

Sports

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From tragedy to triumph

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It's never easy to turn a tragedy into motivation, but Abbotsford's Rhys Burnell has done just that.

Burnell, a member of the Burnaby Mountain Selects lacrosse team, the B.C. Midget Box Lacrosse team and the U-16 Field Lacrosse team, was rocked when he found out about the sudden death of his close friend and teammate Chris Friesen on March 25.

Friesen, who grew up in Langley, was just 17 years old. He was far too young, said Burnell, a 16-year-old Grade 11 student at Yale Secondary.

"I went through a lot of emotions," he said.

"I was sad, I was confused. I tried to figure out why he died but I managed to just get through it."

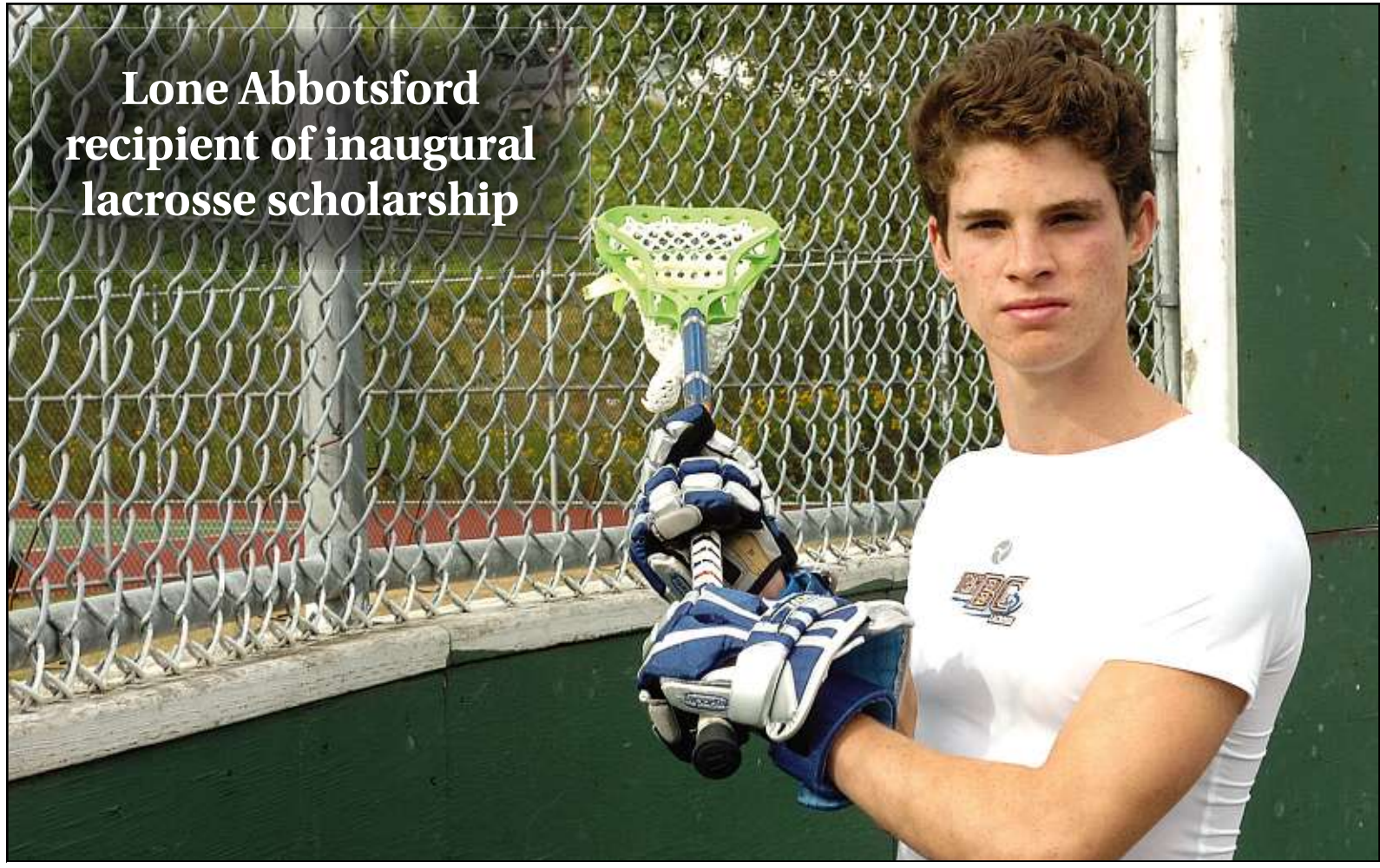
Delivering the news to their son that his friend had passed away was also an emotional experience, said Burnell's mom Lori.

"It was very difficult because we were very close family friends," she said. "It's devastating. It's hard to explain to kids this young why these things happen. I don't think there is an explanation but to see all of the boys take up the cause and keep working hard in Chris's name and really pay tribute to him . . . Chris lives on through these young guys."

"There's a picture of him holding a lacrosse stick and it says 'Be The Best' at the top," added Burnell.

He has heeded that advice. Burnell was recently named as the lone Abbotsford recipient for the inaugural Burnaby Mountain Selects Scholar Athlete Awards presented by Jeff Cathrea and Brent Hoskins, co-head coaches of the SFU men's lacrosse team and founders of the Burnaby Mountain Lacrosse Elite Development Program.

Lone Abbotsford recipient of inaugural lacrosse scholarship



— CAM TUCKER/TIMES

Rhys Burnell, a Grade 11 student at Yale Secondary and a member of the Burnaby Mountain Selects, is the lone Abbotsford recipient of the inaugural Burnaby Mountain Selects Scholar Athlete Award, which recognizes high academic achievement and on-field excellence.

The award recognizes high academic achievement, as well as on-field excellence and is given to 57 student-athletes from B.C. and Washington. Students must have a grade point average of 80 per cent or higher.

The award, which Burnell will receive at the Maple Leaf Awards Dinner in January 2011, is exciting given the adversity he has faced the past few months.

"It feels great," he said, beaming.

"It's a lot of fun to play with guys on a really good team and to just show up and play your best."

As much fun as excelling in both box and field lacrosse is, putting up a better performance in the classroom means the most to Burnell.

"It's very important," he said, "because I'm looking for a university scholarship."

Modest about his grades, which range between As and Bs, Burnell said it's important to take the same

work habits from lacrosse and apply them to education.

"I just go to school and do the work," he said, adding his favourite subject was mathematics, although he admitted, bashfully, it's not necessarily his best subject.

"But it's the same with lacrosse." His accomplishments both in lacrosse and in the classroom have mom and dad brimming with pride.

"I'm extremely proud of Rhys,"

said Lori. "He works really hard and he has to manage his time really well at school in order to do all these things."

"I think sport teaches a lot of lessons like working really hard and training hard and setting goals and that comes into play the rest of your life."

And it seems lacrosse will continue to play a huge role in Burnell's life.

"I love the game."

Hayden breaks record

Mission's Brent Hayden and the rest of the UBC Dolphins broke their Canadian club record in the men's 4x100 medley relay recently to cap the pool portion of 2010 Summer Nationals swimming competition at Saanich Commonwealth Place.

The Dolphins - including Brian Johns, Scott Dickens, Rory Biskupski and Hayden - clocked 3:40.08 in the final to eclipse their previous mark of 3:40.84 set last year.

Dickens, Johns and Hayden were also members of the '09 record-setting foursome.

It marked the second Canadian club relay record at the event, which also served as the second of two trials to finalize Canadian team selections for the Pan Pacific Championships, being held Aug. 18-22 in Irving, Calif. The victory capped a great week for Hayden,

who collected a third individual gold with a win in the 50 metre freestyle in 22.73. He also won the men's 100m freestyle in 49:19.

Hayden, of all the world-class swimmers now locking their gaze upon the 2012 London Summer Olympics, has something to prove. He didn't hesitate when asked about his aspirations this year for the 2010 Pan Pacifics in California and 2010 Commonwealth Games in October at Delhi, India.

"Gold would be nice. That's always the ultimate goal," said Hayden.



BRENT HAYDEN

— WITH FILES FROM POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Kronwall to Europe?

It appears Staffan Kronwall will not opt out of the final year of his one-way two-year deal with the Abbotsford Heat's NHL affiliate, the Calgary Flames.

On Tuesday, a report out of Sweden said Kronwall, who played in 44 games with the AHL Heat last season, wanted out of the final year of his deal with Calgary in order to play in Sweden.

But on Thursday, Kronwall's agent, Claes Elefalk, told *Sport-Expressen* that the 6'5" defenceman turned down offers from Djurgardens of the Swedish Elite League and the KHL, and will honour his NHL contract.

— CAM TUCKER/TIMES

Roller hockey sign up

The second registration date for the fall roller hockey league is Saturday from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. at Sports Zone, 33147 South Fraser Way, Abbotsford.

The league is for boys and girls, ages 7-16, is non-contact and there are no practices.

All stats and standings are posted online. The cost is \$135 for the season and includes a free jersey.

Check the website at www.agrechockey.com for information on the league, including stats, schedules and registration dates.

— STAFF REPORTER