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Ron Rop | The Muskegon Chronicle
By

Tanner Gentry is like most boys his age.

He's an active 12-year old who plays basketball and baseball. He enjoys kicking a soccer ball with his sisters and riding his bike. He enjoys swimming and playing golf.

"There is nothing he can't do," says his mother, Mary Jo Gentry, as she glances over to watch Tanner work his way through another session of therapy.

It's been a long road to recovery for the athletically gifted Tanner, whose life took a dramatic turn on July 4, 2007.

While tubing with his cousin behind a personal watercraft on Middle Lake, Tanner, then 8, fell off the tube and was hit by a boat.

His injuries led to the amputation of part of his right leg. His left leg also was so severely damaged there was serious discussion of amputation. He spent nearly three months in the hospital and missed the first month of the third grade.

Back into sports

Within a month of leaving the hospital, Tanner was playing wheelchair basketball, which is now his favorite sport.

"He was out of the hospital in September and playing wheelchair basketball in October," Mary Jo says. "In hindsight, were we nuts?"

That was just the start of the resumption of Tanner's sports career and some accolades. His Grand Rapids Junior Pacers basketball team has finished second at nationals twice and Tanner has been named the Most Valuable Player both times.

The week before the basketball nationals in Denver, Colo., he was playing in the sled hockey nationals in Minnesota.



Matt Gade | Muskegon Chronicle

Tanner Gentry plays some one-on-one basketball with his coach Lee Montgomery, of the Grand Rapids Junior Pacers, prior to the start of the peewee wheelchair basketball practice at Bunker Middle School on Tuesday evening. Tanner was named the 2011 Male MVP after competing in the Junior NIT National Tournament in Denver, CO.

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"Sports have given him friends all over the country," says Nick Gentry, Tanner's father.

He's toyed with the idea of playing football this fall for the middle school team at Mona Shores, but said that probably isn't going to happen. At least not this year.

"I want to play golf, but I can't until high school so I just play with my dad," Tanner says.

Setting goals

Tanner has set a goal of running at full speed by this summer. He'd also like to get a cheetah foot, a high performance, fiber foot used for sports.

In order to reach that goal, Tanner knows he has to work hard during his two weekly 45-minute therapy sessions at Generation Care, 945 E. Sherman.

During his workouts with Jennifer McCann-Bauer, Tanner works on his leg strength and his balance.

"He's got the spirit of a million kids," McCann-Bauer says. "He always takes more than I give him. Two days later, he'll be sore, but he pushes himself through it. He's not one to let you know if it hurts."

"He just wants to run without a gait," Nick says. "Just a boy out running."

Back at the lake

Tanner gave the "thumbs up" as the tube he was riding bounced across the waves on Middle Lake.

It was Labor Day in 2009 and Tanner was a bit nervous about tubing again.

"Nobody would pull me," Tanner says.

Finally, his uncle stepped forward and agreed to give Tanner a ride around the lake.

"He was fine and actually flew off the tube one time," Nick says. "Then he got nervous because he heard the boats, but everything was all right."



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Tanner Gentry races down the basketball court while playing basketball at Bunker Middle School while helping out the other kids during a peewee wheelchair basketball practice in the middle school on Tuesday evening. Tanner was named the 2011 Male MVP after competing in the Junior NIT National Tournament in Denver, CO.



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Tanner Gentry works with his physical therapist Jennifer McCann-Bauer with a workout ball at Generation Care on Thursday afternoon.

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"When he started out, I think he was a little nervous, but I think it was more nerve-racking for his mother and his aunts," Nick says.

New outlook on life

Before the accident, Tanner was a carefree young boy who just wanted to hang out with friends and play sports.

"Everything he has gone through has given him a different perspective," Nick says. "He's well beyond his age, maturity wise. Now he talks about being a fireman or getting into prosthetics. He thinks about a lot of things that kids his age don't."

He also spends time teaching others how to play wheelchair basketball.

"They are starting to get the hang of it," Tanner said. "I'm teaching them how to dribble right now."

"He has an innate ability to teach," says Kim Senkow, a coach and coordinator for the Muskegon Trail Blazers.

Tanner wheels around the basketball court doing layups, reverse layups and shooting 15-footers. But then he stops and takes the time to share his knowledge of the game with others.

"He's an awesome role model for these kids," Senkow says. "He is so kind and patient with them."

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Enlarge

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Tanner Gentry gallery (13 photos)