

# Beating the opponent inside

*Nancy Elliot found out that lessons in life can be lessons on the ice*

**H**aving opponents is nothing new to Nancy Elliot. Whether on the turf in the PG Women's Soccer League or, more recently, on the ice as a member of the Worth Counseling Wildcats women's hockey team, Nancy's always faced her competition head-on and driven for the goal. But what do you do when the opposition isn't a person or object you can see and deal with? What do you do when the opponent comes from within your own body?

That was the situation Nancy was in last winter. A day before she planned to leave to visit family in Ontario for Christmas she got a call from her doctor. "You might want to consider changing your plans," he said — a recent blood test had



Soccer is still the first love for Nancy Elliot, but she's slowly learning skills for hockey. DOUG BROWN/FREE PRESS

shown high levels of tumor markers in Nancy's system, possibly

indicative of cancer. New Year's Eve she went under anesthetic for

surgery to remove what had turned out to be ovarian cancer — a form of cancer that has few obvious symptoms and is often diagnosed too late. In Nancy's case it was just in time.

"Most people don't have symptoms or they're very vague like feeling tired," says Nancy. An active lifestyle playing soccer and hockey gave her a keener sense of her bodies' ups and downs and likely saved her life.

Radiation and chemotherapy followed surgery, leaving Nancy tired, weak and nauseated. The rest of what was to be her first hockey season passed her by, leaving frustration in its wake.

"I don't think I was ever angry about it, but I was frustrated. I didn't feel up to doing the things that I wanted to do. It sucked the energy from me," says Nancy. "It was my first season skating. I'd never skated before and I wanted to put the skills I'd learned to use."

When soccer season began again, Nancy pushed herself to get

back into being active again, but the double-punch of chemo- and radiation-therapy took the wind out of her sails.

"I love sports. I was really pushing it and in the spring I was probably pushing it too hard and I got sick a few times," admits Nancy. But despite bouts of nausea and weakness she refused to give up and played a few games with her team, Ms. RRSP.

The experience of the last year has had effects beyond just the physical aftermath of cancer, says Nancy, but not all of them are negative.

"There's a whole sense of mortality. I'm relatively young to be thinking about this sort of thing but now I make more definite goals and I'm better at figuring out what's important and getting to it. I have things I want to accomplish. I try

to master a new skill in skating and then apply that to the game. If I can accomplish that it's more important than winning."

Although Nancy admits she'll always enjoy the thrill of victory, self-improvement has become almost as important to her — like improving her skating as she goes into her first full year of women's hockey.

The spectre of cancer still creeps into the edge of Nancy's consciousness from time to time. She still has to go in for occasional testing in case of a relapse, but for now Nancy's focusing on a different opponent — her own lack of skating experience. "I think I can start building back now. I'm still a little shaky out there, but I'm taking powerskating lessons and they're helping."

## ▼ From A15

### Family can finally be in the stands for Seigny

"Wolves bench. Only two other players - Kent Bergstrom and Tone Stakes - can claim the same thing. But unlike Bergstrom and Stakes, Seigny spent his first two years far from home and from his family. But now he's looking forward to playing a full season with his staunchest supporters in the stands.

"Playing in front of friends and family is great. It's an experience I

didn't have for two years in Manitoba," says Seigny. "Now my folks don't have to travel half-way across the country to watch me play and they're there every time I go away. Every trip they come with me. It's as much a part of their life as it is mine."

The Timberwolves play their first regular season game November 3 against Capilano College. Their first home league game is November 10

when they face the Lower Mainland's Kwantlen College at the CNC gymnasium.

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