

CLINICAL UPDATE

WINTER
2010

CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION IN THE PROSTHETIC ORTHOTIC WORLD

Ride 'Em Cowboy

Amputation doesn't keep Jason K. from his passion of bronc busting

Take one determined cowboy, one bucking horse, a judge's score that counts points for the horse's bucking action and the rider's technical expertise, and you have the makings of classic rodeo saddle bronc riding. The ride lasts only eight seconds, but in that eight seconds, the bronc is lunging, twisting, turning while the rider concentrates on technique that includes only one hand on the reins and the free hand not touching any part of the horse. On the first move out of the chute, the rider must make sure his feet are over the bronc's shoulders, followed in a split second by knees bent behind as the

An amputation didn't stop Jason K. from saddle bronc riding.

boots strike the cantle on the back of the saddle; then feet back to the horse's shoulder as the animal's front feet hit the ground. After the required eight seconds, the rider must jump off the horse (because the horse doesn't calmly come to a stop) or jump to a pickup rider's mount.

That's exactly what Jason K. was doing at the Ballston Spa Rodeo in 2006, riding perfectly and winning his event, when his horse ran into a steel fence, pile driving Jason's leg into the abutment and resulting – eventually – in an amputation.

Following multiple unsuccessful surgeries to reconstruct his shattered leg, ankle, and foot, Jason had to weigh his options. Because his injuries were so extensive, his bones weren't healing; in fact, they remained broken. "The bones wouldn't come together and I couldn't walk at all," he said. "I saw a specialist in New York City who said I could undergo a months-long limb-lengthening process, the Ilizarov method, of which I would have only a 25 percent chance of success. When I was told that after an amputation, I could be walking (within weeks), I chose amputation."

The New York orthopedic specialist recommended Dr. David Dixon in Albany to do the amputation. "Dr. Dixon is the best surgeon I ever met," he said, noting that injuries from the rodeo circuit brought him into contact with a number of surgeons. "I have no problems with my residual limb."

After amputation, Jason was referred to Sampson's and now is a patient of Brian Clark, CPO. "Brian is amazing," he said. "And Bill (Sampson, CP) is a great guy and knows what he's talking about."

Back in the Saddle Again

Although every patient has a



Out of the chute at the Kimball Ranch Rodeo in Nebraska. Jason hangs on for the required eight-second ride.

different time frame for the post-amputation healing process, Jason's was exceptionally quick. Thirteen days after surgery he was being fitted for his first test socket.

That same day, a rodeo associate in Arizona who did not know about the amputation, invited Jason to participate in a roping championship. Initially Jason declined the offer, but the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to do it.

"I was second in the national (professional rodeo riders) standings at the time (of my amputation) and I had it in mind that this wasn't going to stop me," he said. "I asked Sampson's to make my leg as hard as possible so I could go out and ride. They strongly urged me not to, but they did wrap my leg in fiberglass. So 17 days after surgery I got on a plane and went to Arizona

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and placed third in the competition. At that point, I decided I could do just about anything I wanted."

Although he opted out of rodeo competition, he continued to ride and work his ranch near Saratoga Springs. "My ankle doesn't flex, but my leg muscles are still strong enough to ride. When you are riding, you're using your upper body and upper legs," he said.

"Jason's probably one of the most active amputees I've worked with," said Brian. "He spends most of his day on horseback and jumping on and off horses. He truly puts the prosthesis to a test."

Jason's prosthesis is a basic shuttle lock/pin suspension and a carbon fiber foot with a multi-adjustable ankle, which accommodates the heel heights of his western-style boots.

"I have a normal gait and I can walk on soft dirt, over rocks, and uphill. No one knows I'm an amputee unless I tell them," he said. "I have retrained myself to do all the things I did before."

Earlier this year, Jason moved to Nebraska where he trains horses for clients there and in Colorado and Wyoming.

Rigorous activity such as that means that Jason is especially hard on his prosthesis. "I blow the toe out in about a week," he said, referring to the inner workings of his foot that wear through to the outer cosmetic foot shell.

Since Jason is more than 1,500 miles from Albany, he has become adept at adjusting and repairing his own prosthesis. "I have a background in mechanical engineering, so I can figure out how to make adjustments," he said.

"A patient adjusting his own prosthesis is typically not recommended," said Brian. "But Jason is mechanically adept and because he's often in remote locations, he is able to fine-tune his prosthesis."

Rodeos and ranching are this family's history

Jason started in rodeos at a young age, while growing up on the family farm.

"The farm hands would often go to a rodeo on Friday nights and one night I went with them and they put me on a bull," he said. "I kept bull riding until I was 25, which was when my sternum was crushed after being thrown. I spent a year in traction and then switched to bucking horses. I've been doing that for 17 years."

Rodeo is also in the blood of Jason's five children. His 21 year old son, currently in the Air Force, is a team roper; a daughter, 17, rides barrel horses; a son, 16, team races; a daughter, 14, does breakaway roping; and a daughter, 5, is working on her riding skills.

showcase skills that working ranch hands or cowboys need to do – calf branding and doctoring, team roping, trailer loading, wild cow milking and, of course, bronc riding.

"I have been training colts here in Colorado for the past four months and figured that if I can ride these young bucking fools in training then I could compete in professional rodeo once again," he said.

But just prior to his return to the arena, Jason experienced a flash of doubt.

"I hadn't been on a bronc in three years, and when I was in the chute, a wave of fear came over me. I almost got off, but I told myself that I can do this," he said. "It was a huge mental and physical accomplishment to be able to get back into the chute again after such a horrifying accident. My

Endolite Brio Adjustable Ankle



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- Jason K.

After hiatus, competing once again

Although it has been three years since Jason competed professionally, the rodeo bug has bitten him again. "I can't stop doing what I love to do," he said. He now is a member of a Ranch Rodeo team in Kimball. Ranch rodeos

heart was pounding the first time but when the chute gate flew open it was as if I had never left. Getting off was a bit more difficult and somewhat comical. Since I can't feel my foot I wasn't sure if it was out of the stirrup in order to get off. When riding bucking horses in order to get off you either jump off or grab onto one of the two pickup riders and pull yourself off. Since I didn't have a safe place to jump I decided to grab my pickup man and slide off onto his horse. In doing so, I actually had to pull my entire leg up while still in my saddle, as the horse was still bucking, to see that my foot was out of the stirrup."



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