

# SPORTS & LEISURE

## Moriah Kolenda an 'inspiration' both off and on the volleyball court

By **EAMONN MAHER**  
Staff Writer

Cancer survivor Moriah Kolenda is making a rapid recovery from having her left leg amputated and the biggest obstacle she's faced is that there just isn't enough time in the day.

The 16-year-old Christ the King Secondary School student pledged to try to return to living a normal life not long after the day in the fall of 2009 when a team of doctors were unable to save the limb from a malignant tumour in her knee.

And she's making progress on several fronts well ahead of schedule, leaving doctors amazed at how quickly she was able to walk using a prosthetic leg.

Back at school full time, now that her chemotherapy treatments are complete, the Grade 11 student was a member of the Jaguars' senior girls' volleyball team this season— fulfilling a promise made to herself to play her favourite sport again.

"I'm so happy to be back with the team," she said.

"I don't play as much as I'd like to, although I've played in tournaments and stuff, which is good, and I think I've improved since the start of the season. Coach says I'll probably be starting next year. It's just going to take time."

In September of 2009, Kolenda was thrilled to have made the Georgetown Impact club rep volleyball team after a couple of years of trying. A week later, she was told that the persistent soreness in the knee she'd been experiencing for months

wasn't a court-related injury as doctors had previously thought.

"I didn't even get to play a game with the Impact, but that's okay," she says now.

They also found ominous-looking spots in her lungs, pelvis and thigh, and while those turned out to be benign, a 21-hour limb salvage surgery involving 10 specialists was unsuccessful after it was discovered Moriah had a rare blood-clotting disorder.

Further taxing parents David and Karen Kolenda emotionally were the heart problems of Moriah's older brother Josh, a Grade 12 CtK student who just happens to be the assistant coach for the senior girls' volleyball squad.

He had three open-heart surgeries to correct the problem and ended up in the same hospital as Moriah, one floor apart.

"It was kind of fun in a way to have your brother there with you," she added.

"He's been great through this whole year and I'd like to give a shout out to him for everything he's done, like looking after my younger sister when my parents were at the hospital with me. He's gone through a lot."

Moriah has begun snowboarding again near Collingwood in the Track 3 program, which allows youths with disabilities to hit the slopes, something she did for six years before the surgery.

She has also been invited to a camp for kids coping with cancer that will go on a dog-sledding trip in the James Bay area and was selected to join another group heading out on a snowmobiling tour as part of a

leadership program.

Somewhat shy prior to the entire ordeal, Moriah is now receiving requests to appear at speaking engagements to share her experiences and that indomitable spirit.

"It's good to get back into everything, volleyball especially," she said after a recent match victory over Burlington's Notre Dame.

"In the summer, hopefully I can start running again and maybe biking too. I want to see if I can get the Cheetah leg. It's been hard to get my cardio back up to where it was. I get tired a lot faster, but ever since the chemo stopped, everything is coming back to me. It's nice just to have a regular routine with school and everything else."

After the big comeback win over Notre Dame, Jaguars' head coach Timm Stephenson called the team together for a meeting. Soon after, shrieks of joy echoed through the gymnasium. Next year, the team plans to travel to Hawaii for a tournament, another stop on Kolenda's increasingly busy itinerary.

"She's an inspiration to everybody and we wouldn't have had a team without her," said Stephenson.

"She's always had the skill. At the beginning of the year she was a bit tentative because it was new to her and she hadn't got the proper leg for sports. Now she does and since Christmas she's been going like crazy. Her vertical has improved to the point where she can jump about a foot and that's great to see."

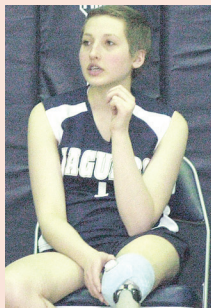
Christ the King's senior girls were eliminated in the opening round of playoffs last week by the second-place Nelson Lords in two close sets. All things considered, it's a setback they'll soon get over.

"We had a bad game recently and our coach mentioned Moriah and how she's still going strong," said Jags' co-captain Jill Borsuk.

"She's been a real motivation to us. Always upbeat and always making us laugh."

*'It's nice just to have a regular routine with school and everything else.'*

—Moriah Kolenda



Moriah Kolenda, 16, a Grade 11 student at Christ the King has overcome a year and a half battle with cancer to get back on the volleyball court. She says her brother Josh, who has had three open heart surgeries, has been 'great' during her ordeal.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

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