



SKI HELMET SAVED ONE LUCKY BOY

Date: Thursday, March 21, 2002

By Sarah Huntley

When 5-year-old Eliot Levmore received his ski helmet two years ago, he was so excited that he wore it to bed.

"He slept in it the first couple of nights," his father, Saul Levmore, said Wednesday, "because it meant he was growing up and about to go skiing."

Now that same helmet, bright blue with silver stars and a black racing stripe, is a symbol of something else: a prevented tragedy.

Wednesday, a day after Eliot plowed into a tree during a ski class at Aspen Highlands, the Chicago boy was recuperating at Children's Hospital in Denver. The only outward signs of his trauma were a two-inch gash with 10 stitches above his right eye, a neck brace, just for precautions, and a touch of grogginess.

Eliot's doctors say he is extremely lucky. He sustained a medium concussion and had some bleeding around his brain but is expected to make a full recovery.

"He actually got away almost scot-free," pediatric neurosurgeon Lori McBride said. "He managed to dent his helmet and not his head."

Eliot, who had been enjoying his first day of using ski poles, was injured at about 11:30 a.m. Tuesday when he had second thoughts about going over a jump in class and veered to the side, plowing into a tree.

His accident was the second involving a child at Aspen Highlands in five weeks. Five-year-old Leonie Arguetty, of Wellington, Fla., died last month, two days after she hit a tree. She was not wearing a helmet.

Late Wednesday, officials with the Aspen Skiing Co. announced that all ski and snowboard students age 6 and younger will be required to wear helmets while in lessons. The change takes effect March 23.

Arguetty's death was one of 14 on Colorado's slopes this year, the most recorded in a ski season. The previous high was 12, during the 1998-99 season.

Eliot's doctors said Wednesday they have little doubt that the boy's helmet prevented serious injury and possibly death.

"Lucky for Eliot, he was wearing his helmet," McBride said.

Levmore said helmets are a routine part of his children's lives. There's no scootering, biking, skiing, or even ice skating without one.

Eliot sometimes grumbles about wearing a helmet while on his scooter, but never while on the slopes. "For skiing and skateboarding, all their heroes are wearing helmets," Levmore said. "I doubt I'll be doing much without a helmet again."

Levmore and his wife were skiing another part of the mountain, preparing to meet their children for lunch, when his cell phone rang: A ski official said his son had been unconscious for two minutes.

Levmore remembers skiing down the mountain to Eliot. "You're scared out of your mind," he said. "I have a very, very special kid, and his brain is his best part."

Eliot, suddenly shy Wednesday because of the attention, managed a quick wave to reporters as he sat in a wheelchair, wearing blue pajamas and clutching a tattered penguin.

Levmore said he's encouraged by his little boy's recovery, which includes continued mastery of Nintendo. The family plans to return to Chicago on Saturday but promised to ski the Rocky Mountains again.

"We're addicted to Colorado," Levmore said. "We'll definitely be here next year."

All content herein is © 2002 ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS
and may not be republished without permission.