

READY TO PLAY Game face on?

TYLER MARION IS DRIVEN TO PLAY



By Gordon Ruder

On most days of the week you can find five-year-old Tyler Marion doing what he loves most – playing some kind of sport. He is passionate about hockey, basketball, baseball, downhill skiing, and water skiing. When Tyler talks about the next game he’s going to play, you can hear the joy in his voice as he visualizes the swish of the basketball through the hoop, the slap of the puck into the net, or the satisfying crack of the bat hitting the ball. Yet when he was one year old, it was a much different story – that was when Tyler’s paediatrician told his family that he had cerebral palsy (CP) and might never be able to walk, let alone play sports.

Check! Leg braces on? Check!

EVERY SPORT HE ENCOUNTERS

Thrilled that his son has exceeded the expectations that some professionals placed on him at a young age, Larry Marion says that Tyler doesn’t know the meaning of the word “can’t.”

CP is the most common cause of physical disability in children, affecting one out of every 500 babies born in Canada. Tyler has spastic diplegic CP, which causes stiff muscles and spasticity in the lower limbs.

In addition to typical sports equipment, Tyler has a pair of custom-made ankle foot orthoses (AFOs) that were created and designed by a team of

certified orthotists and orthotic technicians at Boundless Biomechanical Bracing. Tyler’s AFOs provided the foundation that made it possible for him to start walking and gave him the confidence to try it. Now they protect and support the growing joints, bones, and muscles in his lower limbs.

While many young children are self-conscious about wearing braces, properly fitted ones can help them feel more stable on the playing field, court, or rink. Their braces become just another piece of equipment – that’s how Tyler sees them. So, when

he gets ready to play hockey, he asks for his braces as enthusiastically as he asks for his gloves or stick. Having the right gear is important.

Tyler’s eagerness to wear his braces makes him a good role model for advocacy and awareness – and this is always necessary. People can understand and accept that eyeglasses allow you to see better and braces on your teeth make them straight. Still, there are people who tend to think something is wrong with a person when they see them with a leg, back, or arm brace.





“At the first sign that the other kids are out on the street,” says Tyler’s mom Christine Marion, “Tyler and his brother are running to get their gear and get outside to play. He’s incredibly driven to play every sport he encounters.”

There is no cure for CP, and Tyler’s family understands this. They also know that a brace can’t stop the spasticity in Tyler’s leg. Boundless orthotists often use this analogy: getting a leg brace is like getting a pair of eyeglasses for nearsightedness. While the eyeglasses won’t cure the underlying problem, they will improve a person’s eyesight

when they’re wearing them. The same principle applies to braces.

That said, Tyler’s interests, goals, and support needs may change as he grows older and he may require different orthotic devices. Whatever his needs, he can depend on support from “Team Tyler.” This includes his biggest fans – his family – along with his clinical orthotists, doctors, physiotherapists, teachers, and the other healthcare providers who are helping him maximize his potential and make the most of every opportunity.

While Larry is understandably proud of his son’s athletic abilities, he also views sports as an important part in developing the necessary grit to manage life’s trials and tribulations, regardless of one’s physical abilities. He says that “playing sports is such a great teacher for life – it teaches you how to win, how to lose, how to be a team player, and how to get up when you fall down.”

And with his indomitable attitude, Tyler is already showing others how that’s done.

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