

Doctor with fond memories of playing days plans to give back

JASON BELL

DR. MACKENZIE ACHESON could well be the poster boy for everything the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League has tried to exemplify since its founding in 1970.

The Winnipegger completed four splendid seasons with the Fort Garry/Fort Rouge Twins while finishing his science degree at the University of Manitoba and then went on to medical school.

Now 30, the married father to an infant daughter, Annie, is now taking specialized training in psychiatry.

After playing a pair of junior A games (with the Winnipeg Blues of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League) in the fall of 2008, Acheson, in his first year of studies, decided the juggling act was entirely too difficult to manoeuvre.

"For me, personally, it was either focus on hockey or focus on school. I knew I wanted to go into medicine from a young age because I knew I wanted to help people, so the decision

was pretty easy. The situation with the Twins was perfect, practice once a week and games Friday and Sunday and I didn't have to miss any school for travel," Acheson said.

"The hockey was good. It was competitive. I remember thinking the top end (of the MMJHL) was similar to the middle-of-the-pack MJHL players.

"It was so much fun... one of the best times of my life."

Acheson strung together four 20-goal seasons, while averaging 50 points a year. He was also a bona fide playoff performer, scoring 35 goals in 68 career post-season games as the Twins made the championship series three of the four years he was there.

But his hockey resumé is missing an MMJHL crown.

"We lost in the finals three out of four times (to the Charleswood Hawks) and lost in the semifinals the other time. We came close the first time (2009) in Game 7 in quadruple-overtime. That was brutal," he said, laughing.

"There was another time (2011)

against the Hawks in Game 1 of the final. We were down 4-1, I had the one goal and I think I scored three more in the third but they won 5-4 in overtime. That's kind of the way it went when I played. We seemed to find ways to lose. I'm a pretty optimistic guy but the Hawks just seemed to have our number."

Former Twins general manager Mike Ashley said he remembers the moments that followed the series opener like it was yesterday.

"Mackenzie was our captain that year. He ties it up for us but we lose it in overtime. We're all standing around yakking and he said, 'I got four and we couldn't win.' And I said, 'Exactly, we needed you to score five,'" said Ashley, who spent 24 years with the Twins before stepping aside after the 2018-19 season.

"He's an incredible young man. And there were lots of them like that in the league over the years."

Acheson said his fondest memory of wearing the Twins colours was finally playing organized hockey alongside his

younger brother, Dillon, now a lawyer, for two MMJHL campaigns.

"We played a bunch of street hockey and roller hockey together but never on the ice together, so that was great," Acheson said.

"I remember one guy hitting him from behind and I stood up for him, so that was pretty funny because he's usually the one beating up on me."

Acheson said he's interested in focusing on mental health in sports. He's done some advocacy work with sports teams in the community and plans to reach out to the MMJHL to see how he might be able to help out going forward.

"I'd love to work with the league in some way. It's been an important part of my life, with so many great people," he said.

"I still go to some games and some of the team functions and run into so many familiar faces. It's such a great sense of community."

jason.bell@freepress.mb.ca
Twitter: @WFPJasonBell



Former MMJHL player Mackenzie Acheson is now a doctor and family man. He and wife Amy have an infant daughter, Annie.