

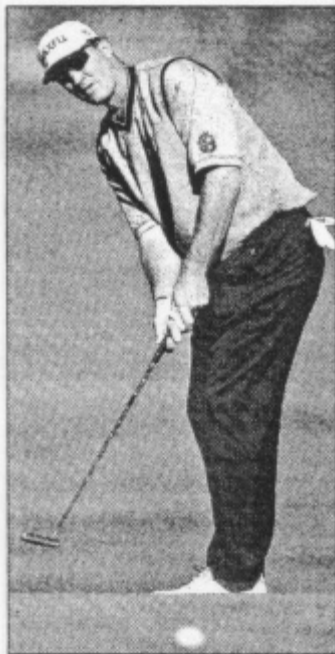
Cupline

Hockey news and notes

Lemieux trades skates for spikes

By Kevin Allen
USA TODAY

With decisions to be made about trading Jaromir Jagr and re-signing several key players, Pittsburgh Penguins player/owner Mario Lemieux has put team



1999 photo by Harry How, Allsport

Lemieux: Annual fundraiser nets about \$1 million.

decisions on hold to focus on playing 54 holes of golf this weekend.

And yes, the golf is more important.

Lemieux is hosting the fourth annual Mellon Mario Lemieux Celebrity Golf Invitational — the main fundraising event of the Lemieux Foundation. The tournament, which starts Thursday in Nevillewood, Pa., will raise about \$1 million for medical research.

"As a cancer survivor I just feel that it's important that I do what I can," Lemieux says.

The event is big for celebrities, drawing Michael Jordan, John Elway and others. "I'm anxious to talk with Michael about what he's up to," Lemieux

jokes, referring to Jordan's rumored comeback.

Lemieux says he'll play one more NHL season, but he could play more. The back problems which contributed to his retirement in 1997 are no longer an issue. He credits a stretching program, developed for him by a Montreal company called Bionix. "This is the best my back has felt in 15 years," Lemieux says.

Bionix CEO Albert Barbusci said his company doesn't diagnose problems as much as it assesses posture deviations using digital pictures aided by reflective markers placed on the body. The "bioprint" is fed into a computer that produces a stretching program designed to bring about corrected measurements. "It balances your posture," Lemieux says.

Lemieux's ability to play has plenty to do with the improved health of the Penguins. The once-bankrupt franchise made \$2 million-\$3 million last season.