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ORLANDO SOLAR BEARS NEWS SPORTS

Solar Bears defenseman won't let Crohn's disease win: 'It's knowing your body and how it works'



By STEPHEN RUIZ
ORLANDO SENTINEL | JAN 23, 2020



Orlando Solar Bears defenseman Rich Boyd, who has Crohn's disease, has produced 4 goals and 2 assists in 13 games during his first full season in the ECHL. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel)

Every six weeks, Rich Boyd sits in a chair and waits for a needle to be inserted into his arm.

In those moments, the fact that he plays hockey professionally is irrelevant. Boyd is simply a patient.

The Orlando Solar Bears defenseman was diagnosed with Crohn's disease — a chronic condition that inflames the bowels — when he was 13 or 14 years old. The infusion treatments help Boyd remain on the ice.

The Solar Bears (16-16-5-1, 38 points) will host the Jacksonville Icemen (13-20-4-0, 30 points) at 7 p.m. Thursday in an ECHL game at Amway Center.



ORLANDO SOLAR BEARS NEWS

During Hockey Fights Cancer month, Solar Bears speak out about 'enemy within'

NOV 19, 2019 | 6:01 PM

"If what I'm on now didn't work, I was going to have to get a colostomy bag that would've taken me out of hockey," said Boyd, who is in remission. "That was nerve-racking, not knowing going in whether that medicine will work. I had to see how my body adjusted to it, but it's working really good now."

More than 3 million Americans are battling Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. Common Crohn's symptoms include severe abdominal pain, diarrhea, urgency, fever, weight loss and fatigue.

"A lot of what people don't understand — if they don't have the disease or are unfamiliar with it — is really how debilitating and life-altering it can be," said Rebecca Kaplan, spokeswoman for the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation.

Born in Sarasota, Boyd comes from a family devoted to hockey in general and the Detroit Red Wings in particular. His two older brothers played the sport. The Florida Panthers drafted R.J. Boyd in the seventh round in 2010, but he played only one minor-league game before a shoulder injury short-circuited his career. Boyd's other brother, Sam, played collegiately in Massachusetts.

"I would have bet the farm that Richie would have been drafted, but he never got drafted and his older brother did," said their father, Donald Boyd. "I thought Richie was a more offensive player than his brother, but they all played defense. You can never tell about that stuff."

The same thing goes for the body.

Boyd did not know what was going on when he began going to the bathroom too frequently. At the time, he was heading into the eighth grade and preparing to go to a boarding school near Boston.

He did not tell his parents initially, instead searching the Internet for answers as his weight dropped.

"Finally I told my mom," Boyd said. "I'm like, 'I'm going to the bathroom way too much.' She scheduled a visit with the [gastrointestinal] doctor, went in and

got a colonoscopy and everything and was diagnosed."

Frank Scarpaci coached Boyd with the Florida Eels youth hockey program in Fort Myers.

"I remember the first time we noticed he had a problem," Scarpaci said. "We were playing against the Palm Beach Hawks. Richie didn't come out of the bathroom. He was very, very sick. It was tough for him to continue playing, but he had a lot of resilience."

Boyd said he used to take about 25 pills a day. As he cycled through medications, he watched what foods he ate.

He kept losing weight.

One Christmas, Boyd returned home and shocked his parents by how skinny he was.

"He looked like a string bean," Donald Boyd said.

Boyd redshirted his junior year in college after losing 60 pounds.

"I would go to class, try to eat, go right to practice, and by the time practice was over, I was so drained that I'd just go home and lie down," said Boyd, who is now 6-foot-3 and 209 pounds. "It affected my schoolwork, the way I performed on the ice and everything."

Boyd, who has four goals and two assists in 14 games in his first season with the Solar Bears, no longer takes daily medication.

ORLANDO SOLAR BEARS NEWS

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OCT 11, 2019 | 7:19 PM

Orlando Solar Bears rookie defenseman Rich Boyd, who has Crohn's disease, is in his first full professional hockey season after playing for the University of New Hampshire. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel)

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Boyd is managing, just like former NHL players Theo Fleury and Tom Poti. They have Crohn's, as does former Jacksonville Jaguars quarterback David Garrard.

"It's knowing your body and how it works," Boyd said. "The biggest flareup is with stress and nerves, but it's just keeping a level head, keeping everything right in front of you and not letting things build up too much in your head."

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Stephen is an online content editor and sports writer for the Sentinel. He is in charge of the home page for the website in the morning and writes sports features, mainly on endurance sports such as running and triathlons. Stephen enjoys rooting for the New Orleans Saints and Houston Astros, working out, reading and cooking. He graduated from LSU.

Taboola Feed

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A Florida man threatened a mass shooting at a Publix because he said not enough people were wearing masks as protection from coronavirus, deputies said.

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