

BETH TEITELL | COMMENTARY

Mission impossible? If you're not already a Bruins fan, can you become one?

By **Beth Teitell** Globe Staff, Updated April 27, 2024, 6:00 a.m.



Is adult-onset Bruins fandom possible? If you didn't grow up playing hockey, or come from a hockey family, your window may be closed. But why? ALLY RZESA/GLOBE STAFF

It's sad to be jealous of a baby, I know. But how can I not? Little Sydney Mercier has a decades-long head start on me — and she's not even trying.

We met in the gift shop at TD Garden during Game 2 of the playoffs. I was there trying to achieve what I've been told is near impossible: [adult-onset Bruins fandom](#). She was there because she'd been born with a [black-and-gold spoon](#) in her mouth.

"Look at all this stuff in your size," cooed her mom, Michelle (wearing a knit Bruins beanie, natch) as they bonded over logo bibs and tiny jerseys.

On one hand, we're living in a golden age of self-actualization. Tell people that you want to learn trapeze in middle age, or announce you're reinventing yourself as a notary, and you'll get a "good for you!"

But drop that you are trying to become a hockey fan — because the Bruins are in the playoffs and it never hurts to have more sports in your conversational arsenal — and prepare to get your wings clipped.

"Can't be done," one woman told me flatly. Apparently if you didn't play hockey as a child, or grow up in a hockey family, the window has closed. "You can't even get on the bandwagon," she added, "because that would mean you have to watch the games. Or at least *a* game" (which is harder than you might think).

There's no question that the people who are already blessed to be Bruins fans are passionate. The team has sold out the past 620 consecutive regular and post-season games, per a team spokesman. That's going back to 2009. The team is inarguably having a more successful season than the Patriots or the Red Sox. And hockey was the sport played by one of Boston's most beloved heroes, [Bobby Orr](#).

But the Sox and the Patriots are part of the city's fabric in a way the Bruins aren't. We're still in the grip of Brady and Belichick and they're not even Patriots anymore. We remain obsessed with Gisele, and she's an ex-Bostonian who's the ex-wife of an ex-player.

Even non-fans enjoy a good "Yankees suck!" chant, and as for the Celtics, sure they've won only one championship since 1986, but between their famed parquet floor and all

those banners, they've managed to retain their mystique.

The Bruins? Sure, they were big — HALF A CENTURY AGO — when Orr was part of a team that was so captivating they “were the Beatles,” in the words of my colleague Dan Shaughnessy.

But now? It's hard to remember when hockey season starts or ends. I've (very recently) come to learn that it actually occurs at a fixed time, but it feels like a Jewish holiday, always moving around on the calendar and popping up at times that surprise you. *What, the forsythia are blooming and they're still skating?*

“It feels like the Bruins are operating in secrecy sometimes,” said [comedian Will Noonan](#) — and he grew up here playing youth hockey.

Stand in front of City Hall and ask passersby to name Bruins players, and here's the lineup:

“I'm trying to think of one,” said a legal assistant named Maggie. But she couldn't. “The Celtics keep coming into my mind.”

“Current players?” asked a woman who declined to give even her first name, but acknowledged she works in City Hall, the very heart of Boston.

A reporter tossed her a bone. *Name a past player.* “Bobby something?” she stammered.

“Oh, God, no,” said a woman named Angie — who works concessions at the Garden, where the Bruins play 41 regular season games yearly. “I know number 31. But what is his name?” (A check of the Bruins roster found no number 31.)

What are the Bruins doing wrong (off the ice, I mean)? [Trenni Casey](#), host of “Early Edition” on NBC Sports Boston, put it bluntly: “Name me a commercial that features a hockey player???” she emailed. “How can regular people get excited without a State Farm ad?”

Right! How are we supposed to get interested in a hockey team that's only about . . . *hockey*?

In the case of the Bruins, some challenges are baked in, and hence need to be compensated for. Turnoffs include: the puck, which is small and moving too fast; the fighting; the fact that you can't tell who's who as they whizz around covered in pads and helmets; and, of course, the color scheme. [Black and gold](#)? Maybe . . . if you're hazard tape.

But imagine if player number #31 (or an actual player) were dating, let's say, Zendaya, these drawbacks could be overlooked!

This is not just supposition. Taylor Swift's romance with Kansas City Chiefs star Travis Kelce led the NFL to its highest regular-season viewership among women since it began tracking in 2000, according to [Front Office Sports](#), and was worth \$331.5 million in brand value for the team and the league.

There's also a heaving bosom onramp, courtesy of a thriving [subgenre of romance novels composed of hockey romance novels](#). "Pucking Around," "See Jane Score," "Behind the Net." The books are steamy and not too hockey heavy, and have reportedly [increased interest in the game, and, in Australia, boosted attendance](#).

As for me, I figured I'd start by watching the game on a big screen TV, which I know is NOT THE SAME as going to a game, but it is less expensive. OK, that didn't work (although I was excited to learn about the existence of the "ankle cam").

My next move was to pretend to be a fan, in hopes of tricking myself. That brought me to the Garden for Game 2. I hadn't bought a ticket so I was reduced to hanging out in the store with the 20-month-old. When the game finally ended, I said a prayer, and thrust myself into the black-and-gold stream of humanity exiting the arena.

The Bruins had lost, but the group was in good cheer, and I let the fandom rush over me: jerseys, hats, those crazy oversized chain necklaces. Alas, I absorbed the merch, but not the joy, so I closed my notebook and headed out to Causeway Street, part of the mob.

We were so numerous that cars had to stop for us, and, protected by the bubble of the fans' faith and hoodies, I felt an inkling of a tingle, and, for a moment, wished I'd bought a foam finger.

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