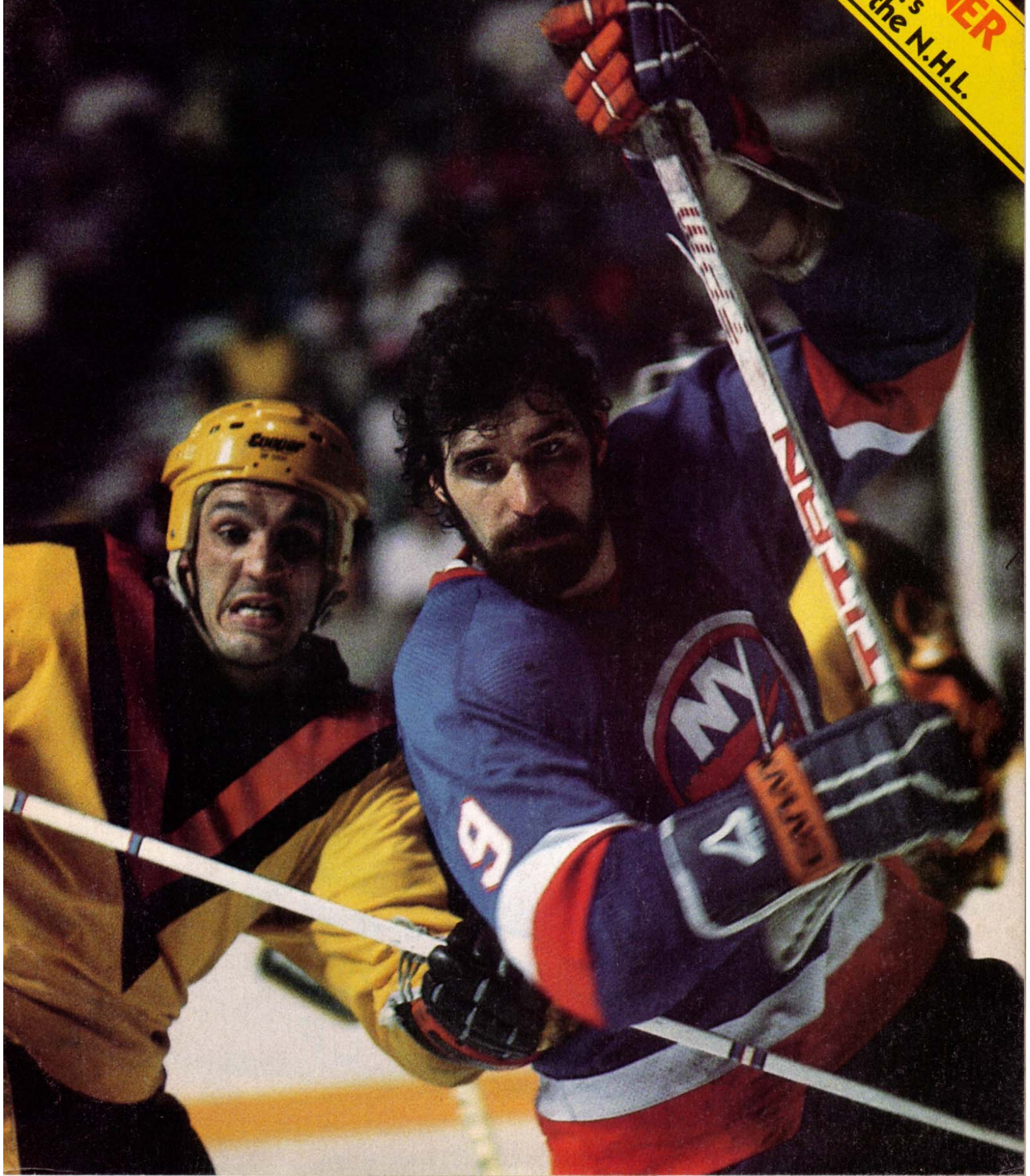


LENS ON CAMPUS

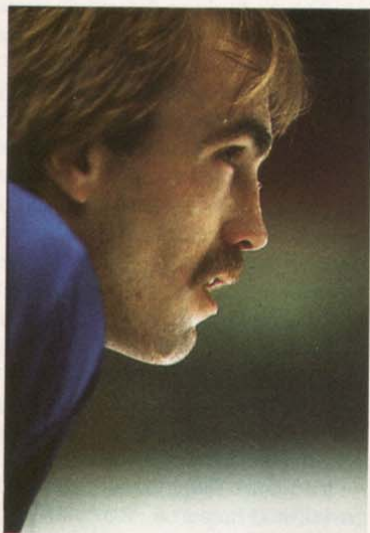
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MAGAZINE

BLADE GUNNER
Bruce Bennett's
Freeze Frames in the N.H.L.



BLADE GUNNER

FREEZE FRAMES



Bruce Bennett's hit warp drive: In one week this past May his photographs appeared in *Life*, *People* and *Sports Illustrated*. *Time* used three photographs this year and featured his picture of superstar Wayne Gretzky of the Edmonton Oilers scoring a record-breaking 77th goal in their *Images '82* roundup of the year's best. His credit line appears regularly in books, magazines, newspapers, year-books, calendars... even on bubble-gum cards.

For success like that you've got to have the ability, of course, but Bruce Bennett is the first to admit that it doesn't hurt to be the official photographer of a team that's on top of the world. The New York Islanders, a 1972 expansion franchise that posted a dismal record of 12 wins, 60 losses and six ties their first year in the National Hockey League, have now won four consecutive League championships. Bennett, team photographer for the past two years, knows that nothing puts ability in the spotlight faster than covering a team that's on fire.

Without a doubt, it's one of the most difficult sports to photograph, a game of quick changes from finesse to brutality, from grace to violence; swift and precise one moment, an aimless confusion the next. Always with an unpredictable, sudden finality: a puck hits a post, glances off a skate, takes a funny

bounce and a game — perhaps a whole season — is lost. The photographer can anticipate some of the elements of the game flow within the confines of the rink, but he can never relax.

"It's the expressions on the faces, the waist-up action — that's what everyone wants," Bennett says. You have to be dead-on to get it: "With a 300mm lens on a moving skater, you've got maybe 12 inches depth-of-field. If you're lucky."

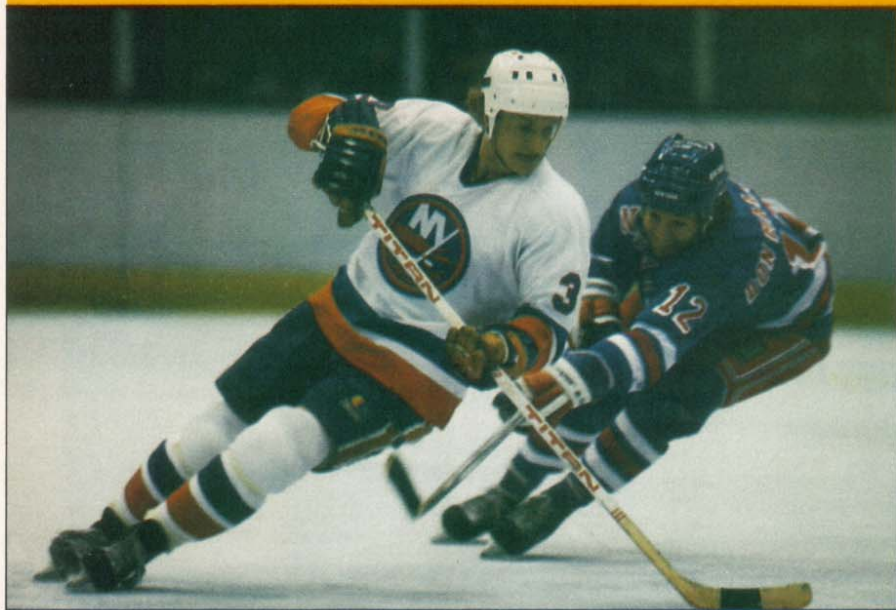
For an idea of how difficult it can be, watch a televised game and concentrate not on the players, but rather on the actual *movement* of the TV camera as it pans, zooms, cuts back, follows, circles and roams to bring you the action — all without leaving you lost or dizzy. Crouched behind the boards, the still photographer tracks in much the same way — while watching out for a flying puck getting larger and larger in the viewfinder.

There's not much time to think about the technical part of shooting: you've got to have it down. "The most important thing is eliminating blur," Bennett says. "I've talked to guys from the Associated Press and United Press, and given a choice of a 500th of a second at 5.6 or a 1000th at f/4, they'll go at f/4 to get the extra speed. I've never found the need to go that high. I'll shoot 400 ISO Ektachrome at a 250th, f/2.8 on the button." He uses a 300mm

By Barry Tanenbaum

IN THE N.H.L.





2.8 lens as the workhorse. "I carry a 180 2.8 and a 35 and an 85, but the 300mm is pretty much the whole show. You don't have the time to change lenses or fool with settings; you find combinations that work — lens, film, setting, motor drive — and you stick with them."

Equally important is the coordination of eye and hand. "When I start shooting a game, I'm cold, I'm not into it, and all my focusing is being done by eye. I see through the lens, send a message to my brain and my hand responds by turning the lens. But as soon as I hit that point where I'm warmed up, it's as if my hand is moving automatically. It doesn't wait for my eye to tell it anything; it focuses. I can always tell when I've hit that point, and I always know that my stuff is right on the money."

Bruce Bennett started photographing hockey when he was in college. His first shots were taken from a balcony in Madison Square Garden, the New York City home of the Rangers. He sent the photos to *The Hockey News*, asking if they could use a photographer in the New York area. They wrote back, asking if he'd like a press pass.

It was a classic case of being in the right place at the right time and having the talent to back it up. *The Hockey News* needed a replacement for their New York-based photographer who was switching over to writing, and, as Bennett says, "they saw in me someone who was young, hungry, hard-working . . . and who would be thrilled to get into the games. They were right." Still in college, he shot for *The Hockey*

News, then *The Sporting News*, then *Goal* magazine, the N.H.L.'s official publication.

"I'd played amateur hockey and loved the game, but in college I was an accounting major. In my third year in school, doing a lot of professional shooting, I took a good look at my accounting grades and decided that I should become a photographer. But I got my accounting degree anyway. I figured, like my parents said, I'd always have something to fall back on."

He didn't have to fall back. After college he freelanced for four years, shooting mainly hockey, and then, two years ago, the Islanders called. "People came to recognize my name next to a hockey photo, and when the Islanders' team photographer decided to leave, my name came up in several conversations about a replacement."

For the Islanders he'll photograph their 40 home games, plus three exhibition and up to 15 playoff contests. At his discretion he'll cover out-of-town Islander games and other East Coast teams — the New York Rangers, New Jersey Devils and Hartford (Connecticut) Whalers. Off-season there are hockey books and annuals, posters, calendars . . . and non-hockey work. Bruce Bennett is also Bruce Bennett Studios, which handles local commercial accounts with in-studio and location work.

Headquarters is his home on Long Island, where the lower level of the large ranch house is devoted to the business: shooting studio, darkroom facilities, office. He's just bought a computer to keep track of his thousands of slides.

"It's a nice feeling to be with a winning organization," Bennett says, "especially one that gives me the freedom to do other work. You know, you can't sit by the ice, game after game, and be a fan—your mind has to be into what's happening and you can't be cheering the team on. But I have to admit that it means a lot to me personally. Kids will come down to the rink, see me with my cameras and ask, 'Who are you with?' I'll say I'm with the Islanders and they'll say, 'You're Bruce Bennett!'"

Sports Illustrated calls for a shot . . . *Time* magazine has an assignment . . . *USA Today* runs a photo . . . there's talk of covering the US Olympic hockey team . . . "I've always been working, shooting, but during the last year-and-a-half things just picked up and zoom — warp drive!" ■