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# Sports Illustrated

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# HOCKEY TALK

FROM HAT TRICKS TO HEADSHOTS AND EVERYTHING IN-BETWEEN



FOREWORD BY **KOSTYA KENNEDY**

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AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



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**FENN**

**M&S**

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## FOREWORD

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THE ETHOS DOESN'T CHANGE. BACKYARD PONDS become Pee Wee rinks, then junior-league barns, and finally, glossy, 20,000-seat arenas. Years and generations pass. The NHL extends further and deeper into the international landscape. There's money to be made. And still hockey remains rooted in its hardiness and humility, in an appetite for hard work, a constancy of purpose, a willingness to absorb and play through pain, a determination, above all, to do whatever may be needed to help your team win. This is where the soul of the game resides.

Hockey's magnificent moments invariably come after a series of unseen and unglamorous ones. Sidney Crosby's Golden Goal – relived and freshly examined in Michael Farber's exquisite story *Eight Seconds* (page 2) – was not scored simply by dint of some isolated sleight of hand, but because of a sequence of decidedly blue-collar (if sophisticated) efforts. For Crosby, the praise that he gets around the rink is worth as much as the latest endorsement dollar. *No one works harder than Sidney*, any coach or teammate will tell you. And it takes only a short time watching him to see that this is true.

Bobby Orr had the ethos too, of course. For all his

spectacular skills, the rushes and weaves and feints that changed the sport forever, Orr's greatness was buttressed by the honored values of his craft: He could knock a guy flat. He could go into any corner against anyone (or even two of anyone) and come out with the puck on the blade of his stick. He played, and willed his team to victory, on knees that he could barely stand on. Those are the virtues that cling to Orr and that have made him – still elusive, still inscrutable (page 18) – a living legend.

The pinnacle Orr moment endures in part because it lives in black and white, the classic hockey photograph. Orr is soaring, horizontal to the ice, after scoring the winning goal of the 1970 Stanley Cup finals. The power of the photo is not just in the fact that he scored, nor in his apparent jubilation, but also in the knowledge that in the next frame Orr, who'd been tripped into the air by a Blues defenseman, will land hard on the Boston Garden ice.

In the most thrilling of hockey highlights, pain is just a breath away. In hockey, nothing comes for free.

**WE WRITE ABOUT THE GREAT ONES OF COURSE.** Crosby and Orr and Wayne Gretzky, Rocket Richard and Gordie Howe. They each elevated themselves by some mixture of, in the words of Herbert Warren Wind describing Richard (*Fire on Ice*, page 146), "his courage, his skill and that magical uncultivable quality, true magnetism . . ."

Courage, it must be noted, comes first, the thing that unites not only the sport's immortal players but also all of the worthy foot soldiers; that quality (the ethos, again) that must attend a

hockey player, lest he wind up left behind or banished to a coach's dreaded doghouse. Courage is needed because the threat of violence – legal or illegal, intentional or incidental – is always there.

In the fall of 2000 I wrote a story for *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* on Marty McSorley, the aging NHL enforcer, then with the Bruins, who had just received the longest suspension ever mandated by the league. McSorley's crime (a provincial court ruled it to be exactly that) had been using his stick to club the Canucks tough guy Donald Brashear in the side of the head. It was a horrific act, awful to see (Brashear dropped like a bag of bones, and then lay convulsing on the ice) and unpardonable.

It was not, however, unique. The incident had given another glimpse into hockey's dark side. McSorley, Boston's primary fighter, was hoping to engage Brashear, the Canucks heavyweight, into combat. The blow had not simply been an outgrowth of that single game – Brashear and McSorley had fought in the first period and had circled one another throughout – but also of a career made essential by the nature of the professional game.

In his prime McSorley, best known as Gretzky's bodyguard with the Oilers and the Kings and a player who routinely finished near the top of the league in fights and penalty minutes, had made himself into an effective defenseman. Good for twenty-two minutes of ice time a night, smart with the puck, a plus-player. McSorley was no All-Star but was a solid top-four blue-liner, clearly something more than a goon.

And so I asked him, "Marty, do you think you would have made it to the NHL if you weren't such a good fighter?"

McSorley paused, and then he said: "I would not have made it to Junior A."

WHEN HE SWUNG HIS STICK AT BRASHEAR, MCSORLEY crossed over the edge (far over) and broke hockey's do-and-don't code of violence. Jesse Boulerice crossed over as well – terribly, shockingly – when he raised his stick and battered Andrew Long in an OHL game (*Less Than Murder*, page 72). Such an event tends to burst into the public conversation, serve as a referendum on the sport.

Yet it is easy to parse. We abhor what Boulerice did and condemn it without restraint. *There is no place for that in hockey*, every observer, every player, every coach agrees. *Never was and never will be*.

But what about, say, the purposeful slash that Bobby Clarke, that revered and toothless Flyer, the rambunctious Canadian boy from Flin Flon, delivered to the great Russian forward Valery Kharlamov in the 1972 Summit Series? Kharlamov's ankle was fractured, his superb series finished, as Canada rallied in his absence to win the remaining games. How does the hockey purist regard Clarke's slash? Just a part of the sport? Over the line? Fair? Unsportsmanlike? Does that swing of the stick lift Clarke's legacy – and surely in many barroom conversations it has – or diminish it?

Fighting, that is, gloves-off and put 'em up fighting, has been part of North American hockey from its earliest age and remains close to the heart of the modern game – as evidenced in Farber's *Why Good Teams Fight* (page 102). Yet that particular form of violence, the clashing of enforcers away from the pulse of the game action, is something other than the slashes and cross-checks and high elbows that occur in mid-battle, and those are in turn something other than the body-rattling (but within the rules) hits and blows that pepper each shift and can define the environment of a game.

Hockey's beauty shows itself in many ways – the spectacular goals of Richard, the cerebral elegance of Gretzky, the dauntlessness of Howe, the tic-tac-toe of a power play tuned just right, the flash of a goalkeeper's glove. All of it takes place on a knife's edge: literally, on skate blades; figuratively, because at any moment on the ice, a collision may come, or a heavy check into the boards. And then things may unravel. Such ordinary run-ins, after all, are what concussed Crosby in the early of days of 2011, dizzying him and ending what had appeared destined to be another MVP season for the Kid.

Years ago in the Colorado Avalanche locker room I was talking with the NHL forward Dave Reid, who was then in the even-song of a nearly two-decade long professional career. Reid was raving about a young and energetic teammate, who, Reid said, "played every game, every shift, as if it might be his last." Smart, we agreed, because you never know if it would be.

That's the way the memorable players approach each night in the hockey rink, playing the game on some level as if it might be his last. "Leaving it all on the ice," so many players like to say. And, "Whatever it takes."

There it is again: the ethos, the soul of the game.

KOSTYA KENNEDY



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HOCKEY TALK



# I. EIGHT SECONDS

*A second by second account of Sidney Crosby's legendary Golden Goal, as told by the players who were there*

BY MICHAEL FARBER 6/12/2010

vanc



ancouver 2010

CONSIDER A MOMENT. NOW TAKE THAT MOMENT – maybe the most significant in sports in 2010 – and break it down frame by frame into 100 or so smaller moments. Hit STOP, REWIND, and PLAY. Now do it again. Follow the traveling puck, the dot that connects four men. Team Canada forwards Sidney Crosby and Jarome Iginla, American goalie Ryan Miller, and referee Bill McCreary. Seated in front of oversized plasmas or small laptops earlier this fall, clicking through a DVD, they watch adjustments, assumptions, decisions, and unadulterated dumb luck. No need for a spoiler alert. The climax never changes. Crosby scores with 12:20 left in overtime. Canada 3, USA 2. Olympic gold. These men know too well what will happen because they were there.

The golden goal in Vancouver is embroidered on the tapestry of hockey, part of a Crosby legacy that will one day veer into legend.

But what if Crosby had not scored to end the most significant game ever played on Canadian ice and an American like, say, Joe Pavelski, who had a credible chance seconds earlier, had?

The same people who still bask in the reflected glow of the goal light would be muttering about a hockey messiah who, other than a round-robin shootout winner, had experienced a middling Olympics.

Canadians would be lining their sackcloth with fur in anticipation of winter.

Hockey in the U.S. might have undergone a dramatic updraft that likely would have made Miller a breakout star, boosted

PREVIOUS PAGE: Sidney Crosby seconds after scoring the Golden Goal at the 2010 Olympics. *(Photograph by David E. Klutho)*



interest among hockey agnostics in NHL cities such as Atlanta and Columbus and maybe even prodded owners of the twenty-four American-based teams to look past their wallets and embrace participation in Sochi 2014 so Team USA could properly defend its gold medal.

"If we'd lost to the U.S.," Iginla says, his eyes dancing, "they'd've probably made another *Miracle* movie."

The four men met separately with *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* and talked through the most memorable goal scored by a Canadian since 1972 and the most deflating one scored against the U.S. since, well, ever. Viewed through the prism of personal experience they deconstructed the kaleidoscopic twists of those last eight seconds, offering explanation but not excuse, hammering happenstance into narrative. As their tales eddied and flowed, it was clear they were not simply reliving how four men came to be in one quadrant of Olympic ice on the last day of February – but telling a universal story of how the regimented and the random blend to make history.

## 12:28

Crosby barrels into the high slot with the puck on his stick, trying to barge past defensemen Brian Rafalski and Ryan Suter. Their teammates, forwards Zach Parise and Jamie Langenbrunner, apply backside pressure, swallowing Crosby in a deep blue sea of U. S. and A. as the puck skitters ahead toward the American net. He is in jail. Crosby might be Superman, but unless he leaps defensemen in a single bound, his options are limited. The Americans are in control, which appeals to the man on the ice who most craves it.