

## **S2E7 Extra – Fran Rider**

My name is Fran Rider and I am the president of the Ontario Women's Hockey Association and heavily involved in women's hockey. My dad was a firefighter. My mom was a lifetime volunteer helping kids. And we are true hockey fans, sports fans. And we were cottagers as well. And so morning to night, my brother and I did participate in every sport going on, on and off the water.

I absolutely loved hockey, loved the Toronto Maple Leafs, desperately wanted to play hockey. Girls didn't play at that time, so my hockey was playing on figure skates on a backyard rink with a hockey stick and absolutely loving it. I learned about the Brampton tournament and started playing hockey. I was 15. The youngest player in our team was nine. The oldest was 44. It was full body checking. I went from figure skates to full body, checking in no time, and I was happy being on the bench. But the players wanted you to play and be part of the team. And at that point I started playing hockey for and I played for about 30 years. It was so important to be part of the team. You shared your love of hockey and you learned a lot about developing individual skills, but more importantly, sharing the joy and experiences of teammates of the game has played with intensity at many levels, but there is a bigger focus on the individual, the person, and working together and succeeding as a team and losing as a team. If you made a mistake that would cost the team a goal or cost the team. There was a lot of support network there and you learn very much how to win and lose together and to keep the perspective of sport and society in in true life.

When I started to be involved in 1968, I started to volunteer as well. And I want to do anything and everything I could in the world of hockey that took me to working on various boards at team level, at league level and association level. And certainly as we were growing and building, we were watching the trends of the game. The equipment was very, very inferior and you know, the equipment did not fit women properly, the helmets did not fit properly. The pants, the gloves. The shinpads, has none of the equipment fit well. The sticks were inappropriate, but we were working towards making equipment better and also learning that very early the spinal injuries that were starting to pop up in hockey and we worked with Dr. Pashby as he was working his work to put the face shields on players to save injuries. And Dr. Tator was certainly very close to Dr. Pasby in that goal. We saw a movement into spinal injuries and severe spinal injuries and paralysis and even death through hockey.

We connected with Dr. Tator, who was very, very keen to do research on spinal injuries, on mechanism of the injury, and worked very hard to the prevention and quality of life through spinal injuries. We collected the information of individual players who had spinal injuries and suspected spinal injuries and shared that data with Dr. Tator. And he actually got involved firsthand with some of the players who had a fractured vertebrae, who was not treated properly. And he intervened in that one. And not only did he do research on it, but he cared about every single person and he was an inspiration. We couldn't believe that we were working with someone of his prestige, his knowledge, his credentials and the fact that he cared. And he was so humble and gave so much to each person he came in contact with and wanted to do so much to make the world of sport safer. I remember talking with him on the phone many, many times and his incredible kindness and his brilliance and his desire to make things better and his interest. He was actively interested. He made himself available with his busy schedule and the pressures of his work and the importance of his work. He still made himself available for a call. And it was just it was

difficult to comprehend how available he was and how kind he was. And it really brought us have an incredible respect for the person he is.

In 2018, Jenn Kish, Kerrin Lee-Gartner, Cassie Campbell and myself donated our brains to Dr. Tator and his team for research on the female brain. There's a lot of studies on differences between female and male brains and different types of brains. And the differences, too, do bring some sophisticated research and studies to ensure that the best possible things can be done to treat people while they're alive and the study of post-mortem brains. When Dr. Tator asked for brains of female brains, I was very, very happy and I trusted him totally and was quite happy to provide my brain when I'm done with it, for whatever it's worth to Dr. Tator and his team to do research. And if there's anything any of us can do to make a better world in the future, that's important, that we contribute what we can. For many years I worked with Dr. Tator and his researchers on the spinal injuries, on the concussion research. And really he is so keen and so brilliant and wants to make things better. And research is so important. And at this point in time, there's a lot of research that needs to be done post-mortem and anything that I can do to help him and his research is relentless in trying to pursue better treatments for people, better prevention methods. And if there's anything possible that he needs that, that I can accommodate others that accommodate, I really wanted to help him with that because it's such an important area to provide quality of life for those who have injuries and prevention for those that are prevented from injuries. It's a difficult area. It's a complex area. I'm really, truly honoured to provide any support I can in that area. And if a brain post mortem is what will help, then I'm right into the mix there and happy to do that. For Dr. Tator, safety and sport is very much at the forefront for both the physical and mental health of people.

The caliber of sport is getting higher and higher and higher with improved equipment and improved training methods. So we're creating bigger challenges for ourselves by getting stronger athletes and stronger in sport. So the research and initiatives for safety really do need to continue. They need to be continued on a daily and yearly basis and as the sport evolves, the speed is so much quicker around the same size of ice. So the shots are harder, the game is faster, the shifts are shorter. There's a lot of things that are evolving in sport. And it's important that the sport experts in the medical community work side by side to create, you know, research and initiatives and ideally prevention and also management. Another trend in sport is the relentless pressures that parents sometimes put on children to succeed and their denial or refusal to accept medical research. And certainly a concussion, a brain injury, is something that is not visible and trying to get individuals to understand that a brain injury has no bearing on the importance of a game is really, really important. And we are trying on an ongoing basis to make sure that parents, coaches and all those involved in sport understand that a suspected brain injury or a brain injury needs complete care regardless of whether it's a practice and an important game, the house league game or a championship game, the brain needs to be properly treated. And that's one of the challenges we have, is getting people to accept the fact that what they can't see is real and it needs full and complete attention and prevention in order to preserve athletic careers and preserve life.

I have never been officially diagnosed with a concussion. You know, we didn't know concussions back in the early days when I played sports. And I know even as a water skier, I crashed into a marine railway once and had no clue where I was as I was played centre fielder in ball, I remember multiple times diving for a ball one. I just crunched my head so hard I had no clue where I was on the field and many, many times in hockey with the body checking, I would run into an opponent or run into the boards and certainly feel nauseous, feel the symptoms of concussion, but not be aware that I should pay attention

to what was going on. It was basically, you know, get out, get back onto the ice. And at that point in time, the trend was, okay, if you were nauseous or you had a headache or you were dizzy, you got somebody to wake you up every hour. That was as far as we ever went in those days. We just did not know that that type of thing needed our care. So and I saw colleagues many, many times in the same situation. So, you know, we're very, very thankful that this research and treatment is available now. I'm not sure how some of us survived, but I do know other team-mates in the game had to stop playing completely because they had been had brain injuries. They didn't know it and they ended up right out of the sport. I know multiple players who did that and possibly with proper treatment and proper knowledge at the beginning they would have been able to continue their participation in sport. And that's why it's so important now that we do know those things. The parents and players take those precautions. If you do have a suspected concussion, maybe you sit out for a week, maybe you sit out for a month, but you know, you've got a long life ahead of you and you can continue in sport and higher quality of life through taking a few steps, giving up a little bit now to look after your health. But boy, we all benefit in the long run. And that's so important that people understand that primarily, I hope we can do more in the area of prevention and the brain donation.

That is the key thing if there's some trends there. Also, we read a lot about the research and how important that research is to do the treatment again and prevention of the of the male brain. And so some of the female athletes and we encourage other female athletes that have had concussions, whether they've been diagnosed or not, to step forward and donate their brains to so that we can make the careers of the female athletes. There's incredible movement in getting female team sports and female sports played by you know, every sport is available now to do to young girls and adult women. And we know that concussions impact the quality of people's working lives. And, you know, we've got a lot of brilliant young women in this world that if they have prevention of concussions, they know they're going to be future leaders in the business, professional and the entire world. And it's important that they look after their health and well-being so that they can they can take this world where it needs to go.

Because of that, we need to step up the research and with donation of brains and post-mortem and perhaps, you know, down the road, the research will show that more can be done while people are still alive. That that's great, too. But anything we can do to to help future generations is truly important.