

# Jason Collin inspires the crowd at McNeil benefit

While the Toronto Maple Leafs were jostling for position with the Chicago Black Hawks in the windy city last Saturday night, I was having my faith in humanity, as well as the fact of my advancing years, reinforced at the Rec Centre in Stouffville.

The occasion was the second annual Challenge Cup Benefit Hockey Night.

The idea grew out of the desire on the part of hockey people in Stouffville and Uxbridge to do something positive to honor the memory of the late Dan McNeil, the Stouffville teen who was tragically killed in a car accident on his way home from playing in an Uxbridge Bruins hockey game in October, 1992.

With all proceeds of the night being directed to the Children's Wish Foundation in Dan's memory, the foundation saw it fitting to send a child who had benefitted from the generosity of those who had contributed to the charity in the past.

They chose Jason Collin, a nine-year-old Newmarket resident. Jason represented the organization, dropping the puck for the opening faceoff.

Jason's story is one of heartache and hope. At the age of seven it was discovered he had well-advanced kidney cancer.

He lost a kidney and a lung, not to mention a lot of weight and, ultimately, the better part of his self esteem.

But two years later, still only nine years of age, Jason is half way along the tenuous road to



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

recovery. He has been in remission two years now, and according to his mother Rita, he has three more years to go before he's considered in the clear. In the meantime, he must undergo tests every two and a half months.

Like many children who've had their carefree innocence shattered by cancer, Jason's wish was to go to Disney World to try to somehow make up in a couple of weeks what had been stolen from him.

Thanks to the Children's Wish Foundation, he was sent to Disney World, and on a cruise on the Disney "Big Red Boat" last June.

Rita said that while her son had to put off the adventure twice due to illness, it was well worth the wait.

She said it has contributed to the overall process that has helped her son regain his self esteem, as well as some of the pounds he shed during his illness.

She used adjectives like "amazing" to describe Jason's recovery, and "beyond words" to say how much the foundation had helped.

Over the past few months, Jason, his Mom and Dad, and

his 12-year-old brother Patrick have represented the charity at various functions to express their gratitude.

It's been a long, bitter struggle, admitted Rita. Her son's anger, which had festered within him for so long, is gradually diminishing.

And if the good luck enjoyed by Jason and his brother at the draw held at the Challenge Cup event is any indication, it just may be that the Collin family is experiencing a long overdue swing in their fortunes.

Jason's ticket was pulled in the draw for a Pittsburgh Steelers football, helmet, T-shirt and cap, while Patrick was the winner of a hockey jersey donated by Stouffville resident and New York Islanders player Keith Acton.

It was the second time in several months the pair had enjoyed such luck, as they were also big winners at a draw held by a Newmarket hair salon last fall.

And while the events at Saturday's big night left me buoyant with optimism, the bubble quickly burst for me when I asked Jason if I could get a picture of him with my personal boyhood idol, former Maple Leaf and Montreal Canadiens great Frank Mahovlich. The Big M had been on the NHL oldtimers team that was part of the night's entertainment.

"Who's Frank Mahovlich?" asked Jason as we strode into the dressing room.

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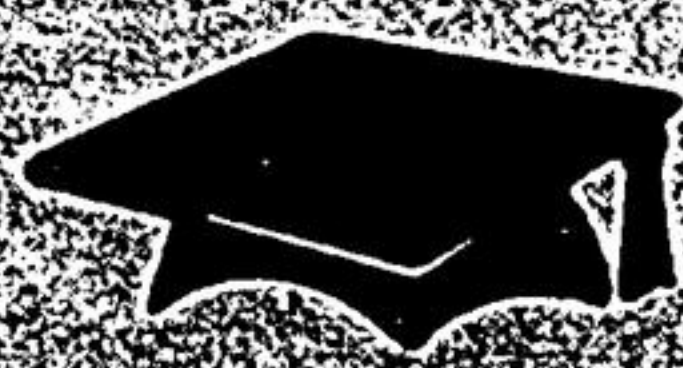
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