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## IN THE GAME

### Hockey players overcome heart defects

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
STAFF WRITER

The Birmingham Titans lost the district peewee hockey game to the Plymouth Killer Sharks in late January, but both of the teams' goalies were winners. Their mothers never thought Patrick Adams and Jackson Lytle would survive open heart surgery let alone play a variety of sports one day. The boys seem less interested in talking about early health problems than their time on the ice.

"It was a fun game," said Patrick Adams, a sixth-grade student at Detroit Country Day School. When the 11-year-old Birmingham boy isn't deflecting goals, he's on a tennis court or baseball diamond.



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Lytle is too busy playing hockey, baseball and drums to even think about the congenital heart defect he was born with until a fellow player asks, what's that on your chest? His mother, Michele, thinks the answer that follows is more common than believed. According to the Congenital Heart Information Network (tchin.org), it's estimated that one in 100 children born in the U.S. every year has a malformed heart. Jackson's scar is from open heart surgery the 12-year-old Plymouth boy underwent at 28 hours old for a rare defect known as Total Anomolus Pulmonary Venous Return. Jackson's older



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hours old for a rare defect known as Total Anomolus Pulmonary Venous Return. Jackson's older

sister Megan was born with the same condition.

"Jackson was 2 or 3 when I wanted to find two children in a family with heart defects. There aren't a lot of children older than Megan because the technology didn't exist to repair it," said Michele Lytle, who went on the Internet looking for a support group and found Patrick's mother, Maureen Adams. Patrick's Atrial Septal Defect wasn't rare, but the two women connected.

"Patrick's pediatric cardiologist referred us to U of M for a certain procedure that was in Phase 2 of clinical trials," said Maureen Adams. "I couldn't find any information on it that's when I hooked up with the Internet group and learned what questions to ask. We chose not to have the experimental procedure and instead went with regular open heart surgery."

As part of an informal local support group, the two mothers shared their knowledge about congenital heart defects, but hadn't physically seen each other since 2000 when Gov. John Engler signed a proclamation to declare Feb. 14 Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day. Then the women learned their sons would be facing each other on the ice.

"We're so fortunate to have two healthy young men," said Michele Lytle.

Both women continue to participate in e-mail discussions on tchin.org. The Children's Congenital Heart Information Network is a national organization that provides educational information, support, financial assistance, and resources for families of children with congenital heart defects and acquired heart disease, adults with CHD, and the professionals who work with them.

"Thirty years ago survival was far less," said Lytle. "Not enough children have survived to know what to expect. There may be complications they might not be aware of. We need to stay involved."

"We sent letters, e-mails and faxes to include congenital heart defects in a proclamation to declare February American Heart Month by George W. Bush in 2004," added Maureen Adams. "It's about awareness. After the hockey game one of Patrick's teammates said he had the same surgery. We didn't know that until the hockey game."

"The subject usually doesn't come up unless they're in swimsuits," said Lytle, "yet it is the number one defect."

This spring, Jackson, 12, is joining the track team at West Middle School in Plymouth. He'd like to stay in touch with Patrick who was 3 years old when he underwent open heart surgery.

"It felt kind of weird meeting him," said Jackson. "I didn't know him, but I think I knew him."

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Even though Jackson Lytle (left) and Patrick Adams play for opposing peewee hockey teams, the boys have a lot in common. They recently met again after a game at Birmingham Ice Arena.

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PHOTO BY LORETTA O'FLYNN

Patrick Adams in action as goalie for the Birmingham Titans.

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