

Triumphant tri-athlete



A proud Jeslyn Ramsay shows off her Innisfail Triathlon medal near her home in Innisfail on Sept. 14. Muscular dystrophy doesn't hold Ramsay back from the activities she enjoys. See page 8 for more coverage.

Noel West/MVP Staff

■ TRIATHLON

Perseverance, community support helps Jeslyn Ramsay

BY KRISTINE JEAN
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Innisfail's Jeslyn Ramsay knows what it means to never give up.

The Grade 7 student at Innisfail Middle School recently completed her very first triathlon.

"It was really great," said Ramsay. "I was really nervous but it was a lot of fun."

It's not that unusual for a 12-year to participate in a triathlon but for Ramsay, who was born with muscular dystrophy – a disease that weakens the body's muscles, it was a demanding challenge and a milestone achievement that she was more than thrilled to complete.

"I finished it in an hour and five minutes," she said. "I thought it would be longer."

The Innisfail Triathlon was held Sept. 10 and Ramsay participated in the 'try-it' event that included a 300-

metre swim, five-kilometre bike route and a two-and-a-half-kilometre run.

Crossing the finish line gave Ramsay a great sense of accomplishment.

"I felt really good about myself after the race," said Ramsay, noting the inspiration behind her first triathlon was her mother Amy Ramsay.

"Last year was my first triathlon and I did the 'try it' event. I loved it and I thought it was something she could do," said Amy Ramsay, adding that because of Jeslyn's muscular dystrophy there isn't a lot of sports she can do. "I thought she would feel so good about herself after. I knew she could do it."

The accomplishment was especially meaningful not only because muscular dystrophy made it more difficult, but because Jeslyn had to overcome other challenges just to participate.

The Alberta Triathlon Association had originally denied Jeslyn Ramsay's

request to participate in the local triathlon because she required a wheelchair at times during the event and a modified bike she needed did not meet triathlon regulations.

However, thanks to support from the Innisfail Triathlon committee and the local triathlon community, Jeslyn was able to fulfill her goal.

"We as a committee took up her cause with the Alberta Triathlon Association," said Dorene Loughlin, race director. "They accepted her (modified) bike. It was the first time in the province that they accepted one of those bikes."

Permission from the provincial triathlon association was a big step in accepting and including people with (physical) disabilities and providing them with the same opportunity, said Amy Ramsay.

"It felt like they really cared," said Jeslyn. Her mother and father felt the same.

"We were very happy," said Amy. "The whole Innisfail committee worked so hard in making it happen first of all, and on the day of (the triathlon) they made everything run smoothly and made sure that we were taken care of," she added, noting other participants' show of support as they gave Jeslyn a 'high-five' and congratulated her near the finish line.

In early October, Jeslyn will undergo major surgery in Calgary to have rods put in her back to help straighten her spine. "It's a needed operation and will prevent future complications," said Amy Ramsay.

Jeslyn appreciates completing her first triathlon, one of her biggest achievements to date, and has these words of encouragement for other young aspiring triathletes:

"Just try your best," said Ramsay. "You probably can do it."

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