

# All he wants now is to get on with life

By Tom Hawthorn  
Staff Reporter

Mel Unruh, a hockey player paralysed after a reckless body check broke his neck, can now get on with his life.

The 20-year-old Aldergrove man has been awarded \$4 million in B.C. Supreme Court.

"Just like everybody else my age, I'm anxious to get out and find a place of my own," says Unruh, who lives with his parents and four siblings.

Unruh was a slight, 17-year-old defenceman nicknamed Runt when he was hit from behind by a larger player during an amateur exhibition game in March 1990.

The check, by opponent Steve Webber, sent Unruh head-first into the boards. He crashed motionless to the ice with a broken neck.

Unruh is now a quadriplegic with some feeling in his arms and feet. During the trial, he testified he had vague sensations but no control over his bowel and bladder.

On Friday, Justice Kenneth Meredith ruled Webber's hit was intentional and issued the award for damages and costs against him.

The award will be covered by an insurance policy for the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association.

The judge said the body check was reckless and thoughtless, but not vicious.

For Unruh, the money will allow him to live as independently as possible.

## Award gives quadriplegic the means

"It'll be used for a lot of things," he said yesterday. "Attendant care, equipment, elevators, lifts, a van, modifications for everything."

Even so common a task as going to bed is a 30-minute challenge for Unruh and a helper.

The award will also allow him to attend college. Unruh had a B average at D. W. Poppy secondary school in Langley.

"I'd like to go to school for sure," he said. "I might go into business (administration)."

Meanwhile, he hopes the judgment will encourage the CAHA to eliminate unnecessary violence.

"They've got to get rid of some of the rough stuff, the checking from behind, some of the stick-work," he said.

"They have to stiffen up the rules. The kids out there don't want to get hurt."

Unruh says he is still an ardent hockey fan, despite his injury.

"It hasn't soured me on the sport.

"Hockey didn't do me in — only one illegal check did me in. I still enjoy hockey."

CP photo

Mel Unruh, paralysed after a hockey body check, hopes to attend college with the \$4 million a court awarded him.

