

# I DID IT!

and so can you ...

Kgothatso Montjane (26) has been differently abled since birth. However, this didn't stop her from pushing herself to achieve great things, going as far as qualifying for the London 2012 Paralympics as a wheelchair tennis player.

"I only received my prosthetic leg in 2000. I went through my early childhood without it, forced to either hop around wearing my surgical boot or rely on crutches to support me. My alternative ability was caused by amniotic band syndrome, something that happens during pregnancy. My mother's placenta was damaged and attached itself to some parts of my body in her womb, which meant that one of my legs and some of my fingers couldn't develop properly.

"At first, having a prosthetic limb was a challenge but, as time passed, I slowly became accustomed to it and now rely on it heavily to help get me from one place to the next. When I'm on the tennis court, however, it's a different story altogether.

"I was very lucky growing up: I was placed in a school for the physically challenged from grade one and being around others who faced similar challenges definitely had a positive influence on me. I understood from an early age that I was not the only person on the planet facing this battle. I soon learned to accept myself and appreciate my life as it was.

"I developed a penchant for sports from a young age and loved playing wheelchair basketball, among other activities.

"When the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) introduced me to wheelchair tennis in 2006, I saw in it the opportunity to travel the world, something I'd always wanted for myself. I

realised I had a talent and started fighting to beat myself at my personal best achievements in the game every time.

"My previous experience playing wheelchair basketball meant I had a head start in feeling at home playing sport in the chair and I quickly became accustomed to holding the racket. Yes, I did topple the wheelchair over from time to time but that was only because I was chasing the ball with everything I had!

"I qualified for the London 2012 Paralympics with merit. This was something I'd been working incredibly hard on for many years and getting through to that stage was something I'd been dreaming about since my earliest memories. The atmosphere in London was buzzing and it was a great thrill for me to be there. Everyone on the team was incredibly excited to have the chance to compete. Unfortunately, though, life threw another curve ball my way that ultimately would prevent me from living my dream.

"I had injured my finger but we weren't quite sure what was causing the severe pain I was in. I wanted to play so badly but at this crucial time, in a place where I'd worked so hard to be, I was prevented from competing because of my

injury. Yet I'm positive about the future and remain convinced that I'll qualify again in 2016.

"I feel privileged to have had so much love and care in my life. My parents' support has never wavered and they're happy to see me doing what I love. They unfailingly watch me from the sidelines when I play tournaments at home. Wheelchair Tennis South Africa has also been a pillar of strength, giving me the opportunity to express myself by doing what I love. If you're surrounded by people who lift you up, you can do anything you can imagine.

"My life these days is unbelievably busy. I train six days a week for two hours at a time and am currently completing my second tertiary course: a national diploma in retail business management at the University of Johannesburg. I feel that, although I have to work hard to keep a balance, I'm good at managing my time and I'm living my life to its fullest extent.

"I feel that if you don't believe in yourself, no one else will; it starts with you. Build yourself up to be the best you can be. Being differently abled is not something that I can blame on anyone else: It was the will of God; something I am grateful for and have embraced wholeheartedly." **S**

