



Bobby Orr & Mike Bossy



Bobby Orr and Mike Bossy team-up for kids:

By JON COOK -- SLAM! Sports

TORONTO, Ont. -- When Hall of Famer Bobby Orr puts his name to something people pay attention, especially his peers. And when it's something that is aimed at helping kids get more enjoyment from the game and develop better hockey fundamentals, fellow Hall of Famer Mike Bossy couldn't help but want to be a part of it.

"How can you not want to get into a project that Bobby Orr's involved with," said the former New York Islanders' sniper, who retired in 1987.

Orr and Bossy are remembered most for scoring clutch goals during their National Hockey League careers, but now they're trying to get some recognition for an assist.

Both Orr and Bossy were back on the ice Tuesday at St. Mike's Arena in Toronto to help launch the second season of Chevrolet Safe and Fun Hockey Schools. The schools, sponsored and promoted across the country by General Motors of Canada, are the initiative of Orr and Dr. K. Vern Stenlund, Director of Programs with Huron Hockey Schools, to help kids, coaches and parents put the fun back into our national game.

"I've been pro-active on this issue for many, many years," admits the 52-year-old Orr, after taking kids through some of the drills taught at the camps. "I just didn't have someone like General Motors to make it grow."

The schools, which start in June in Ontario and travel across the country, are geared for boys and girls involved at the sport at the 6-9 year levels and try to teach kids to be responsible for their actions on the ice and respectful of their teammates, opponents, coaches and parents.

While Orr and Bossy were on the ice as role-models for the wide-eyed Canadian kids that surrounded them, another former NHLer - Craig Simpson - was there to make sure his seven-year-old son Dillon got a chance to meet two of the game's legends.

"When he heard he'd get a chance to get on the ice with Bobby Orr and Mike Bossy he was telling everyone he was doing it," said Simpson, who was in town to cover the Toronto Maple Leafs' game tomorrow in his new role as a broadcaster for CTV Sportsnet. "He enjoys hockey and I think what they're trying to do here is important in making sure that kids realize that it's a fun game and learning how to play it properly and safely."

Orr wants kids like Dillon, who is already in his third year of minor hockey, to be able to enjoy the experience like he did growing up.

"Some of the happiest memories I have are of my days in minor hockey, but for many kids that's not the case and that's wrong," said the Hall of Fame defenseman and former Boston Bruin. "When that happens we fail and we're failing in many cases."

While Orr scored 270 times over his 13-year NHL career, his primary goal nowadays is to make sure that the people coaching our kids are quality people who enjoy the game and whose priority is to make the game fun to play.

"Over the years I've seen outrageous things," said Orr, whose own kids have yet to play hockey at any level. Orr has seen minor hockey coaches throw garbage on the ice in anger, bench 9-year-old kids and berate and embarrass players leaving the rink because they didn't score or make a save.

"It's out there, but the parents are afraid to keep going on it to try to correct it," said Orr. "What those parents have to understand is that there are other parents who feel the same way and if you can get together, you can do great things. Alone it's hard, but together you can do great things and that's what we have to do with this program. We need help from a lot of people."

One of those people is Bossy, a fellow Hall of Famer and four-time Stanley Cup winner with the New York Islanders. Bossy, who scored 50 goals in each of his first nine seasons, said he couldn't pas up an opportunity to work with Orr.

Bossy, who won three Lady Byng Trophies as the NHL's most gentlemanly player, is dismayed with the attitudes of some minor-league coaches he has watched in his native Quebec.

"Screaming at the referees is just not an example to show to the kids," said the 43-year-old Bossy. "You want the kids to play in an atmosphere that's going to help them win and help them be their best and it's not in such a stressfull atmosphere that they're going to perform their best and learn."

Bossy says that both parents and coaches must be realistic when dealing with their kids and players. The five-time NHL All-Star says the reality is that most kids won't play professional hockey.

"You're not going to become a professional in any sport unless you are unbelievably talented," he said. "If you look at the amount of kids that are trying to funnel through to certain spots in professional sports these days, the whole at the end isn't very big."

Bossy, who benefitted during his career playing on a line with tough guy Clarke Gillies, said he would like to see coaches steer their kids away from the more "goonish" aspect of the game.

"I'd like to see it happen and I think that's what our program addresses," said Bossy. "It addresses fair play, respect and responsibility - very, very important aspects of a human being, not just a hockey player. There's a lack of that in every aspect today whether it be in sports or in normal life. That's what this program is about and that's the message we're going to try to get across to all the youngsters."

With two highly skilled and respected players like Bossy and Orr on their team, parents can breathe a little easier in their fight to make hockey a safe and fun sport for their children to play.

"It would be great to see a hockey game where there was one skillful team beating another skillful team, instead of one team trying to intimidate the other team and one team trying to injure the other team," said Bossy, whose own career was cut short by back injuries sustained from playing. "That's an ideal situation people will say and it's never going to happen, but if no one puts their foot down and tries to make it happen then it will never happen. And 20 years from now we'll be saying the same thing about the stick-swinging and the fighting and the intimidation, but Chevrolet has given me a platform to talk about this and to try to get something done and I'm going to take advantage of it."

Orr, showing his reaction time hasn't slowed any from his playing days, responded to Bossy's not-so-subtle shot at the NHL's Commissioner's Office with a one-timer of his own. "I don't think the NHL is going to hire us."