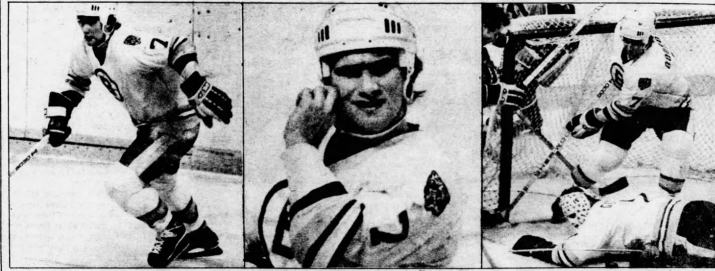


Coach Fred Creighton, talking with Bourque, facing page, says he'll play the rookie in any situation. Bourque, indeed, gets his share of ice time and like any good defenseman seems comfortable handling the puck in his own end.



celled in the other sports he tried as well as hockey.

"When he was eight," said the father, "his (hockey) coach told me 'Send him to school.'"

"He was already intense. I remember once I bought him a new pair of gloves. He got so nervous before the games. He chewed a hole in the fingers before he even got to play."

Ray Sr. had missed his youth because of the Depression, and like so many of his generation he was determined that his children would have better opportunities. A significant portion of his income was spent on hockey schools and equipment and gasoline. He drove his family to Boston to see the Bruins play.

"Sports became more important when his wife died of cancer in 1973, and her two youngest children, Ray Jr. and Ricky, were 12 and 10.

"When my wife was sick I had bills up to there," said Ray Sr., "and I still sent Raymond to hockey schools. I got him involved in sports because I knew what was happening and I wanted to get his mind off it."

And when Ray Sr. remarried, his second wife, Edna, also a Moncton native, did housework so that Ray Jr. and Ricky could continue in hockey. Her lasagna put meat on their bones.

"Now you look back," said Edna, "and you think it's only a bad dream. His pay was covering the house and the bills. All the money I made was going to hockey."

"But they were nice boys. I didn't mind helping."

At 13, an uncle advised Ray Jr. to become a defenseman. "There's a better chance to make pro," he had said, planting a seed.

At 14 Raymond Jr. was gone. There was a year in Three Rivers, a year in Sorel and two years in Verdun, a Montreal suburb. His junior teams never won a championship, but he made the all-star teams and played in the international tournaments and found himself hobnobbing with Serge Savard and Guy Lapointe at the Forum. Somewhere along the way he

lost interest in school and quit. He was a celebrity in the way high school athletes in the states could never imagine.

Ray Sr. was putting 17,000 miles a year on his car chasing after his two sons' careers. He would sit in the stands and yell loudly, and sometimes Ray Jr. wished he would be quiet. But the screaming was an old habit, and old habits carry over.

"If they ever make 'The Ray Bourque Story,'" said the father, "I have 21 reels of tape on him from when he was seven, eight and nine. His brother, too. I wanted to get him making a hat truck and I finally did. Maybe the Hall of Fame will want them someday."

When his son turned 18, Ray Sr. signed a piece of paper giving the owner of the Verdun team, Rodrig Lemoine, the right to represent his son. He trusted Lemoine's ability to deal in large sums of money more than his own, which had been limited by the fact he had always owed instead of collected them. This changed somewhat when Ray Jr. signed a three-year contract worth an estimated \$500,000.

"I told him to bank his money and concentrate on hockey," said the father. "The first day he got his bonus, he bought me a \$10,000 Chevy Impala. It is the first new car I've ever owned."

"He also paid all my debts off. I haven't been out of debt since my wife died. I told him to save it. The taxes would take too much. But he wanted to do this."

In restaurants Ray Bourque has become comfortable with wine lists and sirloin steaks. On a recent evening, he requested a specific Bourdeaux, a wine he had particularly enjoyed. He settled for a Beaujolais Villages, 1977, and started pouring for himself after the second glass.

The Good Life has added seven pounds to his weight, now 210.

"It's kind of hard being weight" when you eat in these good restaurants," he said. Vanilla ice cream was dessert.

As interview subjects, 18-year-olds generally fall into one of two categories. They either talk too much and too thoughtlessly or they talk too little. Bourque falls into the latter, and not only in interviews. Creighton feels Bourque is quiet to the extent that he won't bring his problems forward, compelling the coach to draw them out. Brad McCrimmon, the first-year defenseman who has been Bourque's roommate since camp, says,

"He's either quiet or cautious. I don't know which." Pete McNab thinks Bourque is the quiet type, period, and always will be.

So far nobody has recognized him at a public place away from the Garden, which has suited him fine.

"I don't like to talk about myself," said Bourque. "I feel like a normal person. The only thing I do better than the guy next to me in the restaurant or someone to play hockey. That's what I do for a living. Some other guy is a lawyer. That's the way I think."

"I'm a pretty simple guy. I don't get excited about making a lot of money or anything. It's a great living."

His exploration of Boston has been limited because of the long road trip (Q: "Have you met Larry Bird?" A: "Who is Larry Bird?") He and McCrimmon have been living at a hotel near the Garden, but Bourque recently rented an apartment for himself in North Andover. The apartment has two bedrooms, so that it can accommodate visitors from Montreal, such as parents (2) and girl friends (1). Ray Sr. is expected to be the most frequent guest.

"Your father thinks a lot of you."

"I know," said Ray Jr. "That's been his life. Since my mother died and my sisters and brothers got married and left, there was only me and my brother. He enjoyed coming to all the games and taking us to the rink. He followed us all the time.

"He was just great. Practice was at 6 o'clock in the morning and he'd be the first one waking us up and bringing us over to be rink."

"I knew he was sacrificing. That's why I got him a gift because I knew all those things and I really wanted to show him I appreciated all he'd done."

"Do you remember your mother dying?"

"I was kind of young," said Bourque. "She was sick for a long time. She suffered a lot. But when you're that young, you never think about your mother dying away. You think she's sick but she'll be better."

"My stepmother has been really good to us. She's a great cook. You should try a plate of her lasagna. I'm tellin' ya."

"How good of a hockey player do you want to be?"

"How good?" said Bourque. "With some experience, I'd like to be as good as Brad Park, Robinson, Potvin, those guys. That's what I'd be working for. Still a long way to go."

"Have you always wanted to be a hockey player?"

"I was maybe eight or nine years old," said Bourque. "It was a dream. I used to watch the guys on television and dream about it. Finally I got into a good caliber of junior and it was going good for me and that's when I really started to think about it."

"In a few years draft time comes and you get drafted and it's here."

"It's funny. Once you're here it's different. Like, you remember when you were a kid it was a dream, and now once you get here, I don't know, it's the same thing."

"That's profound."

"It is," Bourque replied, and whether he was telling or asking was unclear. After talking to him, I could believe it was either, or both. ■

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