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Surgery to Remove Bone Chip From Snow Chief's Knee Termed a...

Bobby Orr

Once Best on Skates, He Walks With Pain

February 02, 1986 | RICH TOSCHES | Times Staff Writer

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BOSTON — It used to be a knee. It bent and absorbed shock the same way most people's knees do. But that was a long time ago. Today, the area halfway between Bobby Orr's left ankle and left hip is not so much a knee as it is a barometer.

When the weather changes in New England, as it has a tendency to do every 30 minutes or so, Orr knows it without having to glance outside.

Rain causes an ache. Snow brings a sharper pain.

It is getting worse, too. Orthopedic surgeons have told Orr that without a radical operation to replace what's left of his knee joint with an artificial hinge, rain and snow will be the least of his problems.

In essence, doctors have told Orr that without the surgery, eventually his knee will be able to locate high pressure systems off Baja California and give fairly accurate temperature readings for several South American cities.

Bobby Orr, one of the greatest hockey players ever, is slowly coming to the realization that the rest of his life will proceed with a limp.

The flash from Parry Sound, Ontario, who redesigned the game, becoming the most potent offensive defenseman the National Hockey League has ever seen with lightning end-to-end rushes, can no longer play tennis or racquetball or squash. Golf is bearable, since he can use an electric cart, but a flight of stairs causes big problems.

Orr has already been on the wrong end of a knife six times. Perhaps only William Perry's lunch has seen more stainless steel than Orr's left knee. Six times doctors have operated, removing torn cartilage and clearing out bone chips. For several months, doctors have begged him to have Operation No. 7 to remove more floating chips that turn every step, every curb, into an adventure.

"I'm having some problems with it, no question," Orr said in his Boston office. "I really should go in and get it fixed again, but I'm not ready for that.

"They've located several bone chips floating around behind the kneecap, pieces that really should be cleaned out. Sometimes the knee locks up on me, seizes up, and I can't bend it at all. Some days it gets real bad.

"There are many things that I would like to be able to do, but I can't. I am very restricted. I loved to play tennis, but I can't anymore. I get out on the baseball field with my boys, but I'm sure not very fast.

"But hey, the knee took a beating during my career. It carried me around for a while, I had a good time, and, well, this is how it ended up."