

Local man struggles after eye injury

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Darren Abernethy has a message for recreational hockey players who prefer not to wear any sort of facial protection on the ice.

On Feb. 13 of last year, the Georgetown resident, who turned 50 on Monday, was struck in the eye by another player's stick blade during a game of after-work shinny at the Mold-Masters SportsPlex.

The damage to his left eye was catastrophic. The cornea and iris were so badly mashed that the first doctor to examine Abernethy thought the trauma to the eye was caused by chemicals.

"If my story can help someone make the decision to put a visor on, I'm hoping others will learn from it because I wouldn't want anyone to go through what I'm going through," said the machinist by trade, who was a production planner of custom-made components for a local firm before the injury.

"I'd never even had a close call before that. Initially, it was two months of excruciating pain, unbearable at times to the point where I'd actually pass out. I had so much impact damage and the cornea was ripped apart. It wouldn't heal and every time I blinked it would rip again. I used to ask whether a piece of the stick was still in there."

The ice-resurfacing machine was just about to bring the Thursday afternoon skate to a close when it happened.

Abernethy received a pass from a teammate on his off wing and when an opposition defenceman tried to lift Abernethy's stick, the follow through of the blade caught him directly in the centre of the eyeball.

"It's that feeling you've never had

in your life before. I thought, 'Oh boy, this is not good.' But there wasn't much blood and the pain didn't come right away."

Returning to the change room, he called his son to come pick him up and take him to hospital. When Abernethy went to the mirror to view the damage, all he could see was the white of his eye because the impact had turned the eyeball around.



DARREN ABERNETHY

He's been declared legally blind and although he did return to his job for a couple of months, he's been off since the fall awaiting his third major surgery, to be held this Friday at St. Joseph's Hospital in Stoney Creek, in which an artificial iris will be implanted and hopefully some focus ability is restored.

"You basically went from hero to zero," Abernethy recalled a doctor telling him.

"Because you were on the go from 5 a.m. 'til 11 at night, played hockey, played baseball, did this, did that, coached hockey, had a good job, and then you're sitting at home doing nothing. My wife and I loved to go to concerts and I couldn't even think of doing that now with the light and the noise.

Everything stopped and it's hard to deal with mentally. It's also been a strain on my family and friends. Thankfully they've been so supportive."

Besides the life-changing effects from the injury, Abernethy has wondered about the person wielding the stick that inflicted the damage. Prior to the incident, they usually sat beside each other in the dressing room and were often the last to leave.

From what he can recall, there may have been a 'Sorry, man' just after it happened, but Abernethy has not heard or seen that shinny mate since despite playing together for three years.

"It was an accident and I'm not mad at the guy because there was nothing malicious about it. The only thing I was disappointed about was he hasn't called or come to ask me how I'm doing."

If there's been any positives to come out of his misery, Abernethy said that a number of his buddies have donned visors or full facial protection after either witnessing the incident or seeing the consequences.

But what frustrates Abernethy most is that two weeks prior to the injury, he was in the SportChek at the Bramalea City Centre looking at purchasing a face mask.

"I had a visor in my hand and every day I ask myself why I didn't buy it instead of waiting for it to go on sale to save 25 or 50 bucks," he lamented.

"It's been a hell of a year. All for the love of the game, right? You're just playing and then boom. Who would've figured? The surgeons have said not to think about quitting hockey, think about when you're going to play next. If I do, it will be with a full face mask. But, we'll see. When you're down to one eye, you look at life differently."



Local resident Andrew Hanly will have his late father Ron in mind when he takes to the batter's box for the Jays' Home Run Challenge at the Rogers Centre next Thursday afternoon.

Hanly takes up Challenge

Georgetown resident Andrew Hanly has plenty of motivation on his side heading into next week's Roberto Alomar & Friends Charity Home Run Challenge to be held before a Toronto Blue Jays' game at the Rogers Centre.

The 32-year-old Hanly is one of about 15 contestants in the challenge who have been asked to fundraise \$3,500 for the Jays' Care Foundation, which provides a baseball program for kids age 5-13 who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to participate in recreational or organized sport.

Hanly played rep hardball in Brampton for 14 years prior to moving to Georgetown and his father Ron,

who passed away last July, served as his coach, mentor and number-one supporter.

"My kids don't play baseball and I felt this is just my way of giving back to the kids the way my dad did for me," said Hanly, who is about half way to reaching his fundraising goal, which is due early next week.

A 6-foot-5 first baseman, Hanly is excited to get the chance to get some batting tips from members of the Jays' World Series-winning teams such as Robbie Alomar and Devon White.

To contribute to Hanly's effort, visit his official Home Run Challenge page via Jays Care: <https://secure.e2rm.com/registrant/Fundraising-Page.aspx...>



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