

Ready to Compete

By Sara Matson

Teen athlete Amber Peterson knows no limits.

Amber Peterson is an athlete. One day she's shooting baskets, swinging a bat, or swimming. The next day the 14-year-old is bumping a volleyball or biking with friends. Amber does these activities a bit differently than other athletes do. That's because she was born without her right hand and part of her arm. To help her succeed at the sports she loves, she often wears a prosthesis (pross-THÉE-sis)—a hand and forearm made especially for her.

Amber started wearing a prosthesis when she was a baby. "We have a picture of when I got my first arm, and I was smiling and it was waving up in the air," she says. "I think I was pretty happy with having another arm to help me with crawling and all that stuff." The hand on that first prosthesis was like a doll's hand. Its fingers couldn't open and close.

When Amber was older, she got a myoelectric (MY-oh-ih-LEK-trick) prosthesis with a movable hand. It uses electricity generated by her muscles and also has a battery. It lets her pick things up and hold onto them. Amber named this prosthesis "Mia." Mia works well for school and home activities. But it can't get wet or dirty, and it breaks easily. So Amber got

another prosthesis that she calls "Sporty."

Sporty has a curved hand that's sturdy yet flexible. When Amber catches a softball in her left hand, her prosthetic right hand traps the ball in her glove. It steadies the ball when she's throwing an overhead pass in soccer or shooting a basketball.


But sometimes Amber needs to use a different hand position, such as an open palm or a grip. That's when she takes off the curved hand and snaps on one of Sporty's attachments.

Amber named her prosthetic arms Mia and Sporty.

"I have one for riding a bike and one for holding a bat," she says. Others let her hang on monkey bars, do a cartwheel, grip a hockey stick, and swim faster. Some are new inventions. Amber helped test a gymnastics attachment. And she was one of the first people to use an attachment for setting a volleyball.

Occasionally, Amber needs one that doesn't exist yet. When she wanted to play the violin, an attachment was made for her that let her move the violin bow back and forth more easily.

Because Amber has worn a prosthesis all her life, she says, "I'm used to it. It's nothing really different for me. It's normal." Sometimes other kids ask questions, but Amber rarely thinks about her arm. "Unless," she says, "I'm doing something that is challenging for me. Then I have to think about it and figure things out." For instance, she and her family recently came up with a way for her to try water-skiing without a prosthesis.

What's next for Amber? "I want to play on high-school teams, because I have watched my brothers play. It looks fun." She hopes to compete in soccer, volleyball, or swimming. She might also try golf or diving. Whatever sport Amber chooses, she's glad she has the help of Sporty. 

Quick Q's for Amber

DO YOU EVER CHOOSE TO GO WITHOUT A PROSTHESIS?

Yes. Sometimes it feels good to take it off, just like it feels good to take off shoes.

DO YOU KNOW OTHER KIDS BORN WITHOUT A LIMB?

I know a lot of kids from camps and groups. I have made a lot of friends. Being with those other kids has taught me that I don't have to be ashamed of who I am.

ARE SPORTS JUST FOR FUN, OR DO YOU HAVE BIG DREAMS?

I just like to play, but sometimes I think I'd like to be a Paralympic athlete.

