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The Thursday PLAYBOOK

► Benson honoured

Caledonia Nordic Ski Club member and Team BC racer Jacqui Benson has another accolade to add to her long list — Premier's Athletic Award.

Benson was nominated by Cross Country BC as the top female athlete for the 1999/2000 ski season. She will be recognized at the March 23 awards ceremony but won't be in attendance. Instead, Benson will be competing in Val Cartier, Quebec at the the National Cross Country Ski Championships.

► Juvies prepare for B.C.'s

The Prince George Brink Forest Products Juvenile Cougars split a pair of exhibition games against the Williams Lake midgets this weekend in preparation for the juvenile AAA provincials, March 23 to 26 in Chilliwack.

The juvie Cats came back from a 3-1 deficit Saturday to win 4-3, then dropped Sunday's matchup 5-2. The PG team is the only juvenile team north of the Lower Mainland.

► Minor midgets get split

A split against the Smithers AA midgets over the weekend warmed up the PG Freightliner Midget Minor Cougars for the 'B' provincials in Maple Ridge next weekend.

The minor Cats lost Saturday 4-2 but rebounded Sunday to triumph 8-3 over the Smithers squad.

► Monty top Interior goalie

The Quesnel Millionaire's Jason Montgomery was named the Interior Conference goaltender of the year for the BCHL. Montgomery had a goals against average of 3.66 and save percentage of 90.6 for the regular season, leading the Mills to their first BCHL playoff berth and was also runner-up for interior MVP.

The Penticton Panthers' Duncan Keith was named the interior's top d-man, while the league's MVP award for the interior went to fellow panther TJ Caig.

Hometown Heroics

*But the bad news
is rookie Paul Brown
plays for the Blazers*

By **DOUG BROWN**

Free Press staff writer

Paul Brown's triumph is playing a part in the Prince George Cougars tragedy.

The former PG Minor Hockey bantam bounced through the WHL in this, his first season, finally settling in with Cougars arch-rival the Kamloops Blazers. A good move for Brown, now a second-line forward for the playoff-bound Blazers. Not so good for the Cats who suffered two goals from Brown in Sunday's game, including the game winner.

"It's sure better than last time I was here with Regina when we lost ... it was pretty special coming to Prince George and winning two games against the home town," says Brown.

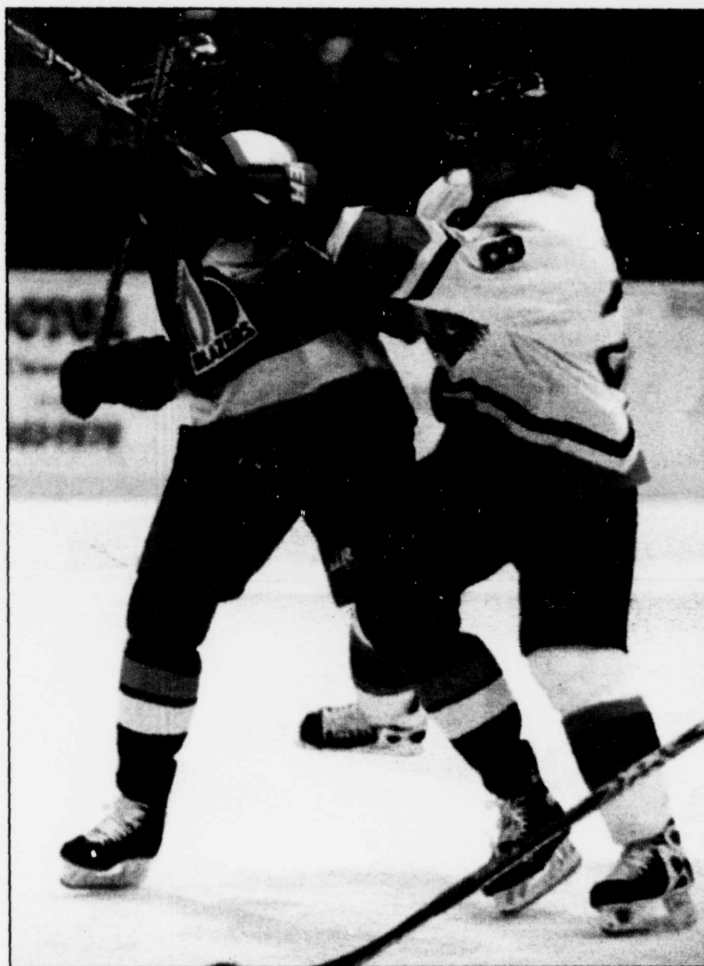
The 16-year-old has quickly adapted to Kamloops' come-from-behind style — his second goal clinched a 6-5 win for the Blazers who were down by three going into the third. "I love it in Kamloops. Dean's been giving me unlimited ice-time. He rewards hard work with ice."

Brown was traded from the Regina Pats to Kamloops in January. It was unsettling at first to be bumped from the east to west divisions, he says, but after an initial period of adjustment he's begun to thrive in the Okanagan.

"At first it was a bit of a shock. Now I feel really comfortable, I'm happy with Kamloops. With Regina I wasn't playing much and didn't have a role," says Brown. "With this time I have a role on the second line, getting powerplay and penalty kill. In Regina I was just the rookie fourth-liner just going through the motions."

The weekend losses made it one win in the last seven home games for the Cougars. Although a playoff slot is a relative certainty, with six of the seven western division teams making it, the Cats are still fighting for the more favourable fifth spot with the Seattle Thunderbirds, whom they hosted Wednesday night.

With six games remaining in the regular season, PG will have two more chances at redeeming themselves against the Blaz-



Cougar forward Blake Robson tries to get around a Blazer Saturday.

JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

ers, both in Kamloops. Brown says he welcomes the opportunity to humble his hometown again.

"There's a big rivalry between Prince George and Kamloops, even from when I used to watch when I was younger," says Brown, who was good for a fight against

explosive Cougar forward Dan Baum in the second period. "There's a real hate. It's like a playoff game the division is so close now."

The Cougars have only two home games remaining in the regular season, March 20 and 21 when they host the west's last-place Tri-City Americans.



Sean Cochrane

Injury keeps Cochrane off Purden

*And too much snow
prevents any official
races on the weekend*

Sean Cochrane's ski season ended abruptly last week when his ski caught an edge off the last jump of the Whistler Downhill, twisting his leg and tearing the ligaments in his knee. But despite being off skis the National Prospect Team member was still on the hill this past weekend,

offering a bit of guidance to the next generation of alpine racers.

"They need someone to look up to in skiing because it's not the most high-profile sport in the community," says Cochrane.

Originally the 20-year-old PG Alpine Ski Team graduate was slated to race in the Purden Downhill. Injury struck and he switched to helping with race announcing. When heavy snowfall forced the cancellation of the two-day competition the injured Cochrane still came out to talk about his

national racing experiences and sign autographs. "Not many Prince George people have really taken this sport far — lately I'm the only one. Plus it's always fun to be able to help out the old club."

Forty-two racers from six BC clubs were at Purden this past week for the annual downhill. Although the official race was cancelled after one attempt on Saturday they still had three full days of training during the week and each racer