



# ANY WAY I CAN

## *The Shayne Smith Story*

*By: Shayne Smith*

***It was maybe the proudest moment of my whole life. I wheeled onto the basketball court with our country's name emblazoned across my chest. I was at the World Junior Wheelchair Basketball Championships in Paris, France. I was playing for Team Canada. Making that team was not easy, and I owe it all to hockey. Let me explain.***

When I was six months old I contracted Meningococcal Septicemia (pronounced men-inge-o-caw-call sep-ti-see-me-a). That's a fancy medical name for a really bad bacterial infection in my blood. The doctors told my mom that I had less than two percent chance of surviving. She said, "Do what you have to do. SAVE MY CHILD!" Twenty-something surgeries and twenty-one years later here I am. I lost my left hand, half of my right hand and both of my feet, but at least I'm here.

Sport has always been a big part of my family life. Not just for my mom and I, but from my granny to my youngest cousin. My cousin Mitch and I are about the same age. Our moms are sisters and best friends too. My cousin and I grew up as close as brothers.

Mitch and I did everything together, from video games to going out to the movies. Well, almost everything. There was one thing Mitch and I couldn't do together and it was what we both loved most... sports. Sure, we could play soccer with bent rules for me so I could strike the ball with my hand. We played hockey with mini sticks in the hallway at home. We just couldn't play competitive sports together.

When we were seven years old, Mitch joined a hockey league. I wasn't mad at him, but I was definitely jealous. I didn't understand why he could play and I couldn't. I loved going and watching him play, but it made me sad that I couldn't play too. Then something amazing happened. One Saturday night while I was watching a Toronto Maple Leafs game with my mom on TV, the first-period intermission

showed a story about sledge hockey! These hockey players weren't using their legs. I started bouncing up and down on the bed. I could do that too. I was so excited. I could play hockey.

I could be like Mitch.

My mom has always been so supportive of me and my sports. She searched and searched for a sledge hockey team for me and she found one. Just one problem though – the team was for men and I was seven. I didn't care. I just wanted to get on the ice and play.

Playing with only one hand was a challenge at first because in sledge hockey you skate with two sticks, one in each hand. But I wasn't going to let that stop me. At first I skated around and around and around in circles, pedaling with one stick. We had to change that. My mom and my prosthetist (the man who makes my artificial legs) sat for hours on end trying to dream up a device that would help me play. And they did and I've been playing ever since.

Most people don't know that sledge hockey is an integrated sport. That means that it doesn't matter if you have a disability or not to play. Everyone can join in. Just jump on a sledge and play! Guess what happened next? Well, Mitch joined my sledge hockey team. After all that time I finally got to play hockey with my cousin. I was so excited.

Something else really amazing happened a few years later. I was introduced to a man at one of my hockey practices who had lost his leg not long before we met. He was there watching. He loved hockey. He had his leg amputated because of a serious injury he had while playing hockey as a kid years and years ago. He shattered his leg and it never healed properly and became badly infected.

This talkative spectator was telling my granny his story and how he wasn't able to play hockey anymore. My grandmother said, "Hold on; I want you to meet someone."

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I was eleven years old at the time. "Shayne, this is Paul," she started. "He just lost his leg:"

"Are you going to come out and play with us," I asked this big man. "No, I don't think so," he answered with a frown. "I only have one leg. I don't think I can." I gazed up at him with a very confused look. I play with half a hand and no legs and he's telling me that he can't play because he is missing a leg?

I looked up at him, and boldly asked Paul three important questions... strange questions for an eleven-year-old to be asking a grown man. I'm not shy. "Paul, do you have a heart?" With a puzzled look he responded "Yes." "Do you have a brain?" Paul looked at me like I was a very odd child. He answered "Yes" again. Then, the most important question of all. "Look at me," I began, to help make my point. "What's stopping you?"

This time Paul did not have an answer. Paul joined us on the ice the very next week. That's not the end of the story though. Paul Rosen won a gold medal for Canada at the 2006 Paralympic Games in Italy. Paul is the goalie for the Canadian Paralympic Sledge Hockey Team and may just be the best sledge hockey goalie in the world.

I love hockey, and I love wheelchair basketball too. I have achieved a lot in basketball. I've played all over the world including Japan, England and France. As I told you at the beginning of my story, I made it onto Canada's Junior Team. My next goal is to follow in Paul's footsteps, but on the court as a member of Canada's Paralympic Wheelchair Basketball Team someday.

Not many people thought I would be able to play sports with only half a hand. People told my mom and my coaches not to let me play because I would never succeed. But with lots of practice and determination I've proven them wrong. And I'm not done yet!



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