

CANADA'S PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE

Photo Life

MARCH 1989 \$2.75



**A NAHANNI LOVE AFFAIR • HOCKEY SHOOTER
TRICK TIPS • DARKROOM DUST-BUSTING**



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PHOTO LIFE is indexed in Canadian Magazine by Micromedia Limited. Back issues of Photo Life are available in microform from Micromedia Limited, 158 Pearl St., Toronto, Ont., M5H 1L3.

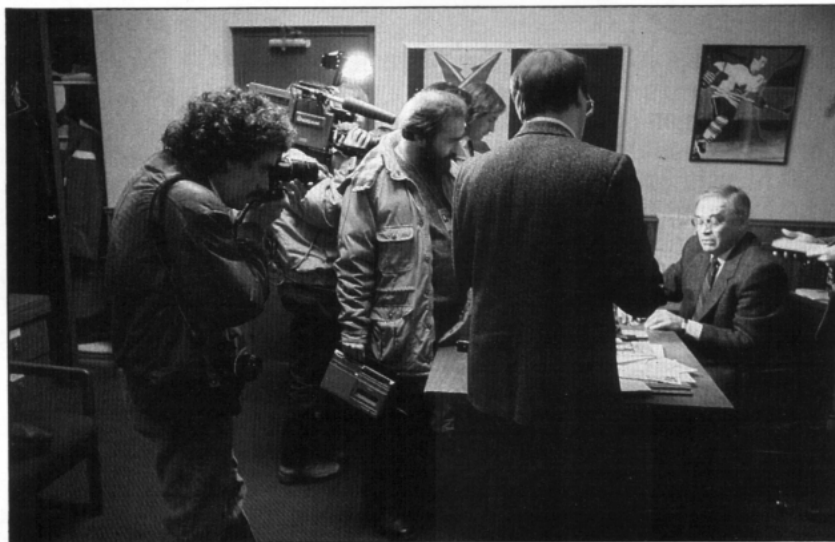
SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year — Canada \$21.95; U.S.A. add \$10 per year; foreign add \$10 per year. Single copy price \$2.75. All subscription mail to: 130 Spy Court, Markham, Ont., L3R 5H6. Six weeks notice is required to change a subscriber's address. Please include postal codes.

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POSTMAN: Second Class Mail Registration No. 3820. Postage paid at Mississauga, Ont. © PHOTO LIFE MAGAZINE, 1989.



Fastest shot in the league



Chris Knowles

Bruce Bennett (left) zeroes in on new Leafs coach George Armstrong.

Bruce Bennett wasn't planning a visit to Toronto, but what the heck. *Photo Life* wanted to do a story on his hockey photography, he needed to get the carnet for his camera equipment re-approved from a previous wrangle with Canada Customs, and a visit to Maple Leaf Gardens would at least provide some comic relief to cheer him up just prior to Christmas.

The Monday night game against St. Louis fit into his schedule, so we agreed to meet in the lobby of the Ballardome that afternoon. I recognized him immediately: the well-battered monopod he was brandishing like a nightstick was the tip-off. Bennett, born in Brooklyn, has used it more than once for self-defence, and by habit he carries it even in Toronto *The Good*. But then, with a brace of F3s and a 300mm f/2.8 in his bag, there's ample justification for caution.

We settled into the Hot Stove Lounge for the interview, when who should walk in and sit at the next table but George Armstrong, named the Leafs' new coach just hours earlier. I was tempted to discreetly turn my tape recorder in his direction, but it probably wouldn't have picked up any gems of

hockey coaching wisdom, anyway.

Far more insightful was watching a pro like Bennett at work. When camera manufacturers boast that their autofocus systems can rack a lens to pinpoint sharpness faster than any human, it's obvious they haven't seen Bennett in action. This guy is *fast*. I've stood in enough cold arenas as a tenderfoot newspaper sports photographer to understand the difficulties of shooting hockey, but Bennett — as befits someone with 17 years of experience in the field — made it look easy. His story begins on page 14.

Another talented artist featured in the following pages is Scott Barham, who beginning this month will share with us his twisted vision of photography and photographers with a cartoon on the Letters page. The 33-year-old Winnipeg artist contributes to an eclectic selection of Canadian publications, and has also just released a children's book, *Lion in the Lake*. He's a five-time Manitoba sailing champion with a passion for old Italian motorcycles and a camera collection that includes a Rollei 2 1/4, a Pentax and an Argus. Hope you enjoy his work. □

—Chris Knowles

RINK RAT

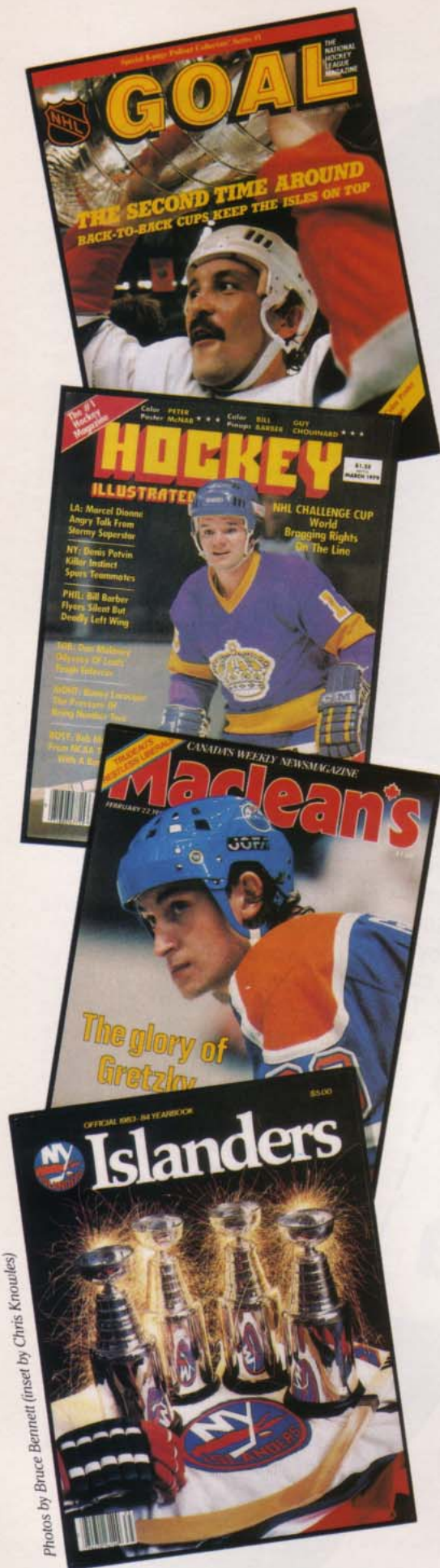
A youngster's dream of breaking into the big league comes true, only Bruce Bennett is taking his shots from the other side of the plexiglass.

BY CHRIS KNOWLES

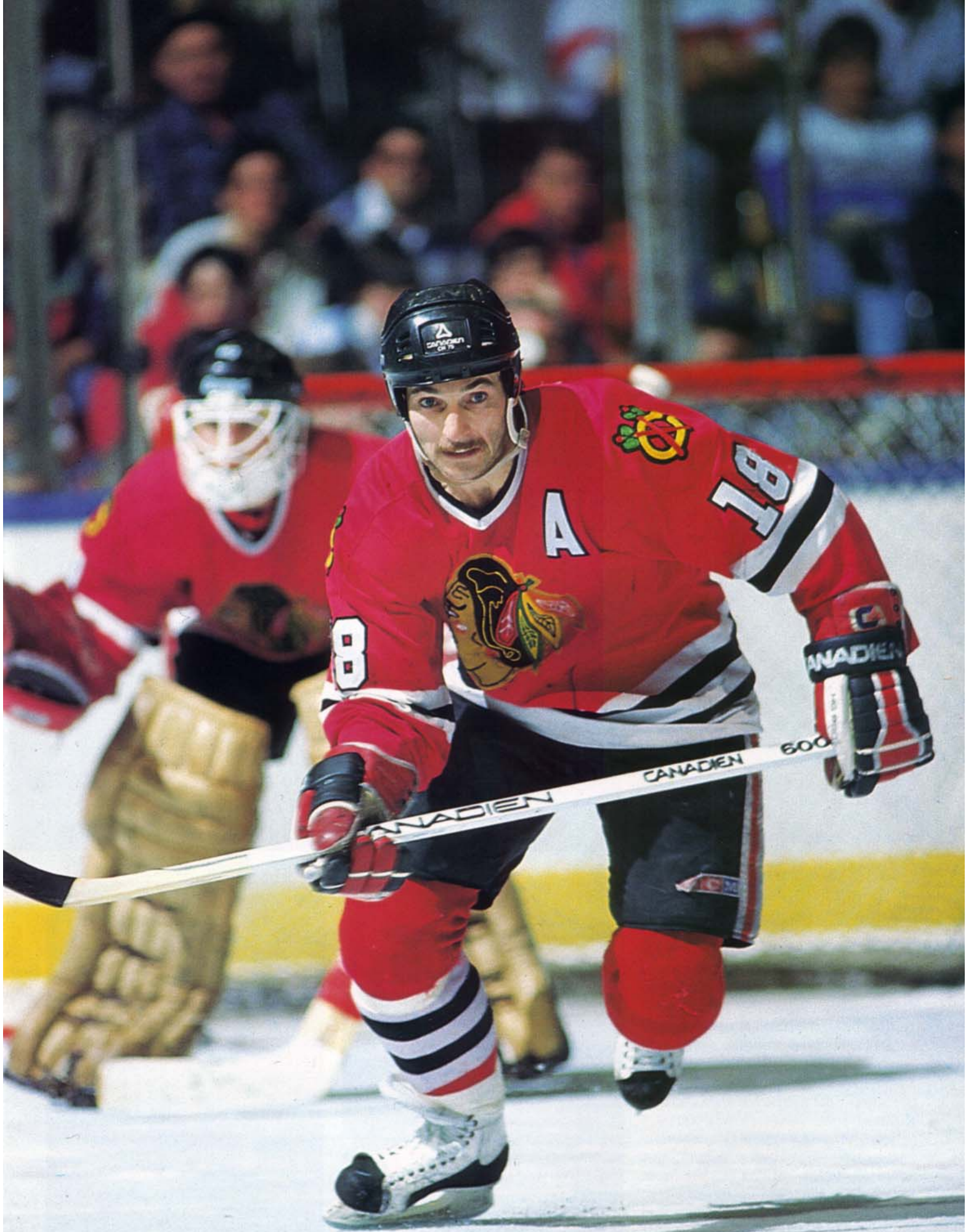


If Wayne Gretzky was upset at the news of his trade to the Los Angeles Kings from the Edmonton Oilers last summer, Bruce Bennett was positively shattered. The moment Gretzky became a King, Bennett, the world's foremost hockey photographer, lost 6,464 slides of The Great One to instant obsolescence. "Nobody wants to see a shot of Gretzky in an Oilers uniform any more," says Bennett.

Photographs of Gretzky in the WHA, photographs of him celebrating with the Stanley

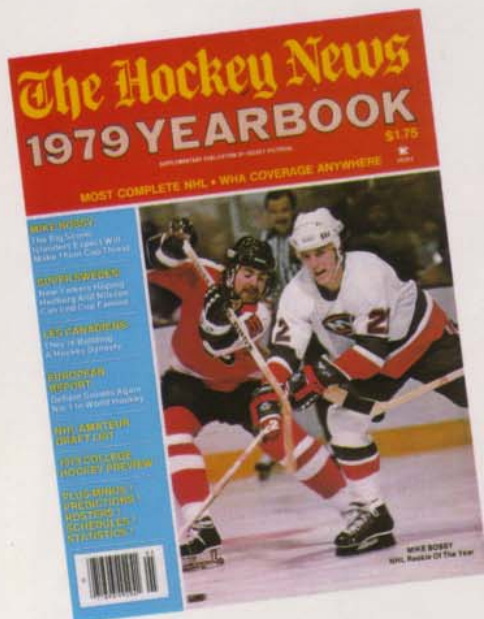


Photos by Bruce Bennett (inset by Chris Knowles)



RINK RAT

Cup, and the historic photograph of his record-breaking 77th goal of the 1982 season, which Bennett, typically, caught as the puck was crossing the goal line — all, in effect, relegated to the round file.

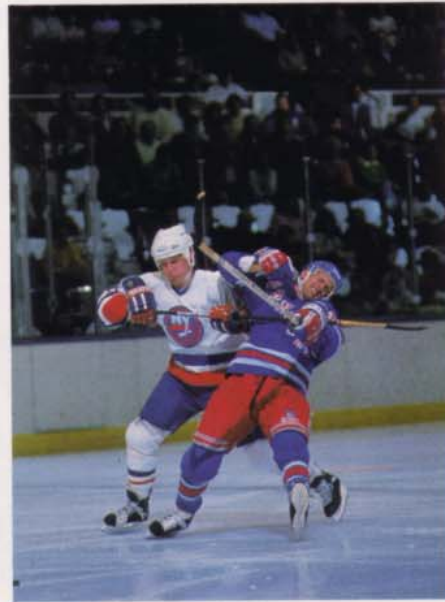


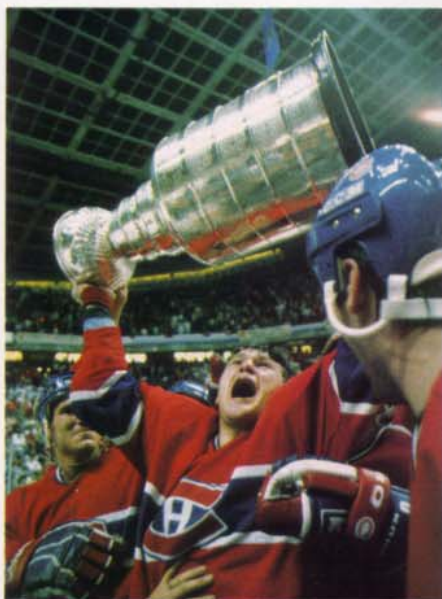
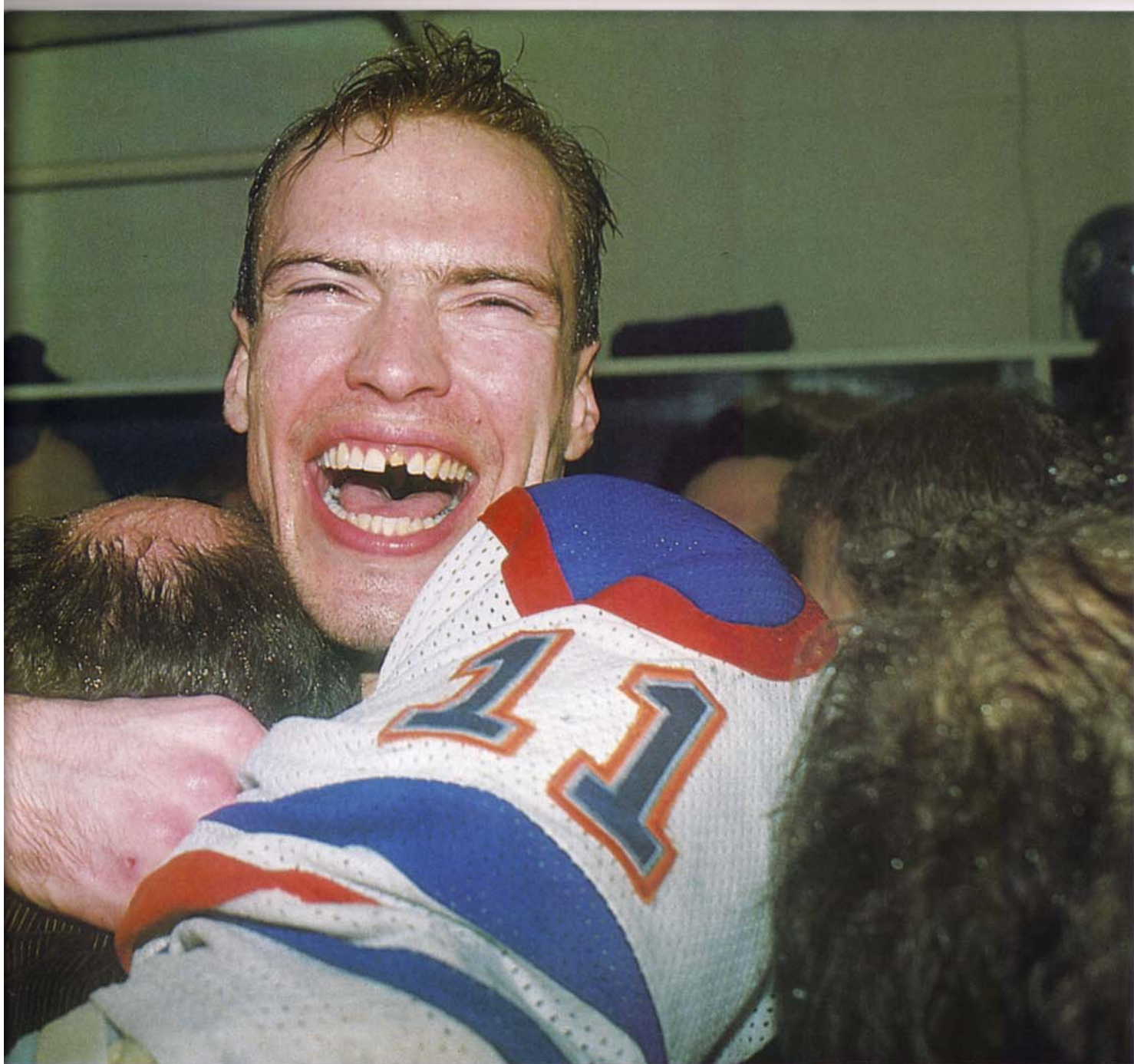
This awful event cut deeply into Bennett's slide inventory, leaving him with only about, oh, *half a million* other hockey photographs in stock.

Indeed, it's easy to fill up slide trays when you shoot more than 100 professional hockey games a year, and have been poking your lens through the glass or over the boards in arenas throughout North America for 17 years.

Bennett has shot so many hockey games — 1,598 as of this writing, by his own tally — that such minor details as focusing are automatic. He shoots an average of 10 rolls a game, tossing around a pair of Nikon F3s like a circus juggler, and sometimes clicking off a few frames before the camera is even up to his eye. "I could probably go from infinity to focusing on a player at a face-off circle without looking, because after a while your hand can almost move without receiving the signal from the brain," he says. "And when the action is hot and heavy, there's no time to think."

Bennett's accurate eye and immense inventory have earned him work from *Time*, *Sports Illustrated* and *The Hockey News*, among many others, and regular requests for photographs from such hockey hotbeds as Great Britain. Swedish rookies in the NHL invariably react with awe when they first





Mark Messier whoops it up with his dad after the Edmonton Oilers won the Stanley Cup in '84, and (left) Claude Lemieux enjoys his own Cup celebration as a member of the champion Montreal Canadiens of '86. Bodychecks make great hockey action shots, but clients most often want the straight-ahead pose typified by Bennett's shot of Denis Savard of the Chicago Blackhawks (previous page).

meet Bennett: "You're a big name in Swedish hockey," they tell him. His hockey photography earns him something else: about \$200,000 a year.

If you're a sucker for those entrepreneurial rags-to-riches stories where, through perseverance and an unflagging belief in the work ethic, boy makes good, you'll love this one:

"I don't know why I got the camera; it wasn't something I always wanted to do,"



Hockey games in New York attract a sophisticated breed of fan.

RINK RAT

remembers Bennett of the day he picked up an Argus Cosina with a screw-mount 135mm lens. He was 16, had never used a camera before, but had a passion for hockey — especially for his hometown New York Islanders. He snapped a few “very poor” photos at an Islanders practice and a few more from the balcony during a game at

Madison Square Garden, mounted them on cardboard and sent them to *The Hockey News* in Montreal, asking if the renowned hockey tabloid needed a correspondent in his area. The editor wrote back with an offer of \$3 per photo, and asked whether the rookie needed a press pass, or had his own. “Um, a press pass would be nice,” Bennett sheepishly responded.

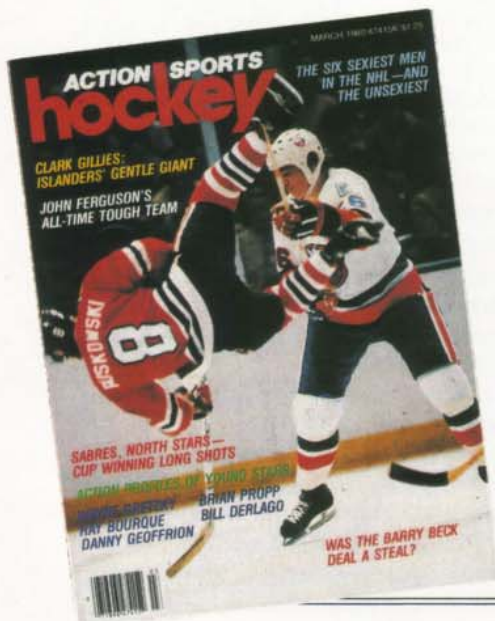
Bennett shot 70 NHL games in his first season as a pro hockey photographer, 1972-’73, and about 80 per season during the next five years. Living at home and developing and printing his own photographs took the sting out of his heavy expenses, but his college accountancy course wasn’t going particularly well and he certainly wasn’t getting rich. Although he was steadily picking up other hockey publications as clients, *The Hockey News* was still his main source of work, and the editor often didn’t pay until Bennett’s bill reached \$1,000 or beyond. At \$3 per photo, it was often a long wait.

When the Islanders won their first Stanley Cup in 1980, Bennett shared in the success. “I started to get calls from all over the world for my hockey photographs. When the Islanders became big, since I was right there, business started to boom.” The following year he became official photographer for the team and hired a full-time assistant. The

surge in the hockey business was certainly welcome, as Bennett had recently been fired from his job as photo editor of a Long Island regional magazine, an event that also led to the breakup of his first marriage.

Since then, Bruce Bennett has become Bruce Bennett Studios, a multi-faceted photographic business with 10 employees, in-house E-6 developing and slide duping, hundreds of clients and a partnership in a local one-hour developing lab. This burgeoning enterprise is starting to outgrow its location in Bennett’s house, and the still-booming hockey business has long-since outgrown Bennett’s ability to cover it all himself. Four of his employees are photographers, and often he’ll assign one or more to help him with the busy weekly schedule, which includes covering every home game of his two main clients, the Islanders and the Philadelphia Flyers.

There’s rarely a moment’s respite around this Hicksville, N.Y., operation, but Bennett and crew are especially frenzied at the beginning and the end of the hockey season, as they scramble to get at least one shot of every player in the NHL. “We try to make sure we have every player at the start of the season and then, when the trades all go through, we end up with them all (in their appropriate uniforms) at the end of the sea-





Bennett was on hand to capture Wayne Gretzky's record-breaking 77th goal of the '82 season, and to see Gretzky console the former record-holder, Phil Esposito. Bennett shoots both the elegance and the brutality (middle) of hockey, and also finds its humorous side (below), such as when Tomas Jonsson of the Islanders arrived home after losing the '84 Stanley Cup to the Oilers.



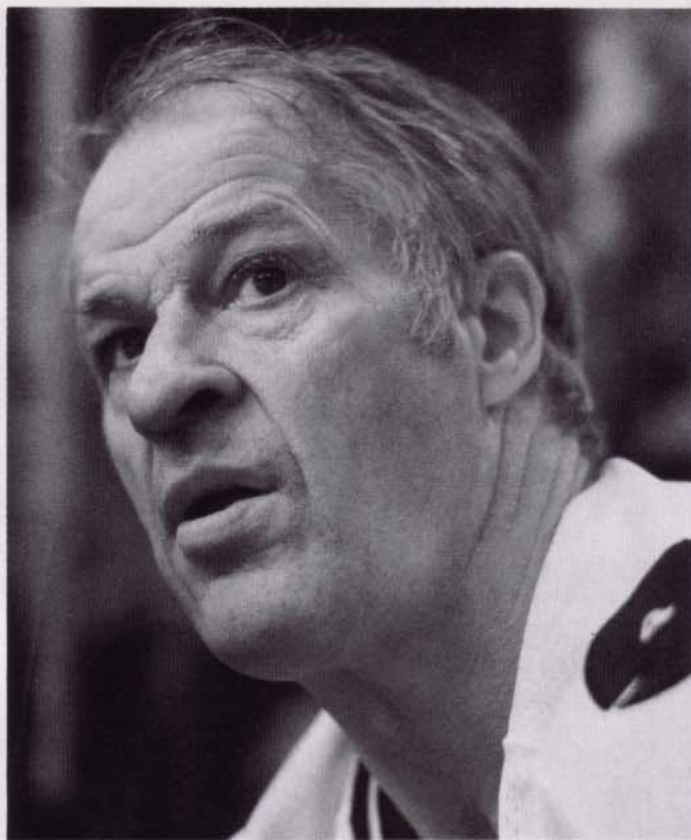
son so that over the summer, which is the hot sales season for hockey slides, we can satisfy any request for photographs." The scramble was magnified at the beginning of this season because of The Trade: Bennett chased Gretzky to L.A. for a pre-season game against Winnipeg, but both teams arrived on the ice wearing their road uniforms. "Throw those away," says Bennett. So he followed the team to Sacramento for a game against the Calgary Flames, and was pleased to see Calgary don its home uniforms, which Bennett doesn't see often. A perfect opportunity, that is until it was announced that Gretzky was a scratch. Undaunted, Bennett extended his stay to catch the Kings' next pre-season game in Oakland, but just prior to the game he was told that he couldn't set up his strobe units in the arena. One expensive trip, and no Gretzky pix.

Trades aren't the only headaches for Bennett. "If a player changes his visor or his helmet or his gloves or his stick, the old photos are worthless. If I sell them to a client, he's going to get mail from some kid saying, 'Hey, that's an old picture!' That's bad for business."

Bennett avoids such faux pas by making himself an expert on current hockey events. He's on the NHL's mailing list for press releases and stats, he keeps tabs on who's injured, who's been traded or brought up from the minors, and who's hot and who's not. "I know other photographers don't get this stuff. They don't ask. They don't do it for a living. I'll take any edge I can get." Sometimes he's just lucky. He made a recent trip to Toronto to untangle some customs' red tape from a previous visit, and stumbled upon the first game by new Leafs coach George Armstrong. "Being here gives me the first crack at him," he says.

Being a hockey specialist makes Bennett a rarity. Most pros can't afford to live on one sport alone, and the numerous semi-pros around the league often have day jobs unrelated to photography. "The guy who used to shoot the Pittsburgh Penguins was also the team dentist," says Bennett. "If somebody called looking for Mario Lemieux photos, he'd say, 'Well, hang on, let me just finish this root canal and I'll send them out.' My clients know they can call, somebody will dig 'em out, and we'll Federal Express them the next day."





Dave Schultz prepares to lower the boom, and a portrait of Gordie Howe in the twilight of his remarkable career.

RINK RAT

Although most of his hockey business is in stock shots, Bennett also accepts assignments to shoot particular games or players. One such job was from *Time* magazine to stake out Gretzky as he gunned for his record-setting 77th goal in Buffalo in 1982. The assignment paid a base rate of \$300, but

the picture was subsequently sold to 12 other publications, and earned Bennett more than \$3,000.

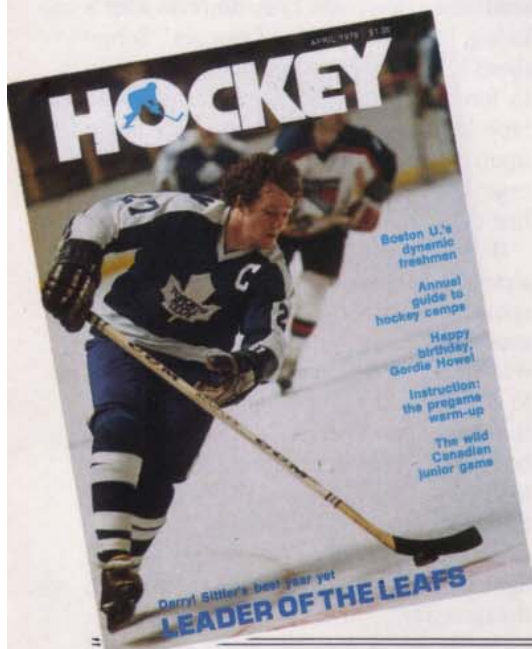
The Gretzky goal has been his most successful single picture, says Bennett. "It's funny, because it's not a great shot, but it is *the moment*." Bennett didn't use his usual ceiling-mounted strobes for the Gretzky assignment because the three-second recycling time of the units would have lessened the odds of catching the exact moment the puck entered the net. Instead, he pushed Ektachrome 400 one stop and shot at 2.8 at 1/500 with a 300mm lens. "When I shoot for something like that I go to 1/500 just to be sure it's frozen. When I shoot for myself with available light I use 1/250. I'd rather throw out 18 frames with a little blur and keep the 18 that don't have the grain, because grain doesn't sell." Bennett's standard stobe film is Fuji 100, which gives him a little more speed over Kodachrome 64 and allows him the luxury of doing his own developing.

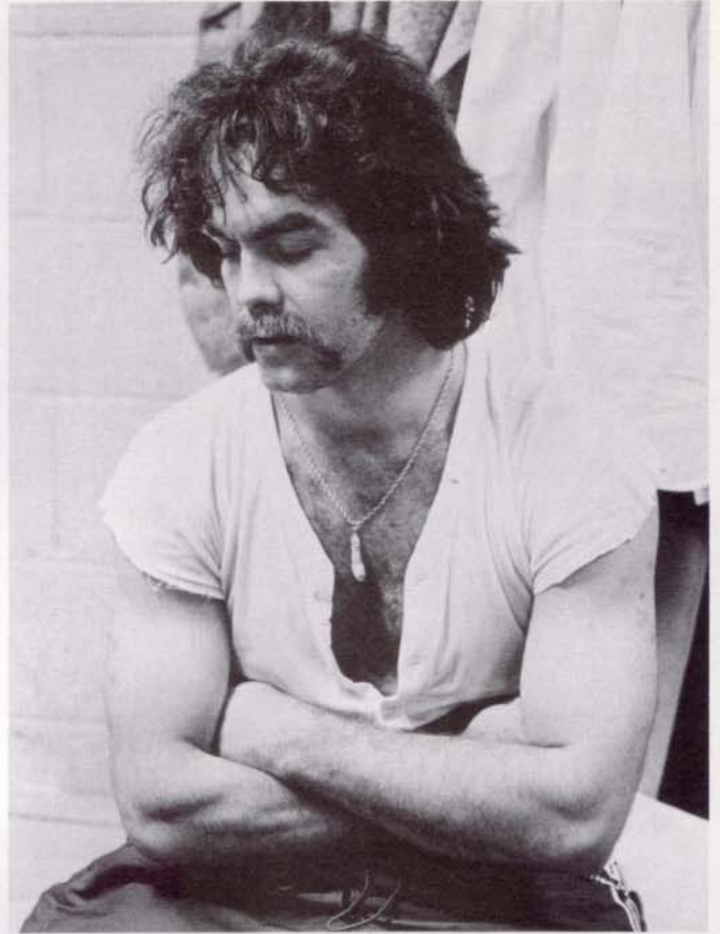
In 17 years Bennett has ducked his share of flying pucks (and been nailed by a few), although today most arenas no longer allow him to sit in his favorite position near centre ice in the penalty box or at the end of one of the players' benches. He's most often holed up near one of the corners, protected by the plexiglass but in camera range of only half of the ice surface. A restriction that bothers him

more, however, is that of format: most requests from magazines and poster companies are for vertical, full-frontal, single-player shots, and Bennett has had his fill. He spent a full month recently completing an assignment for 150 posters, which brought in about \$30,000 but drove him mad from boredom. He longs for an assignment to shoot more dramatic on-ice action, or some behind-the-scenes off-ice photojournalism, but because hockey isn't "one of the big-four sports in the U.S.," it's not given the exposure Bennett thinks it deserves, and in-depth assignments are few and far between.

"I'm more often than not shooting to fill a need," says Bennett, "and that need is usually a strong vertical, boring photograph of a player. And I've felt it more this season than other seasons: a pressure to shoot more of what sells, which gives me less time to shoot what's good. Hockey is a horizontal sport, and magazines are a vertical format. It's real difficult to get up sometimes for shooting boring vertical shots."

It's hard, too, to develop much enthusiasm for going to the rink when the marquee announces that New Jersey or, ahem, Toronto is in town. "There are more and more games that I skip because I sometimes lack the enthusiasm I once had," says Bennett. "Whenever you do something for 125 times a year you're going to get bored of it. Except for sex...but don't print that." □





*Bobby Orr and Phil Esposito are feted by the Boston fans, while (right) controversial Derek Sanderson shows the strain after a game.
(Below) Gretzky's 77th goal (original in color).*

