

# Crow River Youth Hockey Association

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## Hockey Burn Out!

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By Stu Cowan, Canwest News Service

### Hockey obsession leading to burnout among young players

MONTREAL - The Montreal Canadiens don't officially open training camp until Friday, when the veterans report to the Bell Centre for their physicals. But for many young players in this country, the organized hockey season began before Labour Day, with official practices and tryouts starting before the first day of school. In fact, for many young players, the hockey season now lasts 12 months a year, with no shortage of specialized summercamps and leagues.

The Columbus Blue Jackets' rookie camp began last Friday, but Stefan Legein the team's second-round pick (37th overall) at the 2007 NHL entry draft, didn't show up. He isn't injured. He simply doesn't seem to want to play hockey anymore. He's burned out - at age 19.

When news broke late last month that Legein wouldn't report to camp and was quitting hockey, his agent, Doug Woods, told the Columbus Dispatch that the rugged right-winger - who was part of Canada's gold-medal team at last season's IIHF world junior championship - had simply lost his passion to play the game.

Last season, Calgary Flames prospect Dan Ryder, the 21-year-old brother of former Canadien and current Boston Bruin Michael Ryder, decided he had lost his desire for hockey and walked away from the sport, taking most of the year off before deciding to try again this season.

This is a scenario could become more common as the demands on hockey players in this country continue to grow from a very young age.

Bob Nicholson, the president of Hockey Canada, agrees.

"I was really surprised when (Legein) said he wasn't going to report,"

Nicholson said in a telephone interview last week. "But it's certainly something that really does concern us . . . the burnout of players.

"We haven't been able to talk to (Legein) to find out all of the exact reasons why, but it certainly seems like they're saying burnout was one the key factors."

Legein, who had 43 goals, 32 assists and 115 penalty minutes in 64 games with the Ontario Hockey League's Mississauga IceDogs in 2006-07 before being drafted by Columbus, suffered a separated shoulder in the gold-medal game at last season's world junior championship. The word out of Columbus is that while recovering from shoulder surgery, the Oakville, Ont., native had time to get reacquainted with his childhood friends and realized there is more life than hockey.

But the seeds of hockey burnout are now being planted long before a player reaches the junior level, and Nicholson agrees it is becoming a problem. "It's a big concern of ours that players aren't playing soccer, baseball, lacrosse like they used to (in the summer)," he said. "We're in board meetings now looking at ways to try to make sure that they're not playing competitive hockey 12 months of the year."

Part of the problem is overzealous hockey parents with dreams of their

Son(daughter) becoming the next Sidney Crosby. They're the ones forking out the cash for the summer hockey programs, which aren't cheap. "I think a lot of it comes right from the parents," Nicholson agreed. "It almost seems like it's worse now with the 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds.

The message doesn't seem to be getting down to the parents right now."

Soccer has become more popular than hockey as a participation sport in this Country (Canada), with 867,869 players registered with Soccer Canada in 2007 (including 732,521 under age 18) compared with 545,363 with Hockey Canada in 2006-07. The lower cost associated with soccer is often mentioned as The reason, but the lower pressure level - both on kids and parents - might also have something to do with it. Most Canadian parents don't dream of their son growing up to be the next David Beckham. Plus, soccer season is in the summer, when the family schedule is a lot less hectic.

But the slower-paced summer schedule also means more time for that Power skating, stick handling or goaltending school so that your kid might have a shot at making the double-A or triple-A team next season. And even if you don't have dreams of your son playing in the NHL, there is still plenty of pressure on hockey parents.