



'SKATING WAS MY LIFE'

It was to be a fun-filled night out for roller-skating champion Paul Irving and the people who were closest to him. Instead, his professional life was ruined.

On the night of December 30 last year Paul, his girlfriend Gayle, his parents and brother went in two cars to Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast.

His parents parked their car as Paul drove into the carpark.

"I saw a spot and pulled up and was reversing into it," says Paul. "A four-wheel drive with seven blokes in it pulled right up behind me and they wouldn't shift. They were abusive and I got out to see what could be done. Gayle headed off to find the casino security men."

What happened after that must have happened very quickly, Paul says, because Gayle was not gone long. By the time help arrived the other car was gone and Paul was lying in a pool of blood on the concrete.

"I have no idea what happened," he says. "I don't know whether I was punched or kicked or hit with something hard. The back of my skull was split."

Taken to the Gold Coast Hospital, Paul went into intensive care while Gayle and his parents Ron and Marie began a nine-day vigil.

For 31-year-old Paul (pictured above with mementos from his skating days), the sport is now out of the question. One fall could spell permanent injury or even death.

From 1975 to 1988 Paul was the Australian national figure-skating champion, and he was placed third in the 1985 and 1987 world skating championships.

He first strapped on skates at the

age of 18 months. Paul sacrificed his work and social life and, by 1989, he had turned professional.

"Skating was my life. There is a lot to give up if you want to get as far as I got. You train before and after work, forget about going out, you give everything to it. And I loved it."

His injuries have robbed him of balance, given him pain and dizziness, erased some of his memory and taken away his sense of smell.

"I get headaches although I never suffered from them before. If I stand up too quickly I get dizzy. Reading gives me a headache and I get sharp pains across the top of my head when I get up in the morning."

For the two years preceding the attack Paul worked full-time as a coach. "I wanted to teach kids. I get depressed when I can't go out there and show them what to do."

Charges against four of the six men accused over the attack have been dismissed. A fifth man was convicted of common assault, and a sixth is still to face court