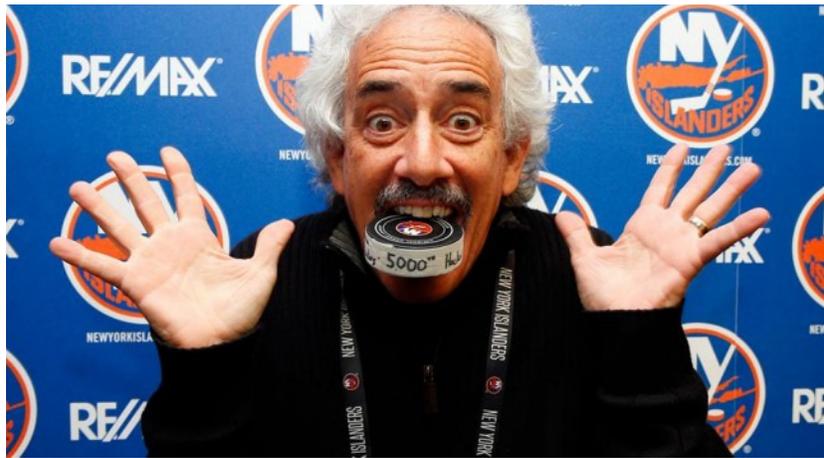




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BRUCE BENNETT: ALL-STAR IN HIS OWN RIGHT

Posted by *Scott Charles* on Jan 23, 2015 13:15

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You won't find his name in the National Hockey League record book, but if you walk around Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum or any other NHL venue most people would be aware of the prominent photographer, Bruce Bennett of Old Bethpage, Long Island.

Starting out, this maestro of the camera was happy to receive a press pass and be able to get into games for free, but after shooting 5,086 Hockey games, Mr. Bennett has become one of the best photographers in all of sports.

Bruce has seen it all – albeit through one eye – whether it be the NHL, WHA, Olympics, or Stanley Cup Final. He certainly has the pictures to prove it; not to mention all of his credentials. Those pictures will be featured in an upcoming book published and released with the help of the Hockey News this fall, commemorating one of the outstanding careers in the world of professional photography.

On April 8, 2014, Bruce was honored at the Coliseum after shooting his 5000th hockey game. Bennett's remarkable numbers include but are not limited to over 4,300 NHL games, 192 international games, and even eight WHA games. Throughout his storied career he has shot 34 NHL Stanley Cup deciding games and worked in over 50 different arenas.

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Islanders Insight recently had the chance to catch up with the Wayne Gretzky of hockey photography. **FOOTBALL BASEBALL BASKETBALL HOCKEY COLLEGE GENERAL ALL**

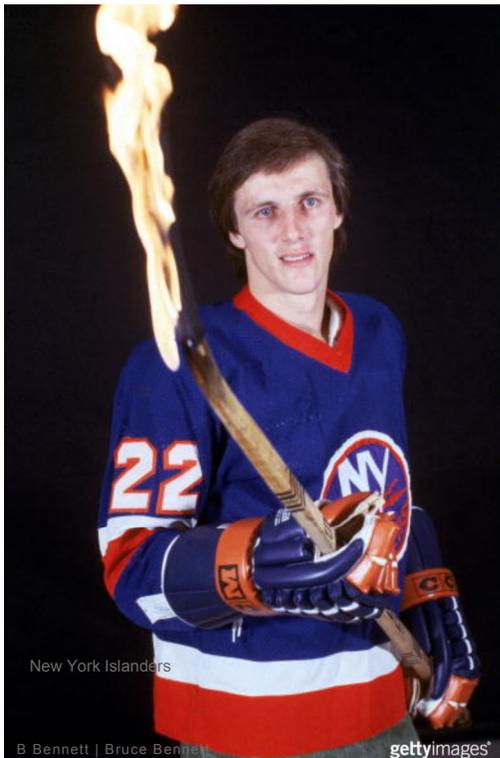
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1) You committed to a book highlighting some of your best work over the many years as a professional hockey photographer. How did the idea hatch and what can you tell us about the project?

I actually had the idea of doing a best of book as many as 14 years ago. I shopped it to book publishers sporadically over the past decade. This time when I discussed it with some people over at *The Hockey News*, they thought the time was right and they could make it work. They had some good ideas in terms of promoting, packaging, and distributing the book. I also had a comfort level working with those guys after doing so much work for them in the past.

2) Everyone has seen the famous Mike Bossy flaming stick photograph (If not see below). Is there a story behind that?

Well there was a lot of planning and practice that went into making that shot happen. But, *probably* not enough practice! We set a small studio up in a spare locker room at Nassau Coliseum. I settled on kerosene-dipped cotton stapled to the bottom of Bossy's stick and knew I would only have a few seconds to shoot. We finished rapidly and no firemen showed up.



3) Do you have a favorite Nassau Coliseum memory?

It would have to be when the Islanders won the first Cup in 1980. As a Long Islander it was really tough to separate my personal feelings from what was happening on the ice. But that's the only way to be successful shooting sporting events – emotional detachment.



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B Bennett | Bruce Bennett
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HIGHLIGHTS: Ducks Drop 2nd Straight
Blackhawks 4, Ducks 1 - Rickard Rakell scored Anaheim's lone goal as the Ducks dropped their 2nd straight game after a 6-game winning streak. Patrick Kane scored twice in the win for Chicago.

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4) What was your most embarrassing moment as a photographer?

As a photographer you try to keep a low profile. A good photographer gets the shot and isn't noticed. During the NHL All-Star Skills competition, I am allowed to skate around the ice to get better images. The NHL experimented a few years back with myself and another skating photographer. They attempted to dress us different outfits so we would 'blend' in. The outfit they decided on was a white Stay Puft Marshmallow Man outfit that was a few sizes too big for me. Funny to some, but a really bad look!

5) Who was your favorite Islander to photograph?

I always maintained it was Tomas Jonsson, a Swedish defenseman on the smallish side. His best feature was that he made the greatest assortment of faces including grimaces and the look of sheer determination. John Tonelli was always in fluid motion with arms and legs flailing and of course Denis Potvin was not only a joy to watch but also great fun to shoot. The embodiment of power on ice.



B Bennett | Getty Images Sport Classic
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6) What was your favorite 'abnormal' photo that you have ever shot?

I think that had to be when the Islanders ran a promotion and everyone dressed as Santa Claus could come walk out onto the ice. A couple of Ranger fans came out and ripped off their Santa outfits thereby revealing their Ranger uniforms. Things got out of hand real fast, but it made for good photos.

7) How do the older venues such as the Coliseum compare to some of the newer arenas from a photography perspective?

Most of the new arenas are cavernous barns. And although the Coliseum doesn't rate favorable to some of the other intimate long gone rinks like Boston Garden, Chicago Stadium and the Montreal Forum, well, it's home. And it may be a barn, but it's OUR barn, and it's where we call home.

8) How are you able to ignore the sound from the crowd and focus on your specific job?

It must be some sort of mind game I play on myself. To be distracted in this field is the kiss of death. When you are in a position to shoot things like the Stanley Cup Final, you need to remain focused (pun intended) and diligent. Or you lose. So in many of those situations I tune out....or more succinct, I turn my hearing 'off'. At the Cup, it's the Cup and me. I stick with it no matter who is holding it and all else doesn't matter. Always conscious enough to avoid being run over, but eliminating that sense of hearing or having my brain turn off that sense helps me maintain my composure in those tense situations.

9) When you first started, could you have ever imagined you would be where you are now?

Who really knows when you start down a path like this where it will lead. I have a degree in accounting and it was entirely possible that I would have had a long career with numbers. And that wouldn't have been too bad. After all, you usually don't have to worry about getting hit with a puck when you're balancing a spreadsheet. Started just shooting for fun and the cards fell into place. Tough to really look back 40 years and see how it all came together.

10) Have you suffered any injuries while working at a hockey game?

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Back in the day when you would shoot at the arenas, you would have a wide-open area in the penalty box or next to it. It was really the best position in all professional sports. You really felt like you were in the game. But at Madison Square Garden we were just target practice. I broke some ribs there. A few years back, at Nassau Coliseum, a puck hit me on top of the head. I was bleeding and ended up in the locker room with a couple of doctors trying to close the wound. Rick DiPietro was in the locker room at the time and just started giggling.

11) You have worked at over 50 arenas, do you have a favorite venue?

As I mentioned before, those older arenas like Boston Garden and Chicago Stadium had such a great feeling but they were also very tough to work in with photo positions of very limited quality. As for photography, when the fans are into the game, you can see the players are engaged and that makes my job great in any arena.

12) You have worked over 5,000 games throughout your career, Do you have a specific number you would like to reach?

Like a player I take it one game at a time and one season at a time. Looking ahead, I would like to hit 5,000 NHL regular season and playoff games and that I should be able to do in six, maybe seven years. Then maybe do some photo editing at games for a few years. But you never know what the future might hold.

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About Scott Charles

Scott Charles is a graduate from SUNY College at Old Westbury with a BS in Finance. Scott had no intention of joining the sports media world until one day he saw an advertisement on the legendary Stan Fischler's twitter account. During his time with Stan he was the lead reporter covering both the New York Islanders and New York Rangers. He would collaborate with other staff members to research, organize and edit columns for The Fischler Report. At practices or games Scott would conduct extensive interviews with players, coaches, team executives, league officials and national journalists. Scott can also be seen on Sportstalknyradio.com and occasionally heard on the Dump and Chase Podcast. You can follow him on twitter @Scottmcharles.

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