

September 29, 2001

Berard comeback draws range of emotions

It had been 18 months since defenseman Bryan Berard last played against NHL competition - until Saturday.

Now, Berard is trying to resurrect a playing career many observers believed was over.

Berard, playing at the time for the Toronto Maple Leafs, was injured on March 11, 2000, when Ottawa Senators winger Marian Hossa's stick struck his right eye. The incident was accidental; the injury was believed to be career-ending. Seven surgeries followed, but sight in his eye didn't return to levels that would allow him to play in the NHL.

Berard was not offered a contract by the Leafs this summer, thus becoming an unrestricted free agent. In August, Berard was invited to Team USA's pre-Olympic camp in Colorado Springs, Colo., as a thank-you for his play with U.S. national teams over the years. However, Berard was able to skate with the team, leading several NHL clubs to inquire into his interest in trying to return to the NHL.

As an unrestricted free agent, Berard cast his lot with the New York Rangers. With medical clearance and an insurance repayment settlement, he began work this week with the Rangers.

Berard played for the first time Saturday night in Boston against the Bruins, under a seven-day Rangers tryout contract. The question now is how long his comeback will last.

Here are some comments about Berard, his attempt to overcome a catastrophic eye injury and return to the NHL, from around the hockey world.

THE NHL

"An examination of Bryan Berard's right eye was performed on Sept. 26 by Dr. Mark Fromer, clinical professor of ophthalmology for the New York Medical College. Dr. Fromer has certified to the league, both orally and in writing, that Mr. Berard's visual acuity in his right eye is 20/400, which satisfies the standards set forth in NHL By-Law 12.7. While we intend to carefully observe Bryan's progress, on the basis of **Dr. Fromer's** examination and certification that Mr. Berard's eyesight satisfies the League's existing standards, Mr. Berard has now been cleared as eligible to play in NHL games."

Bill Daly, executive vice president and chief legal officer, in a statement released Saturday