

# The London Free Press

## TODAY

### Whiplash sufferers offered effective help

Mon, April 6, 2009

By TOBI COHEN, THE CANADIAN PRESS

Just weeks into his pro baseball comeback, Canadian third baseman Corey Koskie threw in his mitt.

The 35-year-old father and Manitoba native -- who had been out of baseball since suffering a whiplash injury and concussion in 2006 while chasing a pop-up -- made the difficult decision after feeling faint and nauseous during a minor league spring training game with the Chicago Cubs.

"I love being out there, being with the guys, the whole competition," he told Major League website mlb.com shortly after making the call in early March to end his career.

"At some point you have to look at it realistically and say, 'Is it really worth sacrificing the rest of your life for a game.' "

For Koskie, the road to recovery has been long and painful, but sharing his story as he has in recent weeks has made him something of an advocate for whiplash victims.

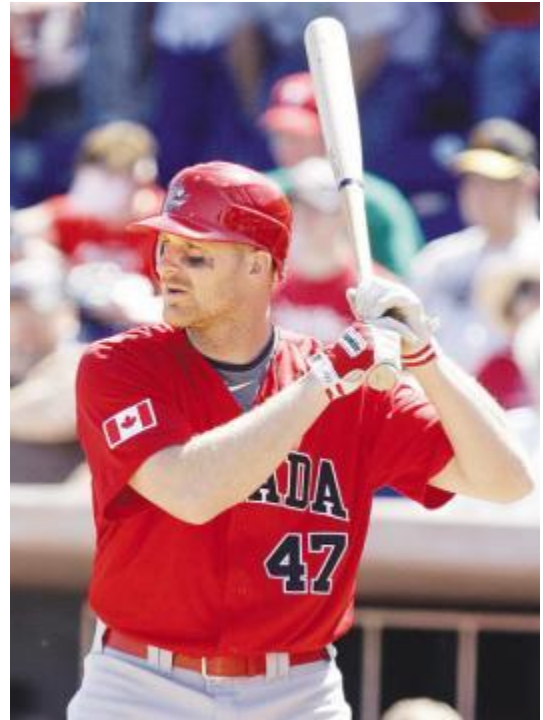
His celebrity case has also raised the profile of the often-debilitating injury that Dr. Mark Frobb, a chronic back pain specialist in British Columbia and author of *Surviving Whiplash: Saving Your Neck Without Losing Your Mind*, said afflicts thousands of Canadians.

Known in the medical field as whiplash associated disorder, Frobb said there are about 120,000 new cases each year in Canada and that about 6% of Canadians will experience some level of disability as a result of whiplash at any given time.

"That's probably greater than the incidence of diabetes in Canada so it's a significant percentage of the population," he said, adding car accidents account for the bulk of whiplash injuries.

Despite the high incidence, accessing proper care and treatment for an injury that rarely has any obvious outward signs remains a challenge for many sufferers who, like Koskie, have found themselves tossed from specialist to specialist without any relief.

"If I wrote a book I'd call it, 'If Only I Had A Cast,' "he once told The Canadian Press. "People think you're fine."



LONG-LASTING EFFECTS: Canada's Corey Koskie bats in the first inning of an exhibition spring baseball game against the Philadelphia Phillies in Clearwater, Fla. Just weeks into his pro-baseball comeback, Koskie threw in his mitt. The 35-year-old father and Manitoba native who had been out of baseball since suffering a whiplash injury and concussion in 2006 while chasing a pop-up made the difficult decision after feeling faint and nauseous during a minor league spring training game with the Chicago Cubs.

While thousands of papers have been written on the subject of whiplash associated disorder, Frobb said they've largely been academic and offer little advice to the layman sufferer.

His book, which is available online through Amazon. will be released in bookstores in April, is the exception. Described more as a "handbook," Frobb said it's meant to help sufferers understand their injuries, the available therapies, the insurance industry and their rights when it comes to compensation, as recovery will largely depend on an individual's ability to advocate on their own behalf. "The whiplash victim is coming from a different perspective. For the most part, they're in a significant amount of pain.

They may be somewhat disoriented and foggy from the injury itself," he said. "They need sort of a Mother Goose version so they could sit down in an evening, as the book is designed to do, and by the time the evening is over, have a handle on how to deal effectively with their injury."

According to Frobb, whiplash injuries happen in a mere 300 milliseconds when the head and neck are hyper extended during an impact.

The second phase of the injury occurs when the head and neck whip forward at two-and-a-half times the speed of the

original collision, causing tearing and shearing of the inside tissues.

Concussions, cognitive disorders, memory lapse and even post-traumatic stress are all part of the spectrum of whiplash associated disorder, he said. And it doesn't take much for it to happen.

Being rear-ended by a vehicle travelling a mere 13 kilometres an hour is enough to cause a 100-pound woman serious whiplash, he said, adding vehicles, on the other hand, are built to take such an impact.

"Therein lies the rub. You may experience the injury but you don't have any visible damage to your vehicle, which is quite likely pointed out to everyone around you, including your insurance adjuster," he said. "The onus is on whiplash victims to be able to prove that they've been significantly damaged and that it's affected their life."

Two years after Valerie Oskam and her then 12-year-old son were rear-ended at a red light near their Surrey, B. C., home, they're still feeling the effects of the seemingly minor collision. There was no need to call police. No need for an ambulance. The other driver took full responsibility for the chain reaction fender-bender and they exchanged information before Oskam drove herself to the hospital to be evaluated.

Yet to this day her son suffers migraines at least once a week that leave him couch-ridden, while Oskam now suffers from mood swings and even found her head, neck, back and

shoulder pain became worse after she was given the wrong treatment by a physiotherapist.

"I'm really limited in what I can do," said the pharmacy technician, who fears she may never recover and wonders if she'll still be able to work in five years. "I'm probably going to have to deal with this, I think, because it's lasted so long."

Frobb said 80% of whiplash victims resolve their injuries within a year. Of the 20% who don't, a quarter will be severely disabled and may never get back to work.

Seeking treatment within the first three months is key, he said, adding sleeplessness due to head and neck pain should set off alarm bells.

In his book, Frobb urges victims to document their injuries and provides checklists to help ensure such details as the vehicles and speeds involved in an accident aren't forgotten. He also cautions those seeking treatment to observe the "rule of six" and the "rule of three."

If, for example, one doesn't see an improvement after six massage therapy sessions or six chiropractic appointments, Frobb said it's time to try something different. Similarly, therapies often have a "ceiling effect."

"If you seem to reach a level of stability and after three visits, you can't notice an appreciable improvement, chances are carrying on with another six to 10 treatments is not going to make a difference," he said.