

Injury does not stop baton twirling champion named a Finalist for the 2107 Sask Sport Athlete of the Year



Photo: Shurana Niessen

Second-year Elementary Education student, Jasmine Runge, Finalist for the 2017 Sask Sport Youth-Female Athlete of the Year Award.

IN JUNE 2017, WHEN JASMINE RUNGE, A BATON TWIRLING ATHLETE, WAS INJURED BY HER BATON CAUSING PERMANENT BLINDNESS IN HER LEFT EYE, SHE THOUGHT SHE WAS SEEING THE YEARS OF PRACTICE AND TRAINING GOING TO WASTE.

"I was definitely heartbroken; it happened at a competition and I didn't know what to do. Usually, when I get hurt, people ask 'Are you okay?' and I say, 'Yeah, I'm okay. It's fine,' but this was the first time I replied, 'I'm not okay!' So I knew it was serious in that moment and it was heartbreaking to know that I might not come back from this. Lots of people thought I was done for the year, even my coach. It was hard because I had put my whole life into baton ... It always came first because that is what I loved and what I excelled at," Jasmine says.

After Jasmine received the news from her optometrist that she would be able to twirl again, but that it would be hard, Jasmine thought, "I'm a role model in this sport, and if I quit now, with the two biggest competitions of the year coming up—all the work from the age of 7 was building up to these competitions, and to not complete it—I knew I had to push for it, and do what I wanted to do and achieve the goals I had set for this year."

Jasmine did compete at the International Championships despite the injury, and she brought home a Gold Medal in 3-Baton. "I got a lot of attention because I had to compete with an eye patch. My sport is all

about vision! I don't have depth perception, so it is a harder struggle now," she explains. The following are the list of titles Jasmine received in 2017, after her injury:

- 2017 Canadian Baton Twirling Federation (CBTF) Athlete of the Year - Overall
- 2017 Athlete of the Year - Senior Female
- 2017 Grand National Duet Champions
- 2017 Grand National Solo, 2-Baton, and 3-Baton Champion
- 2017 Sharon Holliday Memorial Award for Sportsmanship
- 2017 Finalist in the Youth-Female Athlete of the Year for the Saskatchewan Sport Awards, an annual awards program of Sask Sport designed to celebrate and promote the outstanding achievements of Saskatchewan amateur athletes, coaches, officials and volunteers.

"Lots of people were surprised with how well I did. My coach said it is muscle memory. All the practicing I had done from September to December and everything I have learned up to this point had benefited me."

A defining moment, when Jasmine really knew that this was her sport, was when she was performing at Grand Nationals, where there is a winner at every level, and where you compete against each other until one winner becomes the Grand National Champion. "I was Grand National Champion of solo, 2 baton, 3 baton and duet with my partner Julee Stewart. I thought, 'This is me, I just came off that big injury and was still able to push through and win these awards. This is meant for me.'" But topping it all off for Jasmine, was winning the Sharon Holliday Memorial Sportsmanship award, because the sportsmanship award meant that Jasmine had competed and won the awards she had wanted to win since she was young, all the while showing respect and fairness to her competitors.

When asked how it feels to be a Finalist in the Youth-Female Sask Sport Athlete of the Year Awards, Jasmine replied, "It's a big achievement in baton. It's been quite a while since we've been in these nominations. Sask Sport takes athletes from all the different sports in Saskatchewan. It's pretty big for our sport to be recognized over other ones, considering we aren't well-known."

One thing Jasmine wishes people understood about her sport is "the difficulty of it. It is actually a sport. Some

people think because it is not in the Olympics, it doesn't count as a sport. I've been to six World Championships: those are our Olympics." It's hard to think otherwise when considering the amount of time Jasmine spends training: "I practice two hours Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings and after university Tuesday and Thursday, all day Saturday with my team, Sundown Optimist Buffalo Gals (Martin School of Dance and Baton Twirling) and all day Sunday on my own." Jasmine squeezes in University homework time around class time and practice time. "Baton has really helped me with time management and organization," she explains.

With regards to teaching, Jasmine feels baton has taught her about managing active children. Her studies have helped her understand her own experience in school: "I didn't know there were different styles of learning, like active learners. I always got in trouble at school for being fidgety. It wasn't until my University courses that I learned that I'm an active learner. For me to remember stuff, I need to be moving and doing things. I couldn't ever remember my school work, but could always remember my baton routines and tricks. ...I struggled a lot in elementary and high school." Now Jasmine also realizes she needed more encouragement and so she says, "I want to be a teacher, so I can help the kids who are struggling in the same way I was."

As for future baton plans, Jasmine intends to keep competing and hopes to make it to Worlds again, "which is an outstanding feeling," she says. Jasmine plans to retire in her 10th year, which will coincide with her final year of her Education degree, so she thinks that will be a good time to retire from competitions. After retiring, she would like to coach baton: "I want to give back all that it has given to me. I want to encourage and help girls and boys to achieve their goals."

