



New Beginnings for Old Timers

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-Simmons, Calgary Sun

On the first night he ever played, the 46-year-old man got ready for hockey, just as his kids always had. He got dressed in full equipment at home.

"What did I know?" said Norm Burns, retelling the story five years later.

"My only exposure to hockey was through my kids. I thought if you play hockey that's what you do."

That's what he did when his friends showed up late on a Sunday night to pick him up, him standing at the door in full hockey garb, some of them still laughing years later as they relate the story.

He had never worn equipment before, never owned a pair of skates, never really shot a puck, when a friend asked the quintessential Canadian question: "Do you wanna play with us on Sunday nights?"

"I went into the change room for the first time feeling kind of small, and when the guy beside me took out his teeth, I thought: 'Maybe I shouldn't be here.' You know, I couldn't even do up my skates, I needed help, because of all the equipment I had on," Burns said.

"And then I went on to the ice and didn't know there was a step down and right away lost my balance, I thought I was going to break my neck. I'm barely skating around; holding on to the boards and this guy, Larry the cop, starts firing slapshots and it scares the crap out of me."

"If I hadn't paid 380 bucks for the year and bought all this new equipment, I would have quit right there."

But Burns went home and did the opposite. Instead of quitting, he picked up the phone and started looking around for power skating lessons and beginner hockey organizations. He took lessons and somehow once-a-week hockey has turned into twice-a-week hockey, and winter hockey has turned into summer hockey. And he discovered something about himself, about the game, about a part of his childhood being reinvented as an adult.

This is something adults all over the country, many of them over the age of 40, are discovering rather late for the very first time. The business of old-timer beginner hockey is booming in Canada.

"A lot of people ask 'Why are you doing this?' It's a cliché but I'm sort of living a childhood now that I didn't have the first time," said Burns.

"We didn't have a lot of play time as kids. I'm playing now."

"The good thing is, when you stink at something you can only get better. The guys who have played their whole lives, they don't get better. I don't care what anyone thinks about how I play. I'm playing for me because it's something I want to do. And every week I get a little better."