


By Steve Marantz  
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**YOU CAN CALL HIM RAY**

As an 18-year-old, left-shooting defenseman, Ray Bourque brings to mind Bobby Orr, the last such player the Bruins drafted. There, however, the comparisons should end because while Ray's certainly a fine rookie with an excellent future, no one should confuse him with Bobby.

**R**ay Bourque was an 18-year-old defenseman with a left-handed shot when the Bruins selected him in the first round of the amateur hockey draft and because the last player they drafted who fit that description was Bobby Orr. Bourque had no choice but to stand comparison. This may have been unfair to Bourque — nobody ever said comparisons were fair, just unfair — and yet it was understandable. The legend of Orr has grown with the telling. His era was magic, and the people wanted more magic.

Maybe Ray Bourque had a Stanley Cup up his sleeve.

A month into his first season, Ray Bourque has stopped all comparisons to Orr. He is simply not, which is to say he is mortal, a handicap he has accepted without self-pity.

"I don't worry about it," says Bourque. "I don't think I'll be as good as Bobby Orr. He was a once-in-a-lifetime player."

That settled, Bourque is quite willing to be judged on his merits, which are considerable and which, given time and providence, might produce some of their own magic.

There have been times when Bourque has provided glimpses of a brilliant future, though with the Bruins on the road for six straight untelevised games, most of us didn't see them.

"The game in Winnipeg," said Bob Wilson, Bruins' radio broadcaster, "he really opened up the last five minutes. We were down by two and he decided to get something going. And he was really something."

There was the one-goal, two-assist game at Pittsburgh, which was televised and may represent to date the best of Bourque. At the Garden, since his opening night performance of a goal and an assist, Bourque has been unspectacular. He has proven he can pass accurately and wisely, give an occasional hit and get out of the way to avoid taking one and position himself correctly. He has made few mistakes.

In summation, Bourque has performed up to the level of the other Boston defensemen, none of whom (in the absence of Brad Park) possesses his inherent ability. In one sense this has been good enough, simply because he is eight years younger than the next youngest defenseman, Mike Milbury.

"He's coming along just right," said Harry Sinden, Bruins' general manager. "It's only a matter of time until he's a top player. He's doing everything we can expect of him."

Said Fred Creighton, Bruins coach, "I play him in any situation, and for an 18-year-old player that's about as good an endorsement as you can get."

"The great thing about him is the way he listens to what you say. Most of the time he already knows what you're going to say."

Whether or not the Bruins realize it, and they probably do, there is a certain constraint with which Bourque is being

puck because the Canadiens do it that way.

Perhaps nothing would have defused the anticipation. "Everybody wants another celebrity in town," said Milbury. "Then again, perhaps the proper comparison was not made."

"I wasn't around when Orr broke in," said Don Marotte, "although I saw him a lot in the juniors. Bourque doesn't play like Orr. He plays a lot like Park did and Park had some games in the minors before he came up. He plays a lot like Park but better than Park."

"Look at these," said Raymond Bourque Sr., who bears an unmistakable resemblance to his son-the-hockey-player. "This month's long distance."

On La Mere Bell's computer bill for the month of October were three pages of long distance charges, most of them originating from Cambridge, where Bourque's son-the-hockey-player was quartered at the Sonesta Hotel.

"A hundred and eighty five dollars worth from Raymond," said the father. "He calls to find out the news. He likes to hear about what everybody is doing. He called from Los Angeles last week and said, 'You should see the palm trees.' First time he had ever seen palm trees."

There are no palm trees, of course, in the St. Laurent section of Montreal. It is a neighborhood of modest frame houses and brick apartment buildings populated by a generous ethnic mixture, about half French-speaking and half English-speaking. The Bourque residence on Patricia street is the second-floor apartment of a two-story brick building. It has been home since Raymond Sr. moved to Montreal 28 years ago from Moncton, N.B., his hometown, and took a maintenance job with an electrical company.

In the small living room, Raymond Sr. poured O'Keefe ale from cans and talked about his son-the-hockey-player. He is fluently bilingual.

"All my kids are fully bilingual," he said. "Ray has been since he was seven. This was something my father gave us. In New Brunswick if you didn't know English you couldn't get a good job."

"Quebec is different. They don't want French to learn English. They are stupid."

"My kids went to French schools, but our television was always on English. When I talk to Ray on the phone I talk in French because I don't want him to lose his French."

Junior started skating at the raw age of 9½, which was considered young until the NHL changed the drafting age. There were no scouts present, but Ray Sr. made sure his son kept his head up. Good habits carried over.

At age six Raymond Jr. began playing hockey. It was apparent he was a natural athlete because, recalled the father, he ex-

discussed. He has not been the imaginative player he was in the exhibition season, in part no doubt because the opposition is playing with more discipline now. Sinden expects Bourque to become one of the few defensemen who can control a game, like Park, Denis Potvin and Larry Robinson. But rather than control the puck and allow offensive movement to emanate from himself, Bourque has been dealing the puck off quickly. He also has been electing to stay back rather than inch forward from the blue line. And he has not begun to unload his sizzling slapshot as often as the Bruins need it.

"Ray is a very smooth player," Terry O'Reilly told a reporter from a national magazine. "But he's not as confident as he's going to be. He may be holding back a little now. Maybe he doesn't want to make a glaring mistake."

"He's a mature kid, though, and the club is going to give him time to develop. There's no pressure on him to be spectacular."

Creighton said he has placed no restrictions upon Bourque. "He can go with it if he wants," said Creighton.

For his part, Bourque is satisfied with his play, pleased Creighton is using him on the power play and either unconcerned or unaware that his performance during the exhibition season had created some false expectations.

"I've always played more defensively than offensively," says Bourque. "I take an opening if I get it. If there is someone to give it to, I will, and stay back. I had the openings in the exhibition games. That was the kind of luck I was having. It happens that way sometimes."

Bourque could have warned us. He scored 22 goals last year in junior hockey, and that was not the goal production of a coming Orr. He grew up in Montreal, where the emphasis is on passing the

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