

Bossy never met net he wouldn't shoot at

By [EARL MCRAE](#), SUN MEDIA March 11, 2009

Pick a name, any name.

"He's breaking in on goal. He shoots. HE MISSES THE NET."

"He's right out in front. He shoots. HE MISSES THE NET."

"He winds up from the faceoff circle. He shoots. HE MISSES THE NET."

Today being the 23rd anniversary of his spectacular record that might never be broken, I phone the greatest pure scorer in NHL history at his office with the New York Islanders where he's executive director of their business club, and I ask him the question that drives fans nuts.

"Mike, why? Why is it that so many players in today's NHL can't hit the bloody net when they shoot the puck? It's an epidemic."

Hitting the net with the puck was never a problem for the legendary right winger Mike Bossy, Hall Of Famer, his Islanders jersey retired. On this day in 1986, he scored his 50th goal en route to 61 that season. Mike Bossy is the only player to score 50 goals or more in nine consecutive seasons. And he played just 10 seasons.

It was only in his last season -- 1986-87 -- when, plagued by injuries, he scored fewer than 50. But even then impressive: 38 goals in 63 games. Before that, from season one: 53, 69, 51, 68, 64, 60, 51, 58, 61. Previously, in his final four junior seasons with Laval National: 75, 79, 84, and 70 goals.

Wayne Gretzky sits all alone behind Bossy for consecutive 50-goal-plus seasons. Eight. Gretzky played 11 more seasons than Bossy. How many more 50-goals-or-more consecutive seasons might there have been for Mike Bossy had it not been for the injuries that brought about his retirement at age 30?

Had the gift

"I do know what you mean, I've seen it, too," says Bossy to my question, "and it's hard to know what the reason is."

He does know one thing. You can't teach gift. Bossy had a scoring gift, yes, but his incredible ability to put the puck in the net and hit the net was more than gift, it was skill, and if more players had that skill through the benefit of concentrated teaching, they'd be at least hitting the net more, thus enhancing their chances of scoring.

As a child, Bossy had a rink in the backyard. But it wasn't the ice that was most important to him, it was the wood. A piece of plywood, two feet by two feet. "I'd spend hours every day firing the puck at it. From all angles and distances. Different releases. All body positions. With the combination of skill and intuitiveness, I got to where I always knew where the board was in relation to my body even if I wasn't looking at it."

Board. Net.

"When I played (in the NHL) the thing I hated most was missing the net. My mindset was always to hit the net, the puck either going in or a rebound.

"Instinctively, I also always knew where the net was and where and how to position myself. The rapidity of shooting, the element of surprise, was something I believed was very important.

"One thing I see today is players looking too much for the perfect shot. The front of the net is so loaded now that it's hard sometimes to find a spot to shoot at so -- if they do shoot -- they're trying to pick the corners, and wind up missing the net."

Except, I tell him, I'm talking about players who've made the NHL, their eyes wide open, who miss the net by a country mile when there's no impediment whatsoever between them and the goalies.

"Right. Obviously, there's some shooting skill needed, too."

Called by Bridgman

In the first year of the Senators, GM Mel "Melvo The Missing Marx Brother" Bridgman was stricken by a thought.

"He phoned me at 2:30 in the morning and said he wanted to talk about hiring me as the team's offensive coach," says Bossy. "Even now, teams have defensive coaches, but not offensive coaches."

Bossy said he'd be interested in talking.

Bridgman said he'd get back to him.

"He didn't call back. Experts say you can't teach someone to score goals, but you can teach how to concentrate better on positioning, shooting positions, and shot selection."

Mike Bossy. Nine 50-goal-plus seasons in a row.

"Absolutely I'm proud of it," he says when asked what it means to him. "Aside from our four Stanley Cup wins, it's right up there with it."