

Josh Dueck

“The only difference between the possible and impossible is one’s attitude.”



Independence, success, and even love came at an early age in Josh Dueck’s life. When most teens are struggling to figure out what they’ll do after high school, Josh had a clear vision. He would make a career out of his passion — freestyle skiing. He would travel the world, skiing competitively for a spot on the World Cup circuit.

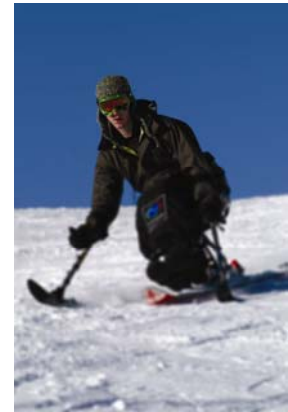
Training eight to ten months a year left little time for earning the dollars he needed to compete. The burden was heavy and in 2002, after two years of trying to realize his vision, the money ran out. Fortunately, throughout his days as a competitor, Josh took the advice of his head coach and enrolled in as many coaching certification courses as time would allow. By the time he retired from competition at the age of 22, Josh emerged a fully certified moguls and aerials freestyle coach.

Thanks to his experience and credentials, he was offered the position of head freestyle coach at Silver Star Freestyle Ski Club in Vernon. The 2003/04 season was unfolding well, with a dominant ski team, and an invitation to host the Canadian Junior Nationals. “This event draws top young athletes from all over Canada and is an absolute honour to host,” says Josh. “The event features all freestyle disciplines, so I knew I had my work cut out for me getting the event sites ready.”

After two weeks of site preparation, Josh was putting the final touches on the large floater on the aerial site, which stood about 4.5 metres tall, set back about 15 metres from the landing hill. “I was doing a test jump and miscalculated my speed,” says Josh. “I ended up going much too large and over-shot the landing hill. I landed chest first and folded in half like a scorpion.

“I was airlifted to Vancouver General Hospital for emergency surgery to stabilize my condition. As soon as I woke up from the surgery, I realized I was reborn a new person, and had to learn to live a new life. Doctors told me my life would forever be changed — talk about an understatement! The loss of my legs, bowels, and bladder is a tough pill to swallow.”

Months of rehabilitation were required so Josh could learn how to live his new life as a paraplegic. The freestyle community, his parents, and an “angel” named Lacey bonded together, making his recovery the most enjoyable and exciting time of his life.



“When I was a competitive skier travelling the world, I was living my dream. It was pretty exciting,” says Josh. “By comparison, the challenge in rehab was like nothing else, with the support I had from everyone it became far more rewarding than any competition I’d ever won.”

“When Lacey arrived at the hospital by way of a oneway bus ticket from Penticton, with only \$60 in her pocket, she was devastated, and had no idea what compelled her to come. We had become close in Penticton and when she heard about my accident, she literally dropped everything to be by my side — and still is today.

“Now some days are better than others. When I’m in a pissy mood, and nothing’s going right, I’m no different than anyone else having a bad day. I still have days when I wish I wasn’t disabled. I realize life is short and there’s nothing I can do about what I’ve done or what I should have done differently. Life goes on. When I’m feeling positive and gung-ho, nothing can stop me.”

Only one year after the accident, Josh continues to live his dream and enjoys flying down the slopes using a sit-ski. “I skied in a NorAm high-level race in February,” says Josh. “It was a huge breakthrough knowing I could transfer my skills as an able-bodied skier to a disabled skier.”

On a full pension with WorkSafeBC, Josh now volunteers with the BC Freestyle Club, learning new skills like how a non-profit organization is run, bookkeeping, and handling media inquiries. Settled into a comfortable home with Lacey, Josh looks to the future and plans to start a diploma program in business. “I believe there’s a lot of opportunity out there for a guy like me who can use his head and think,” says Josh. “The opportunities made available to me through WorkSafeBC are amazing, and I really think the only difference between the possible and impossible is one’s attitude. I plan to make my life rich and fulfilling.

“Prior to my injury, when I saw someone in a wheelchair I’d think to myself, ‘life’s done for that guy; it’s all over.’ It’s not, it’s just different – I’m on a mission to blow down that stereotype by competing at the 2010 Olympics!”