

Peterborough youth to play at ACC against NHL alumni

Adric Heney is overcoming Crohn's disease to play his favourite sport

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When Adric Heney steps on Air Canada Centre ice Sunday it will mark a big step in the Peterborough teen's recovery.

The 16-year-old first suspected something was wrong when he couldn't keep up with his Northminster minor hockey teammates.

Constant stomach cramps were worrisome and his pale complexion led his coach to offer him a bucket to throw up in.

He wasn't growing or gaining weight like his twin brother Ryan so parents Peter and Anuschka took Adric to see family physician Dr. Iain Jamieson. He referred the St. Peter's high school student to The Toronto Hospital for Sick Children (Sick Kids) where he was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease, an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). He began treatment with a revolutionary new drug which is doing wonders for IBD patients.

He's since grown four inches and gained 30 pounds and he's playing hockey with none of his previous ill effects.

Adric has been selected from a pool of Sick Kids IBD patients to participate in an afternoon hockey game against NHL alumni in the home of the Toronto Maple Leafs. It's a program created by Sick Kids physician Dr. Aleixo Muise called the Paediatric Ulcerative Colitis & Crohn's Hockey Event. It raises funds and awareness for children with IBD, to show they can lead normal lives with proper treatment.

Heney's lack of energy and stomach cramps flared up two years ago. A teen who also participated in rep soccer and speed skating was now having trouble walking home from school.

"He just didn't have a lot of energy," said Peter Heney.

On Wednesday, he did a seven-kilometre training run with his high school cross country team.

"Last year, he couldn't do that," said Peter.

"I just started getting tired especially with hockey," Adric said. "Sometimes I got stomach cramps, but as I look back I wasn't too bad compared to some other kids who have it. I also wasn't gaining any weight. It affected my hockey and my whole life. My coach always thought I looked pale."

Every eight weeks, he now gets an infusion of Remicade a drug which has almost eliminated his symptoms. Crohn's is an auto-immune deficiency which affects the body's ability to absorb nutrients. There is no cure, but the drug helps manage it.

"I seem to have more energy and more of an appetite which is also leading to my weight gain, in a good sense," said Adric. "I'm growing more and I haven't had any stomach cramps lately. I can notice the difference when the eight weeks expire."

Adric says he's looking forward to playing at the ACC.

"It's a great opportunity to give Crohn's and Colitis more awareness," he said. "I think it will be cool."

In Canada, one in 250 people have IBD and at least 25% of these cases are diagnosed as children and adolescents. The incidence of IBD has increased by 30% in Ontario in the past 10 years.

Dr. Muise, a gastroenterologist at Sick Kids, says he's amazed by the determination of children to not let the disease change their lives. It's part of what drove him to organize the game.

"No matter how sick the kids get, they always want to and do play hockey," stated Dr. Muise, by email. "I wanted to create an event to bring kids with IBD together to play hockey and show that they can have normal lives with proper treatment. In fact, many of our patients compete in sports at a very high level despite this disease."

mikedavies@peterboroughexaminer.com

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