





## CHAPTER

# 1

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## BASIC BABS

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Brian Babineau

*above:*

*Steve Babineau, in his new “studio,” the Fleet Center [now the TD Banknorth Garden].*

*left:*

*Arguably the two greatest defensemen of all time, and they both spent the great bulk of their careers in Boston. Ray Bourque and Bobby Orr.*

Steve Babineau is a rink rat: a rink rat with a camera, who happens to be the team photographer for one of the most storied franchises in hockey history. What the Bruins lack in Stanley Cup victories over the course of their proud history, they make up for in grit, toughness, and personality. The number of characters and legendary moments captured by Babineau in just the past 38 years are more than most organizations could hope for if they stayed in business for a century. Maybe it's the attitude. Maybe it's hardy New Englanders and their love for a game played on ice, by generation after generation: by grandpa on a pond, by grandson in the Sunday morning squirt house league. Whatever draws the locals to love the finesse, the skill, the sound, the banter, and, most importantly, the physicality of the game, is what attracted Cambridge, Massachusetts, native Steve Babineau.

“My Uncle Lenny always took me to Celtics games,” Babineau remembers. “I was wiry and tall, and he wanted me to be a basketball player. His buddy was a writer for the old *Record American* and we got great seats.”

To Babineau, naturally ordained “Babs” via the hockey world, the hoops just didn't seem to fit. Fortunately for him, an intervention occurred.

“My next-door neighbor Paul Harrigan in 1964 took me to a B's game. I'll never forget it. It was Original Six hockey. The B's were the doormats but it just didn't matter,” Babs recalls. “Jerry Toppazzini, Murray Oliver, John Bucyk, Orland





Kurtenbach, and Eddie Johnston in net. I loved watching these guys and the uniforms were classic.”

The game stirred quite a bit of passion in a kid who didn’t even skate.

“I was born in 1952. When I was eight, I remember watching the 1960 U.S. Olympic team win the gold medal in Squaw Valley. It was on *Wide World of Sports* or something,” Babineau ponders. “From that point forward I was out in the street playing hockey, or banging it around somewhere playing floor hockey. I was the best street hockey player on the planet; even the kids who played ice hockey wanted me on their street team.”

Living in North Cambridge, Babs used to walk to a ballpark in West Cambridge to play baseball, with the same kids who were already skating. Lack of family funds for equipment and transportation to the rink, and living in a different part of the city, hindered his opportunity to play the frozen variety of hockey early on. Finally, in eighth grade, with encouragement from the other kids and families, he took up the game on ice.

“I picked up the skills of passing and shooting pretty quickly. I just couldn’t put it together with my feet,” he says.

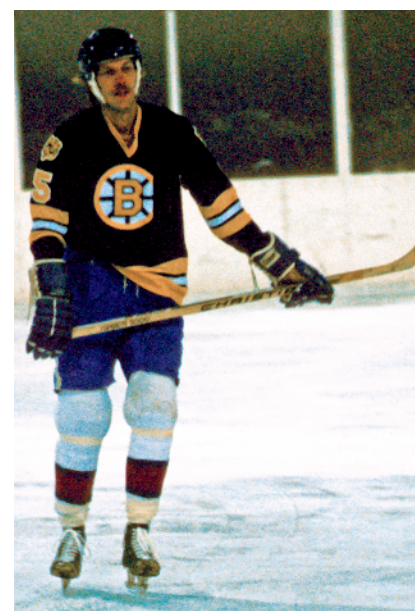
Ah, but of course, therein lies the basic challenge to the greatest game on the planet.

above:

Early ticket stubs and photos from Babineau attending the Boston Braves and Bruins games in the early 70s.

bottom:

The lanky photographer can skate, sort of. Since his high school team lost 44 straight, he’s improved dramatically.



Armen James



Nevertheless, despite lacking skill, a demographic shift of sorts opened up an opportunity for the poor skater. With an influx of African-American kids into the neighborhood, the more popular sports at the time became basketball and track. Very few of the new kids, if any, played hockey at the time. The

I would cut physics class and lunch to hustle down and watch about 30 minutes of practice.

hockey and baseball teams at Rindge Technical High School suffered for a lack of talent and numbers. Babineau tried out and made the freshman hockey team.

(By the way, the athletic swing continued. Where hockey and baseball were popular and very successful at Rindge in the 1950s, by the mid-1960s the emphasis was on football, track, and basketball. Georgetown and NBA great Patrick Ewing came out of Rindge, as did many exemplary track athletes.)

“Playing our games at the old Boston Arena, where the Bruins started,” Babineau recalls, “I’d go in and skate and practice and sit on the bench and say, ‘Gee, I wonder if Eddie Shore sat here, or Dit Clapper.’”

Meanwhile, with Babineau’s father being a union laborer, a carpenter, and a painter, it seemed safe to assume that young Steve might follow in his footsteps in some way or another. The idea at Rindge Technical was to load up the grades for college, or in most cases, line oneself up with a vocational opportunity.

*below:*

*Phil Esposito of Boston just misses against his younger brother, Chicago netminder Tony, after leaving Blackhawks defenseman Keith Magnuson in his wake.*







*left:*

*“Turk” and “Pie,” Derek Sanderson and John McKenzie, walking to practice at Harvard’s Watson Rink.*

In Babineau’s mind, his vocational opportunity, official or not, within the scholastic curriculum or not, was photography.

“I had an attraction to the Bruins,” Babs recalls. “They used to practice at Harvard’s Watson Rink, about two miles from my high school. I would cut physics class and lunch to hustle down and watch about 30 minutes of practice and then return to school. I’d go on my own with a little Instamatic camera. I have a picture of Johnny McKenzie and Derek Sanderson walking across Harvard Yard carrying their skates. Then my friend Rick Marshall and I would jump on the bus and the trolley to go on Saturday mornings to watch the Bruins practice at the Garden.”

It remained to be seen whether Steve Babineau’s photography career showed early promise. His hockey career, despite plenty of opportunity, did not.

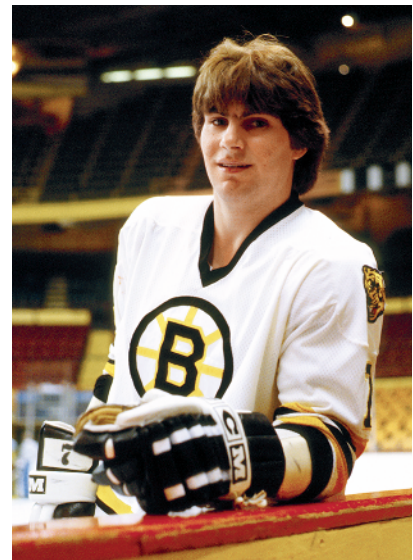
“Coach Dick Kelly, a former Boston University star, used to call me ‘Alice,’ because when I was in high school I was 6-foot-2, and dripping wet I was lucky to weigh 115 or 120 pounds. ‘Hey Alice, get out there.’

“I remember one game he benched me after my first shift. I made a bad pass, so he benched me. We only had 12 skaters. We’re losing the game 10-nothing to Waltham, and with 35 seconds left in the game, he put me back in to take a face-off. I won the draw. Ned Yetton was in goal for Waltham. Our point guy took a slap shot, the rebound came right out to me, and I put it top shelf. The game ended two seconds later.”

Not bad for 35 seconds, eh coach?

*below:*

*Ray Bourque as a rookie. Babineau documented Bourque’s entire career in Boston.*





“We had so few players, anybody who made freshman was eligible to play junior varsity. I was playing both,” Babs says with astonishment. “I played about 30 games that year. We went at it six days a week; practice Monday, JV game on Tuesday, practice on Wednesday, and so on. As a sophomore I made varsity, and if you weren’t captain of varsity, you could also play JV. I was getting a ton of ice time.”

But the team was awful. In fact, Babineau played for one of the most infamous teams in the Commonwealth’s hockey history. They weren’t cheap or dirty or delinquent; they were just bad.

“We set the high school league record for most consecutive losses,” Babineau points out. “The streak started when I was a freshman, and it went until my first game as a senior. We lost every single game, 44 straight. We beat Brockton the first game of my senior year 1-0, and you’d think we’d won the Stanley Cup. It was in all the papers.”

Babineau scored three goals his entire senior year.

*below:*

*Don Cherry coaches the Rochester Americans at the Garden against the Braves. That’s Brave’s defenseman, part-time Bruin, Nick Beverley along the boards.*





"A typical game: we'd play Arlington," Babineau says. "There would be three hundred fans for Arlington, three fans for us. I remember we were tied nothing-nothing after one period, and the Arlington fans gave us a standing ovation. Between periods we said to each other, 'Let's just try to keep it under five goals this period; let's hold 'em to five.' We were gassed. We went down 9-nothing after two."

Despite his less-than-stellar experience on the ice, Babineau's love affair with hockey was raging. About the time Babs was playing high school hockey, some guy named Orr was on the top of his game.

*below:*

*Shots of the great Bobby Orr when Babineau was still an amateur photographer, taken from his seat in the Garden. Left, Orr's lone game as a Boston Brave [against the Bruins] played as a charity exhibition, and right, Orr as a Bruin.*



"I remember when I was a bit younger...the talk of the 'second coming.' I saw Bobby play an exhibition game at the Garden when he was still a defenseman with Oshawa. It was the Oshawa Generals with Orr against Niagara Falls featuring star forward Derek Sanderson. Orr had the shaved head. Sanderson was gritty. I remember Orr and Sanderson fought at center ice," Babs says with a smile. "It was unreal."

By 1969, Orr established himself as the best overall player in the League, while Babineau's interest in photography had taken off. Hockey and photography dominated his young life.





above:

*Self-portrait of teenager Steve Babineau at home in Cambridge in front of his framed hockey collection. At the time Babs worked as a rink attendant at Harvard.*

When Babineau asked for an autograph and Orr obliged, Babineau froze. Orr tried to hand Babineau his coffee to hold while he signed and Steve's hand didn't open. Orr spilled coffee on both their hands.

"I was young, not much younger than him," Babs states the obvious, "but I was nervous then."

Within the same decade, those nerves would turn to pure adrenaline and emotion for Babineau. After being a fan and seeing Orr lead the organization to two Cup wins, Babineau would have the opportunity to shoot a brief stint of Orr's career before it ended, and then be on hand for the ultimate night: Bobby's jersey retirement on January 9, 1979.

"Needless to say he was an unbelievable player and to have a chance to overlap with his time here just a little bit is special to me," points out Babineau. "He was one of a kind and I still get emotional when I watch clips of the night they hoisted number 4. A great night for probably the greatest player."

Because of Orr and others, Babineau gradually learned to keep his composure around superstar players. He also recalls another valuable job-related lesson from watching those blessed with the ultimate in talent: always have your camera ready.

"I lived in Porter Square, North Cambridge, and I worked at the rink at Harvard making ice. I have a picture of me when I was 17, 18 years old, sitting in a chair in my house, with all of these framed pictures I had taken behind me.

"I also remember trying to get Bobby Orr's autograph," Babs continues. "At the old Garden, North Station, there were double doors that were used as the main entrance, and one of the doors was open. Rick and I used to get there early and sneak up to the level where the players came in through security. I remember Orr and Gilles Marotte walked in."





“We got in to see a Red Wings practice: Howe, Delvecchio, Gadsby. After practice Gordie Howe was standing in front of the crease like a baseball batter, Roger Crozier [the goalie] was crouched behind him in front of the net like a catcher, and Andy Bathgate was sending slappers in from near center ice. Pow. Pow. Pow. Gordie is swinging his stick like a baseball bat and hitting pucks upstairs. He got a piece of everything. I don’t know how he did it. I kept yelling at him to give me his stick. He kept hitting the pucks into the balcony, and finally the stick shattered into a million pieces. I remember him looking at me with the end of the broken stick and wondering if I still wanted it. I passed, but he gave me an autograph instead.”

From that point forward Babs always carried his camera along, his nerves settled, the comfort level from the experience of being around the NHLers started to kick in, and Babineau started to get a feel for the building.

**I went out and bought season tickets to the Boston Braves.**

As is often the case, getting something one wants badly enough also means making small sacrifices. He gave up a crack at the best hockey tickets to the best games, just to improve his opportunity to work on his craft.

*above left:*

*Normand Leveille, whose career ended suddenly during a game in Vancouver in October 1982 when he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, returns to the Garden for the first time. Bruin Barry Pederson (#10) is clapping to the left, immediately next to retired Bruin Jean Ratelle in a plaid jacket. Media man Nate Greenberg is next to security guard clapping.*

*above right:*

*Leveille with “Mr. Hockey” Gordie Howe at the Fleet Center, during festivities for the 1996 NHL All-Star game.*



“I just needed to get into the building to take pictures at hockey games, which I could do before the game by walking down to the glass,” Babineau recalls. “The glass was short, I was 6-foot-2, and I could walk down and shoot right over it. Plus, I could shoot from my seat. It may have been the year the WHA [World Hockey Association] started [1972]. I went down to buy Bruins tickets on a wicked cold night. The mayor didn’t want the fans waiting outside, so they funneled us inside and into two lines: Original Six or expansion tickets. I thought, well, everyone’s going to want to see the Canadiens and Red Wings, so I’ll get in the expansion line. I really wanted to see the better teams but I knew it would be next to impossible. Rick and I were third in line for expansion games. We get to the front, looking to buy seats for the Blues and Flyers and such, and they hand us obstructed view. The season ticket holders had already bought all of the rest of the seats before they opened it up to us.

“How can this be? This sucks. I went out and bought season tickets to the Boston Braves.”

The Bruins American League affiliate, the Braves, also played at the Garden. Even with six extra teams at the NHL level in those days, the talent wasn’t that watered down, and the hockey at both levels was outstanding.

Babs bought season tickets to the Boston Braves, plus a ticket package for the first seven games of the season of the New England Whalers of the World Hockey Association (WHA).

below:

*What Babineau calls a “onetime” shot, a posed effort outside the norm. Here, goalie Andy Moog, Ray Bourque and Cam Neely don three different Bruins sweaters; black, white and NHL 75th-anniversary “throw back,” worn by the Original Six teams.*







“I saw guys when they were young play against and for the Braves like [Larry] Robinson and [Terry] O’Reilly. I have pictures of Terry O’Reilly playing for the Braves. We used to keep track of how many times O’Reilly would fall down during a game. He made himself into an unbelievable player. Not a great skater then, but he turned himself into a solid skater and a great player. First on, last off. By the end of his career, in his heyday, you couldn’t knock him off his skates. He might fall after running through you, but you’re not knocking him down. He was best ever at controlling the puck in the corner with his skates. Pass it or keep it, he’d protect the puck with his body.”

O’Reilly is one of only two non-Hall-of-Fame players [Lionel Hitchman is the other] with his name and number in the Garden rafters. He’s the mold of a true Bruin.

“I was dating my soon-to-be-wife, Anita, at that time. I used to take her to games,” Babs recalls. “I remember us watching O’Reilly chasing Dave Schultz down the runway. Schultz butt-ended me once when I leaned over and called him a p——. O’Reilly chased him down the rink. O’Reilly probably doesn’t remember that and obviously he’d have no idea that was me. Pretty cool actually when you think about it.”

Babineau’s season tickets were in the third row. His simple plan: he’d take photos leaning over the glass before the game, and from his seat during.

The next big step in the young photographer’s development: ironic luck.

*above left:*

*Terry O’Reilly “bided his time” playing the game rough and tough as he gradually improved his skating, a weakness when he came up with the AHL Boston Braves.*

*above right:*

*Two men fit in the mold “ultimate Bruin.” Grinders, scorers, fighters, and relentless leaders, Terry O’Reilly and Cam Neely truly epitomize the Bruin ideology.*





above:

*The first Steve Babineau efforts to make The Hockey News. He was paid three dollars a piece for these WHA images of Tim Sheehy and Bobby Sheehan. Printed in Montreal at the time, this was the November 2nd, 1973, issue of the weekly.*

below:

*New England Whalers of the WHA, Boston Bruins of the NHL, and Boston Braves of the AHL. As an amateur, Babineau was shooting all three during the same season.*

A burglar broke into the Babineaus' house one spring afternoon while Steve was down the street playing baseball. When he and his father came home, the crook was still in the house. The front chain was still hooked; the man had come in and was about to go out a back window.

"He heard us, jumped back out, and ran across a field and crossed the railroad tracks," Babs recalls.

The burglar had swiped a strongbox out of Steve's uncle's room, and he had also taken Steve's camera.

"I had a simple SLR [single lens reflex]. One fixed lens. I was able to go out with the insurance money and get a camera with lenses. I started shooting my second year of the Braves with a good camera," Babs says thoughtfully.

Babineau got married in 1973, two days before he turned 21. "Getting married set my life in motion," Babineau says. "I had to get a job."

He sold his first photo to *The Hockey News* that same year.

"I was an avid reader of *The Hockey News*. My neighbor Paul Harrigan got it, and then I started getting it when I could afford it," Babs recalls. "After three or four issues, I worked up the nerve to call them."

"The middle of *The Hockey News* had three pages dedicated to the new league [WHA] but no photos, so I called Charlie Halpin, the editor in Montreal," remembers Babs.

Babineau explained that he was an avid reader of the weekly, and wondered why photos of the WHA never showed up inside. He added a little passion behind his argument, by pointing out the fact that he had turned his bathroom into a darkroom, and had a number of great photos of the WHA's burgeoning stars. He then sent in some black-and-white photos of Tim Sheehy playing for the Whalers and Bobby Sheehan playing for the New York Golden Blades.





Halpin not only bought some shots, he offered to get Babineau a season pass to cover the Whalers games.

“I got six bucks, three dollars each, for my first two published photos,” Babs says with a smile. “And I got a season credential. The Whalers went on to win the championship that year. I came across the great Gordie Howe again that year. He was playing for Houston.”

The second year, the team split its games between the Garden and the Boston Arena.

“I’d come full circle,” Babs adds. “I was back in the same rink where I played high school hockey, photographing professional hockey.”

Events were working out well for the young, up-and-coming photographer. The next logical step was the “big show.”

When the WHA moved to Springfield and then Hartford, Babineau convinced *The Hockey News* to get him a press credential to shoot the Bruins. The timing was fortuitous. The Boston Braves of the American Hockey League (AHL) disbanded, and their PR guy, named Nate Greenberg, moved over and replaced Bruins PR guy Herb Ralby. Greenberg gave Babineau his first NHL credential in 1975. On top of *The Hockey News*, Babs started taking photos for four or five other different hockey publications. What came next seemed inevitable.

“The Bruins had two photographers during the Cup years,” Babineau explains. “Al Ruelle took the black-and-white shots, while Jerry Buckley did color. Jerry left and went to work for the Red Sox, and the guy who took over was Dick Raphael. After a couple years, he and the Bruins apparently had a falling out at one point. He left, but I don’t think it was a big deal for Dick because he was also shooting for the Celtics, the Sox, and the Patriots, as more of a freelance guy. Meanwhile, I had taken a few NHL photos along the way for *The Hockey News* and for *Hockey Illustrated*, beginning in 1974, which would open the door when Raphael left. The media guy Nate Greenberg came up and said, ‘We need your photos for the



above:

*An image from the first Bruins game Babineau attended on a press credential. Left to right: Phil Esposito, former Bruin turned Atlanta Flames defenseman Doug Mohns, goalie Phil Myre, Flames d-man Noel Price, with Bruins Wayne Cashman and Bobby Orr swarming.*



Boards and Blades Club. I thought he was proposing photos for the press room, but it turned out to be for the 'B and B' season ticket holders' room, which was literally underneath the ice."

Babineau received a call about a meeting. He met and showed photos to former coach and assistant general manager Tom Johnson, general manager Harry Sinden, Greenberg, and Garden president Paul Mooney, who ran the building. They ordered about forty 16-by-20 framed prints and also wanted to use some photos in the Bruins yearbook. Soon after, they offered Babineau the job as full-time Bruins color photographer. It was 1977.

"You're the team color photographer until I tell you otherwise," Greenberg told Babineau.

"When Babineau came along, he gradually brought along a bit more technology," Greenberg remembers. "It worked out well for all of us because at that time we were adding more promotions and more color publications. The press guide went to color. I started doing the yearbook with a lot more color photos, so we needed a lot more than we had before."

*below:*

*Babineau captures the action: Bruins defenseman Kyle McLaren hammers Detroit's Anders Eriksson as Boston center Mike Sullivan looks on.*







Over the course of the next three-and-a-half decades, Babineau snapped hundreds of thousands of photos, including almost every one of those found in this collection. His son Brian took the remaining few. The Babineau business became a family affair in the early '90s. They called it Sports Action Photography, and it became one of the biggest suppliers of NHL images to licensees of the League. Clients in the hockey card industry included Topps, Upper Deck, Score, and Pro Set. One of Babs's claims to fame was taking the photos for the Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux rookie cards for Topps. Poster and calendar companies, video game companies like EA SPORTS, and equipment manufacturers like Bauer, Easton, Mission, ITECH, and Louisville Slugger soon came calling. Steve and Brian stayed very busy.

"Never in a million years when he was 15 years old and I let him shoot at ice level at a game against the New Jersey Devils did I think he'd be so into it and be so good at it," Babineau says proudly of Brian. "He had played the game and had a real understanding of how to capture it. I knew he had it figured out soon after he started. We were still using primitive equipment then, so to speak, but he could really capture the angles and the images. When I was young I used to go up to [highway] 128 to shoot cars zipping by to work on my timing. Brian just seemed to inherit it. He had the timing and the movement of the skaters figured out right off the bat."

Greenberg's "until I tell you otherwise" expired when, after 34 years with the team, Greenberg departed in 2007. But

*above:*

*Prominent Bruins through the years pose together for a "onetime." Joe Thornton, Gerry Cheevers, John Bucyk, Phil Esposito, Cam Neely, Ray Bourque and Bobby Orr.*





Bob Morello

above:

*Steve and Brian (standing) Babineau with a Bruins Zamboni on the Zakim Bridge outside the big rink, fooling around during a commercial/print ad shoot.*

below:

*The past, present, and future of Sports Action Photography, dad Steve Babineau and son Brian.*

Babineau didn't outlast him by much. With the NHL wrapping its arms around the licensing of hockey photographs, including Babineau's massive collection, 2008 became time for Babs to wind it down. The league purchased his entire collection in December of 2007.

"I felt that my work would be protected for all time by being part of the NHL image collection and would always remain intact," Babineau explains. "I'm grateful to the League for seeing the value of my work. Many other photographers I have known, their work has disappeared or been sold off into public hands, and I didn't want that to happen. My dad always told me to leave something behind."

"At the same time, moving and selling the archive is like losing a child," Babs points out, "but it makes sense, since I wouldn't really be in touch with the clients like I always was before, with the licensing, and sales, and distribution in the hands of the NHL. So I wouldn't really have direct contact with the clients anymore anyway."

Babs's son Brian will take over day-to-day photography responsibilities with the Bruins and with the Celtics as well.

"This is my last hurrah," Babineau says, "a few hundred thousand hockey photos down the road. The path is now set for Brian to keep our name imbedded in Bruins history."

Bruins history, at least for the past three-and-a-half-decades, is unceremoniously synonymous with the name Steve Babineau. This collection culminates his efforts. A for-the-most-part anonymous existence producing images for the masses now becomes more tangible: priceless moments and memories released by the man who captured them.



Matthew West