

## Amputation no limit for drumming, kayaking, skiing, shooting teen



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**Seventeen-year-old Jesse Ehman uses a prosthetic device he received from the War Amps program which allows him to compete in biathlon.** GREG PENDER / SASKATOON STARPHOENIX

When Jesse Ehman was a kid, he got to meet a famous musician — Rick Allen, the one-armed drummer of Def Leppard.

“He showed me his drum set, some of the things he has for drumming with one hand. Unlike me — I use a prosthetic with a drumstick — he used various foot pedals from the drums. You press them and they play different sounds, so that was cool,” the 17-year-old said.

The meeting proved to be an inspiration. Within six months Jesse, who is a partial left arm amputee, was taking drum lessons. He plays to this day, getting together with his friends to jam.

“It’s really fun. There’s lots of new songs to play and I’m always learning new stuff,” he said.

Jesse was born 16 weeks premature. When he was about two or three weeks old, an IV in his left arm became infected. It started to spread and doctors had to amputate his arm.

“Of course we were worried, but that’s what they needed to do to save our Jesse,” said his mother, Lorelei.

Growing up, Jesse was treated the same as his brother, she said. They were both expected to make their beds and help wash dishes. The one difference was that shortly after Jesse was born they connected with the War Amps for support. He got his first prosthetic, a passive hand for balance, when he was one.

“Really, growing up, we made sure Jesse had what he needed to do any activity he wanted.”

The one thing he couldn’t do was play on the monkey bars — but he now has his driver’s licence (his truck has a standard transmission), plays the drums, kayaks, snowboards and goes wakeboarding.

“I can pretty much do everything everyone else can do. Sometimes it takes a little longer or I have to use a prosthetic, but other than that, I wouldn’t say there’s any limitations,” Jesse said.

The custom prosthetic he uses for biathlons — which involve cross-country skiing and target shooting — has a sleeve that fits over the stump of his arm, with a metal bar that locks at a right angle so he can shoot while prone. At the moment, the design doesn’t really work if he’s standing, but it’s an improvement on the stand he had used previously.

“It’s really fun,” Jesse said of the sport. “It’s kind of challenging — your heart rate is up and you have to try to calm yourself down for shooting — that was interesting. Just learning how to ski more efficiently with less wasted energy, that was fun, too.”

He’s a beginner, but looks to future participation in parasport. He went to a camp last year where he met other athletes and saw how they dealt with their amputations. He picked up tips on how to keep his amputated arm warm while he skis.

Support from the War Amps has been instrumental in showing the options available to Jesse, Lorelai said. The group has not only shared information about prosthetics but matched mothers of other children with amputations to talk.

Jesse said any kids who find themselves in a similar situation should know that no matter the disability, they can do anything anyone else can.

“It may take some time, but if you try really hard and you don’t give up, you can do anything.”

*StarPhoenix reporter Jonathan Charlton tells stories of people coping with health issues. Do you have a story? Contact Jonathan at 306-657-6468 or [jcharlton@postmedia.com](mailto:jcharlton@postmedia.com)*

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