

Eye injuries traumatic, permanent

Stories by
CHRIS CARIOU
Canadian Press

Kids understand, says Dr. Tom Pashby.

It's the hockey oldtimers — the thousands of 30-, 40-, 50-somethings filling community hockey rinks across the country — who can't see past their noses.

Pashby has kept statistics indicating that at least 266 hockey players have suffered blinding eye injuries in Canada since 1972. Eight of those injuries happened last year, all involving adults.

That's the price paid for not wearing eye protection, says Pashby, a Toronto ophthalmologist.

"It's sad to see it," says Pashby, who treated the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs after the Second World War and has a sports safety fund registered under his name.

"It's sad to see hockey oldtimers going out and getting into trouble when we've shown face protection stops eye injuries."

Pashby runs down the list of players who lost an eye in 1991. None wore visors, which attach to a helmet and sell for \$20-\$40. All played in oldtimers leagues.

They range in age from 29 to 45. Six lost an eye to a flying puck, the other two fell victim to a stick.

Since 1979, players under the control of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association have had to wear gear to protect their faces, particularly their eyes. Pashby helped bring in the rule.

At the junior league and university levels — the stage at which most players are eligible for the NHL draft — face protection is mandatory, but in varying degrees.

Canadian and American university players must wear full face protection, such as a full visor or wire mask. The Quebec Major Junior Hockey League recently relaxed its rule, allowing players to wear three-quarter visors and mouth guards.

The Western Hockey League and Ontario Hockey League permit players to wear half visors, which come just below the eyes.

Oldtimers are more susceptible to serious eye injuries, says Dr. Tom Pashby — they don't seem to take the dangers of hockey seriously enough to protect themselves.

Some NHL players also wear them.

But in most parts of the country except Quebec, adults playing recreational hockey are under no such restrictions. Pashby says the wearing of visors should be mandatory at all levels.

"All of those blind eyes could have been prevented by visors," he says, adding there have been no reports of eye injuries suffered by players who wore the clear plastic shields.

Statistics compiled by Pashby, and published in the Canadian Journal of Ophthalmology, back up his assertions that facial protection helps.

In 1972, when only goaltenders covered their faces, 287 eye injuries were reported in hockey across Canada. In 1989-90 only 32 were reported, including five that resulted in blindness.

"Things really took a turn for the better," says Pashby, who has received the Order of Canada for his work in preventing sports-related injuries.

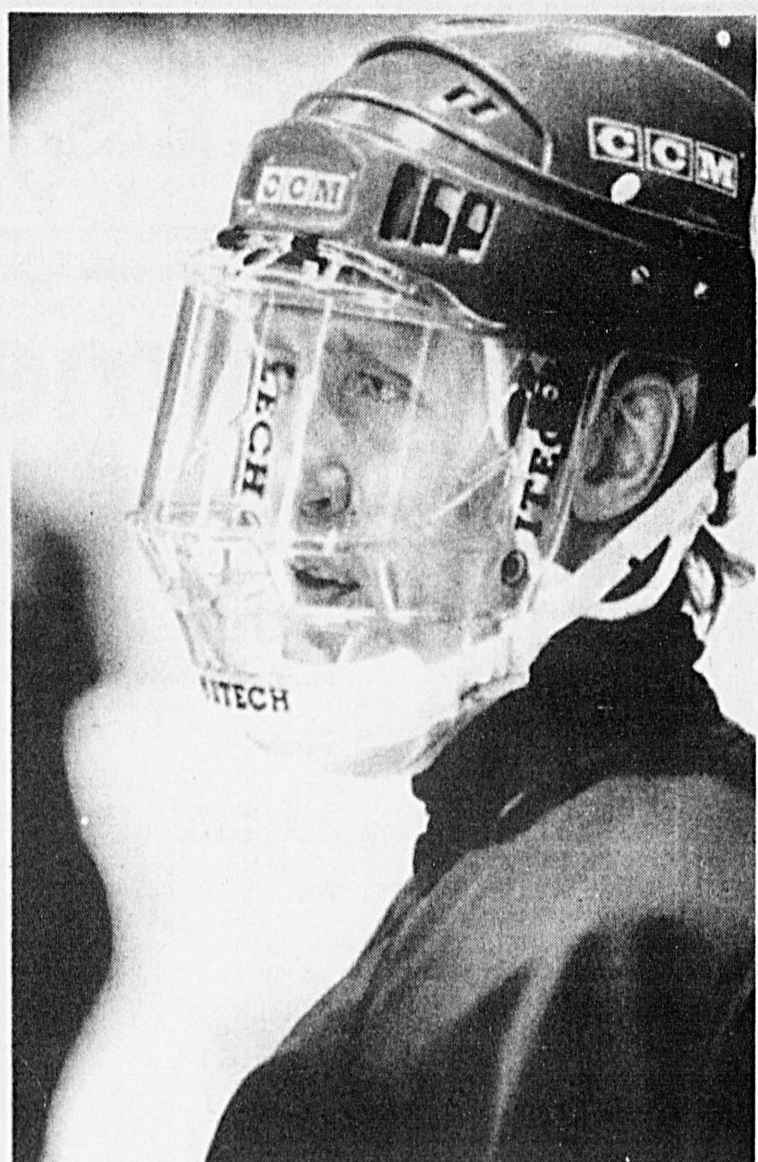
"Before, the average age for players with eye injuries was 14. Now it's 26."

The average age of players who are blinded is 30 or more.

Oldtimers aren't the only ones bucking the trend toward face protection. The NHL has yet to legislate facial protection, even though some players — such as superstar Mario Lemieux — have been hit in the eye with sticks.

Pashby says 25 pro players have lost sight in an eye over the years.

"They'll eventually make the wearing of visors mandatory, the same way they did with helmets," he predicts.



Former Toronto Maple Leafs star Borje Salming suffered a gruesome facial cut in 1986 (left) and has worn a visor ever since.

Stickwork, pucks eye's greatest dangers

Tom Honsberger wore safety glasses to work at General Motors in St. Catharines, Ont., for 23 years. But he wouldn't don a visor when he played hockey with his buddies.

Brent Larson, a referee in the Western Hockey League, wasn't wearing a visor when he took a puck in the eye.

Honsberger was blinded in one eye by an accident on the ice. Larson's hopes of becoming a National Hockey League official are in jeopardy as he fights to regain full sight.

"It's very final," says Honsberger, who was hit directly in the eye by a puck that came at him off a stick. His eyeball was split. The lens inside came out. The eye was eventually removed.

Honsberger had been out shopping for a visor before the accident happened two years ago.

"The same night it happened, my wife and I were arguing about it. She told me to get protection or I'd end up in the hospital. We didn't expect it would happen that night.

"I understood the chance I was taking, but felt it wouldn't happen to me. There's no doubt now that I think everyone should wear a visor."

Facial visors protect eyesight — the statistics show it. But at the pinnacle of the sport,

the NHL, forcing players or officials to wear them is not even a topic of discussion.

Parents and medical personnel say visors save eyes. Hockey purists argue they inhibit play, result in more high sticks and hide players' faces from fans.

The Quebec Major Junior Hockey League adopted full face protection a few years ago. Last week it eased up, allowing players to wear three-quarter visors.

"The players wanted it," says Michel (Bunny) Laroche, former goaltender with the NHL's Montreal Canadiens and now the Quebec league's vice-president.

"A lot of other people wanted it, too. It might bring sticks a little lower. Guys go into the corner and they keep their sticks up high, so there's more injuries."

Quebec League statistics show that while facial injuries predictably went down following the adoption of full face protection, shoulder injuries climbed as a result of higher sticks.

Canada's other two major junior leagues require only half visors. Most other amateur leagues require full facial protection.

None of the college or junior leagues in North America, or the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, had statistics to show high-sticking penalties have increased since

masks and visors became mandatory.

But most officials agree such infractions have jumped. They say players increasingly brandish high sticks, knowing the potential for seriously injuring others has diminished.

"Stick work is a concern of ours," says Doug Geiger, manager of rules and officiating for the CAHA. "But more than that, we're seeing more high hits."

Larson, whose eye was hit by a slap shot, says the CAHA's face protection rule is instilling in young hockey minds the need for safety and they are growing up seeing the visor as necessary, like any other equipment.

But few players who make it to the NHL have such an attachment. Eric Lindros, who never played without facial protection through a brilliant career in minor hockey, took off the mask at the first opportunity — the Canada Cup tournament last September.

"I tell players to protect their eyes," Larson says. "Parents are taking their kids out of hockey because of injuries. To a young kid, hockey isn't everything, so they've got to be protected."

"A broken collarbone can be fixed; a chipped tooth can be capped. But you can't replace an eye."

Speed skiers seek rush

by TERRY EDWARDS
Kelowna Courier

KELOWNA (CP) — Silence closes in as a skier hurtles down a sheer precipice at speeds over 200 km-h.

The skis hydroplane on a cushion of air, with air blasting against the crouching skier. Time, for an instant, drags to a halt.

That inexplicable sensation, says speed skier Gary McCallum, is the magnet that draws skiers to the fastest non-motorized sport.

Speed skiing, or KL as it is called in Europe, is the sport of attaining the fastest speed possible while skiing down a straight line on a steep slope.

The racer accelerates for several hundred metres, then is precisely timed by a pair of photoelectric cells spaced 100 metres apart, before decelerating on a run-out at the bottom of the hill.

The world record of 223.741 km-h, set by Michael Prufer of Monaco, is achieved in just over 10 seconds of gliding.

At those speeds, the racer fights to maintain a tuck against the air pressure. The slightest mistake results in an abrupt loss of speed, or a tumble.

McCallum says falls aren't uncommon, but serious injuries are.

"I've fallen at 100 m.p.h.," he said recently. "You can do high speed cartwheels for a while and it's critical that your skis come off."

The racers wear rubberized suits, both for speed and protection, and streamlined helmets. Foam fairings are placed behind the calf to reduce air turbulence and the poles are strapless so they can be quickly discarded.

McCallum, who has been speed skiing since the mid-1980s, has attended 10 races and the worst injury he has witnessed was a broken leg and clavicle.

"There are no obstacles to hit and you're not doing turns, so you don't have problems with netting," he said.

KL, from the Italian Kilometro Lanciato (Flying Kilometre), originated in Italy and has been a popular sport in Europe for a number of years.

This winter, for the first time, it will be a demonstration sport in the Olympic Games in Albertville, France, next month.

Kelowna skier Aleisha Cline has qualified as a member of the Canadian team.

The Canadian team also includes national record holder Vince Poscente of Calgary, plus Kamloops, B.C., skiers Kenny Dale and Lark Frolek.

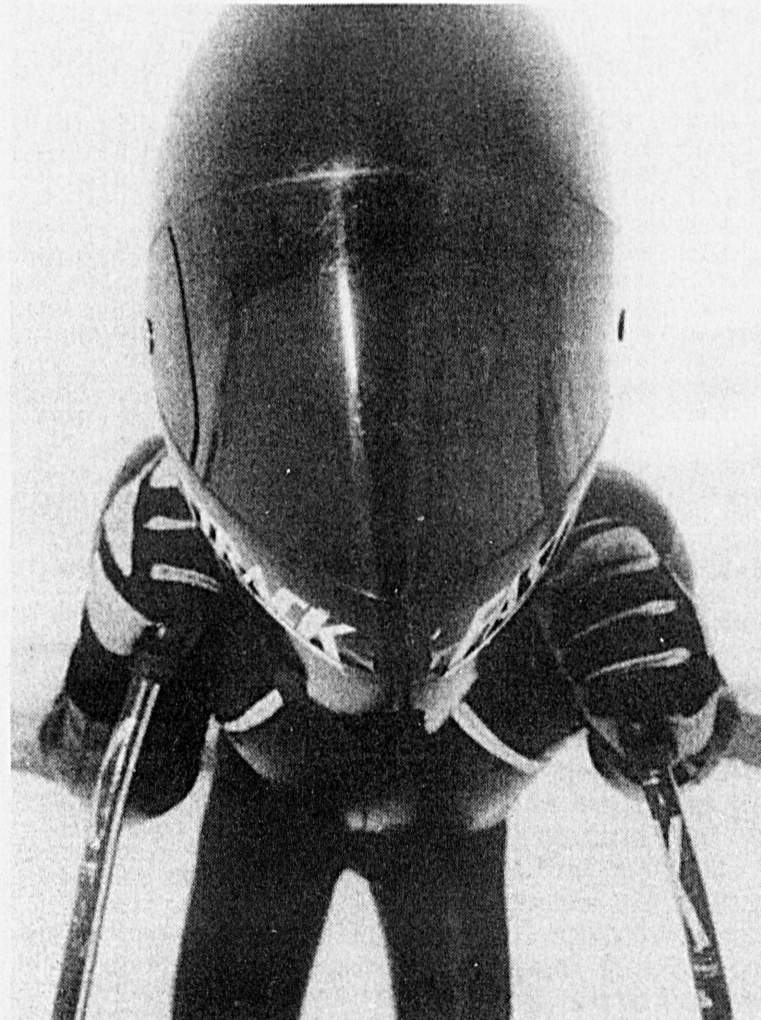
They are expected to be at Big White, near Kelowna, on Feb. 27-March 1 for the Canadian championships.

The nationals will be held on the Parachute run on the cliff. Since there are only about 15 suitable courses in the world, the discovery of a new course at Big White was met with jubilation by the speed skiing fraternity.

"We've got the course, which is the most important thing," said McCallum, chairman of the local organizing committee.

"You need length and vertical. We figure we have an 180 km-h course and it has a good outrun."

If everything goes well, McCallum hopes to stage an FIS race next year and possibly a World Cup event the following year.



Looking like a UFO pilot, Gary McCallum gets set to fly.

Injury rash haunts skiers

GRINDELWALD, Switzerland (CP) — Don Lyon hasn't seen such a rash of injuries in the 20 years he's been a coach for the Canadian women's ski team.

In two weeks before Christmas, Lyon lost Kate Pace of North Bay, Ont., with a broken ankle and Lucie Laroche of Lac-Beauport, Que., with a knee injury. Both were top-10 contenders.

"I've never lost two top athletes like that, that I felt were winners," Lyon said during training for this weekend's World Cup race. "You have the odd injury, but nothing like that."

Pace could return for a World Cup race in Panorama, B.C., in March. Laroche, who had knee surgery Dec. 14, has rejoined the team but is struggling.

Kendra Kobelka of Revelstoke, B.C., who went down with a knee injury last winter, is also battling back. She must finish 17th or better this weekend to qualify for the Winter Olympics at Albertville, France, in February.

Kerrin Lee-Gartner, of Calgary, the leader of the women's team, says the injuries that have ravaged the Canadian team have taken their toll on her.

Cerny's Olympic dream revitalized in pool

by MARIO TONEGUZZI
Calgary Herald

CALGARY — The dream never died for Vlastimil Cerny.

Three years ago, the former Olympic swimmer called it a career. A broken right elbow wasn't healing properly and it was affecting his performance. It was also time to move on with his life.

But the lure of the pool sat in the back of his mind. Now 28, he's making a comeback.

"In the back of my mind, I was disappointed the way my career finished. I was disappointed in my performance at the Olympics," says Cerny, who finished 12th in the 100-metre butterfly and ninth in the 4x100-metre freestyle relay in 1988 at Los Angeles. "I felt I could have done much better. Not so much in the placing but I

didn't swim my best time. I didn't do my best when it counted. At the Olympics. And that's basically what I trained for all my life."

Quietly, a year ago, Cerny began the long road back to competitive swimming. He moved to Calgary in September to work as an assistant coach with the Cascade Swim Club. Before he dishes out words of wisdom to the young, promising swimmers, Cerny hits the Lindsay Park pool himself — training for that dream. It hasn't been easy.

"Challenge is the key word here. It's one of the reasons I decided to come back. It was difficult for me because I got really out of shape. I still stayed physically active but I gained a lot of weight — and I mean a lot," laughs the six-foot-one, 229-pound former Olympian who is about 15

pounds off his competitive swimming weight.

This year has been geared for the Olympic trials in Montreal this May. Every stroke Cerny takes is focussed on making the team in the 50-metre freestyle. To do that, he would have to beat the qualifying standard of 23.16 seconds and finish in the top two. His best-ever time is 23.20. Recently, he swam less than a second off his best time.

"I still have weight to lose and that will play a big part," says Cerny, who will compete in three weeks at the Winter Nationals in Winnipeg. "I'm at the point now where it's sort of the breaking point for me. I'm starting to feel very comfortable. I'm 95 per cent back to my old form."

In 1980, Cerny was an alternate on the

Czechoslovakian Olympic team. He defected to Canada in 1983 and couldn't participate in the 1984 Olympics because there wasn't enough time to become a Canadian citizen. And 1988 was not a memorable experience.

Cerny is convinced he can complete his amazing comeback. This is no Mark Spitz story. You remember the 40-year-old plus Spitz, winner of a record seven gold medals in 1972, who in the past year was failing miserably in his comeback attempt for this summer's Olympics in Barcelona.

"I feel my prime is right now," says Cerny, citing numerous professional athletes who reach that level in their late 20s. "If I had a dollar for every time someone asked me if I was too old for swimming, I'd be rich."

The Winter Nationals will be his first

real competition since June 1989. Last year, he swam at the Summer Nationals but wasn't really serious about it. Many people in the country aren't even aware of Cerny's comeback plans.

But by training specifically for the 50-metre freestyle, the confident swimmer believes he can earn a spot on the Olympic team. He wouldn't be doing this if he didn't feel that way. What would making the Olympic team mean to him?

"It would be a boost to me as an individual to be able to accomplish my goals," he says. "I would also in a big way prove what I've been doing in sprint training."

And he adds: "And it would be just a big thrill".

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