

Tennis coach Rebecca is an inspiration

It was a love of sport as a youngster along with encouragement from a tennis coach at Edinburgh Leisure's Craiglockhart Tennis Centre which led to a disabled customer not only turning her life around but also led her to pursue a new career path.

Originally Rebecca Sellar, (31) worked in a biology lab with cells, but she is now a full-time coach teaching tennis to all age groups at Craiglockhart, and being disabled herself, she has a real passion running disability classes for children and adults.

Born with deformities of her lower limbs and pelvis, Rebecca underwent an amputation of her lower right leg when she was just a one-year-old. She wears a prosthetic and is able to move with crutches, but also alternates with the use of a day-chair depending on her level of pain due to hip dysplasia.

Although active as a youngster, which included winning a sport award at her primary school and an award for 'triumph against adversity' in high school, the same opportunities weren't open to Rebecca when she went to university, leading to further physical issues because of a lack of activity and feeling isolated as she couldn't join in sports with her peers.

Determined to get herself out of this rut, she started volunteering with amputee charity Finding Your Feet, who organise sessions at Edinburgh Leisure's climbing centre at Ratho. These sessions opened Rebecca's eyes to the sporting opportunities available to disabled people.

Having loved playing tennis as a child and having heard about the sessions run by Edinburgh Leisure from a wheelchair tennis player while at hospital sports open day, she sought the opportunity to play tennis at Craiglockhart Tennis and Leisure Centre, Edinburgh Leisure's flagship tennis venue.

It wasn't long before her coach Anna Myatt spotted Rebecca's potential and encouraged her to work towards taking her level 1 and 2 tennis coaching qualifications.

Rebecca has been playing tennis since 2016 and started coaching part time in 2016 after taking up the sport just eight months previously. She progressed to tennis coaching as her full-time job in 2019, leaving her lab job behind.

She now works almost full-time, coaching 30-hours a week, which as Rebecca says, "provides a good work-life balance, especially as I need to cope with the physical challenges of my disability."

And it's not just tennis that has given Rebecca a sporting focus and purpose in life. In 2018, she was awarded the Scottish Women in Sports' Inspiration In Sport award', for her achievements in football, climbing and tennis.

Commenting on just what tennis has done for her confidence, Rebecca said: "Using a wheelchair to play tennis, has made the world of difference to me. It's opened so many possibilities but it's a misconception that you need to be a full-time wheelchair user. I have one participant who was a keen tennis player, but since an operation to fuse her ankle bone, thought her tennis days were over but I've encouraged her to join in the wheelchair sessions and she's so glad to be able to

continue playing a game she loves. And we even provide the wheelchairs so there's no excuse for not being able to join in.

"I get real satisfaction from coaching children to play tennis and it shows them that there are no barriers to playing sport. Some days I might be ambulating around with the use of crutches, and others, needing to use my wheelchair. And I love the naivety of some of the children's questions, which allows me to educate them in accepting disabilities and the use of language in discussing them.

"There's so much more acceptance and exposure for disabled sports because of the of the Paralympics and the likes of comedian Adam Hills and the TV programme The Last Leg that it has brought disabled sports into the mainstream.

"Our number have dwindled due to the pandemic, but my ambition for 2023 is to grow our disability sessions at Craiglockhart Tennis Centre. We currently have a mixed age wheelchair group session for 2 hours on Sundays from 4-6pm, where we try to match players on age ability; an ASN session that runs on Sundays from 3pm-4pm; and now that we have some 'audible tennis balls', are looking to start a visually impaired group in the new year, although we still need to fix the day and time for this. I'd encourage anyone with an interest to come and give these sessions a try."

And Rebecca's advice to anyone who might be physically or mentally challenged is simple: "Looking after your mind and body should be a top priority for anyone, but I feel even more so for those of us who have a disability of any type, for us to be able to remain as healthy and independent as possible. And the best we can do to maintain a strong routine is to ensure we find enjoyable ways that motivate us to keep fit and healthy. That is why I would encourage anyone to put themselves out there and give our disability sessions a go, if you think they might be right for you."

To find out more about the disability tennis sessions at Edinburgh Leisure's Craiglockhart Tennis Centre, contact: rebeccasellar@edinburghleisure.co.uk

www.edinburghleisure.co.uk



Rebecca Seller