

V5-15

No handicap — just an inconvenience

1978

By ISABEL OEHM

Bryan Crispin, 26, is one of the top scorers in the Hanover Men's Industrial Hockey League this season. In December he was the fourth highest scorer in the 45 man league, and as of Jan. 23 he was fifth.

Three and a half years ago it seemed that Bryan's hockey-playing days might be over. On July 9, 1974, his right leg was badly mangled in the power take-off of a tractor. As a result of the injury, his leg was amputated below the knee.

Bryan's three loves in life, to that point, were his fiancée Margaret Kerkhoff, farming and hockey.

AN EARLY START

He learned to skate when he was four years old. His father operated an arena in Wingham and Bryan had all the free ice time he wanted. By the time he was five years old, he could skate well backwards.

Although an excellent skater, he did not begin playing organized hockey until 1971 when he joined the Hanover Twins of the Hanover Recreation League. He continued to play with the Twins until last year when the team folded.

When he first began playing organized hockey, he had to learn the fundamentals such as forechecking and back-checking. In his second year he won the trophy for the most improved player in the league.

This year he plays twice a week, at left wing or centre, for the league-leading Karn's Roofing.

Asked how he copes with his handicap, his answer was prompt. "I don't think of it as a handicap. It's just an inconvenience!"

Bryan owns and operates a 100 acre farm about two miles south west of Hanover where he raises beef cattle and some forage crops.

A FREAK ACCIDENT

Bryan describes the accident as a "freak accident." He stepped on the tractor's draw bar to check the wagon. He had

been doing this six days a week for the preceding two weeks. This time his foot slipped, and his trouser leg caught in the power take-off connection. The connection was being used to activate the self-unloading wagon filled with cut hay for the silo. Bryan believes his foot slipped on damp hay on the draw bar.

Three quarters of an hour later he was on the operating table at the hospital.

A month later he was admitted to the Workmen's Compensation Board Hospital in Downsview, a suburb of Toronto.

He was fitted with an artificial leg and began walking, first using crutches and later a cane.

He returned home in September. Six weeks later he returned to Downsview for additional therapy and refitting of the artificial limb. He had nine different artificial legs over the next two years.

He says he also received therapy at Hanover and District Hospital.

INJURED GOOD ANKLE

Learning to walk with an artificial leg was not easy. In November he fell and tore the ligaments in his "good ankle." He wears a leather anklet on the injured ankle for extra support.

That same month, encouraged by the other hockey players, he began skating again. The biggest problem, he says, was getting the skate to fit the artificial leg. He didn't have to alter the skate, but he only laces the first four eyelets. He found that this gives him greater ankle mobility.

"Learning to skate again was mainly a matter of getting back into shape," he said.

By January he was back playing for the Twins. "It was real hard work at first," Bryan admits, "I wasn't very good at it." He had to learn to turn; even now he finds it easier to turn to the left, rather than to the right. When playing left-wing, his team-mates try to throw passes to him to the left

side. Bryan gets checked just as hard as any other player. At a rugged exhibition game in Chatsworth, he got a "real roughing up."

He has never been out of a game because of his leg but has had other injuries. Last year he missed five weeks with badly torn chest muscles. However, he has had to make repairs in the middle of a game. Once a leather strap broke and he fixed it with a shoe lace.

SOME PROBLEMS

Skating is easier for him than walking. "If I could do my chores around the farm on skates, it would be a lot easier," he says. He cannot run, and really deep snow is a problem. Climbing a ladder is also difficult, but he manages to climb a 70 ft. silo ladder twice a day during the haying season. "It just takes me a little longer than most people," he said.

He uses a snowmobile to get to his work in winter, and drives his tractor or car back and forth to his work in summer. He also operates a motorcycle. The Workmen's Compensation Board provided Bryan with a left foot accelerator and hand dimmer switch for his car. This device folds down so that regular controls can be used. He now drives using the right pedal.

THE BUSY SEASON

Since the beginning of the new year he has been getting his machinery ready for the coming growing season. As soon as the land is ready, he will begin cultivating and seeding.

Bryan farmed for a number of years with his grandfather and has been farming on his own for the past three years. He has 65 head of beef cattle to look after, as well as his crops of grain, corn and hay.

He is also in his fifth year of

employment with J.H. Fleming Ltd. where he works from April to November as a machine operator and mechanic. It was while working on the Fleming farm that his accident happened.

Bryan and Margaret were married a year after his accident. Margaret works four days a week at the Hanover Medical Centre. On her free days she helps Bryan with the chores on their farm.

Bryan figures he could walk with any man for five hours and keep up. He tries to vary his work so that he spends a few hours walking, and then the next several hours on the machinery. He remembers one of his grandfather's sayings, "What you don't do with your head, you must do with your feet."

In the spring, Bryan will be working from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., for six to eight consecutive weeks.

That is a long workday for a handicapped man. But then, as Bryan says, it is not a handicap — just an inconvenience.

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