also have to keep an eye out to make sure they aren't hammered by an errant puck or stick or even a fist.

"In my 14 years of shooting hockey, I've been hit by the puck five or six times and about 10 times with a stick," said Bruce Bennett, the Isles official photographer. "Even so, I still like the fact that I have a front-row seat at games."

Ed Bailey of the Associated Press, who also likes having the best seat in the house, knows what Bennett means. "I was away from hockey for a number of years and wouldn't you know it, right after my return a couple of years ago, I took a high stick to the head and spent the third period in the medical room," he said. "Then, at a game soon afterwards, while a fight was in progress and as I was reaching down to pick up a different lens, an opposing player took a swing at an Islander, missed and caught me right in the temple. I actually saw it coming, but just couldn't move fast enough. Anyway, I dropped to the floor and on impulse tried to get right up, but I just couldn't make it without the help of some of my fellow photographers."

Newsday's Paul Bereswill wasn't even shooting action when he was knocked cold: "I was taking some test shots during the

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Ed Bailey of the Associated Press

warm-ups when someone from the Pittsburgh Penguins let a shot go and the lights went out. Then there was the time a while back when a Gordie Howe shot took the lens right off my camera."

Regardless of the dangers to their bodies and equipment, however, the three photographers (plus Jack Pokress, editor and publisher of the *Observer* newspapers on the South Shore of Long Island, and Brian Winkler, who has been working with Bennett for six of his 12 years in the business) all agree on one thing—they love their jobs.

"I particularly enjoy going to the games and having the fans come up to me and ask questions about my assignments," Winkler said. "First, I'm proud to say that I work for the Islanders, and then I like to answer any questions they may have about photography and offer advice. The fans at the Coliseum are really into it."

Bereswill, who played amateur hockey for about 10 years, loves the sport. "Hockey is in my blood," he said, "and I really do enjoy being at the games even if it is work."

"Photography is a fun job," said Pokress, who has shot all major league sports and the Islanders since 1972-73, "and I find hockey players the easiest to get

along with. I feel the Islanders organization is just great, and I've been fortunate enough to meet a lot of very nice people through my work."

Bailey says of his job: "I get to see the top stars in the business, and I'm there for all the big games."

"As the Islanders official photographer, I find that my work has afforded me good exposure for assignments outside of hockey. Besides that, the sport has given me a lot of thrills through the years, like the plane ride back from Vancouver in 1982 after the team won the Stanley Cup," said Bennett, who has his own custom lab and supplies photos to publications including *Goal*, *The Hockey News* and *The Sporting News*.

To a man, the photographers have the same pre-game routine . . . make sure all the equipment is tested and in proper working order, correct lenses are packed and enough film is on hand. All very simple, but very important. Bennett has an additional chore: the responsibility to assign photographers their positions around the rink.

Unlike the writers who were profiled at the beginning of the season, the photographers have different deadlines with Bailey

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and Bereswill, who shoot strictly in color, having the tightest.

"*Newsday* provides a 'runner' after the first period to take the film back to the paper. It is immediately developed and edited so if the editor wants a hockey shot for the back cover of the first edition, it's available," Bereswill said. "Then, after the second period, or maybe midway through the third, I'll go back to the paper and go over everything I've shot that evening to see if there might be a better shot for the later editions. All the photos fans see in *Newsday* are shot in color but can be reproduced in black and white."

The Associated Press has provided Bailey with a darkroom right in the Coliseum where he develops, edits and prints his own film and transmits the photographs nationwide via telephone lines.

"To be competitive, my deadline is usually 9:30 to get my first shot on the line," said Bailey. "That doesn't always happen because there may be a lot of sporting events going on in the East, and you have to wait your turn to transmit. It takes approximately eight minutes to send a photo whether it is transmitted in color or black and white."

Bennett and Winkler have no real deadlines. "The morning following a game," Bennett said, "we'll develop all our film, which usually means about 300 exposures since we usually shoot two rolls of color and six in black and white. We process our work in my studio which reduces the time it takes to fulfill the requests."

Jill Knee, the Islanders director of public affairs, who is the editor of both the program and yearbook, will sometimes need a photo rather quickly. "While we concentrate on the action, many times we'll have a special assignment from Jill if a new player has joined the club or someone has changed his number or helmet, things like that," Bennett continued. "Then there is the feature work that I do, such as shooting the set-ups created by Jill around her annual theme for the yearbook. This season five players were posed around model trains to depict the 'Isles On The Move.'"

Pokress's papers go to press on Wednesdays. "That means," he said, "I don't have a deadline after a Saturday game, but have a very tight deadline following a Tuesday night game. I shoot all black and white for the papers, but do use color for some feature work."

Photographing a hockey game isn't all just standing around the sides of the rink and shooting action with available light. Many of these photographers are quite creative in coming up with different angles and positions and employing state-of-the-art lighting.

Bereswill often will mount a camera atop one of the goal judge's booths and trip it by remote control. Bennett has done the same thing and has added strobe lights to his repertoire.

"The four strobe lights mounted in the

rafters of the Coliseum are basically the same as the flash you would use on a camera," Bennett said. "These are tripped by remote control and go off simultaneously approximately 150 times during a game."

"The strobes," Winkler added, "unlike the flash unit on your camera, are hardly noticeable to fans or players. We never use a flash at ice level, and the fans should be cautioned to avoid them, too, since they can momentarily blind a player and lead to an injury."

Then there are the rafters. Ah, the rafters. Just take a quick peek right now and see if you'd like to be working up there. Bennett, Bereswill and Winkler are frequent visitors to those heights, and the three report that it does take some time getting used to. "Besides it being scary looking down," Winkler commented, "I was once up there during a playoff game when the Isles scored, and the walkway vibrated so much from the crowd noise that I had to hold on for dear life."

The life of a hockey photographer can be exciting and fun, but it can also be dangerous and their job does take these men away from home a lot during the season. "My wife sometimes complains that I'm away too often in the evenings during the season," Bennett said. "But, she knows how much I like my work and never makes a fuss."

So thanks to Mrs. Bennett and all the other families, Isles fans will continue to be treated to top action photography. ●



Ice level in penalty boxes



Up in the rafters