

2006 Paralympic Ambassador Team

Jean LABONTÉ



Sport:	Sledge Hockey
Date of Birth:	March 20, 1969
Residence:	Gatineau, QC
Disability:	Amputee (Above Knee)
Profession:	Software Designer
National Team Since:	1996

Jean's Story

Not many people can tell you their life began after an amputation but Jean Labonté is one of those precious few. In 1986, at 17 years old, Jean was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a bone cancer frequently seen in teenagers. The tumor was located in his left tibia, and at the time, the cancerous part of the tibia was removed and replaced with a steel rod that was inserted in his femur and went all the way down to his ankle. This had the advantage of avoiding an amputation but it also meant he had a straight leg, which was very cumbersome. The following year was filled with chemotherapy treatments and in the course of that year, serious infection in his leg prevented proper healing and kept him weak. After the chemo was completed, he went through several operations to close the wounds left by infection.

In 1990, the rod in his leg broke. "I was rushed to the hospital and when I saw my doctor, we both agreed that an above-knee amputation was the best thing to do...so it was done. Since then I never looked back."

While in the hospital in 1990, Jean saw an article about sledge hockey, which was then in its infancy. He thought it would be great to try it and found out that his local town had sledge hockey equipment. He tried to organize something but never got it off the ground because he was extremely busy with university studies. "I also learned that there was a club in Ottawa but was discouraged to join them because they were apparently 'too good'. So I waited."

Then in 1994, when he was working at Statistics Canada, he met Hervé Lord, also a Statistics Canada employee who happened to be part of the national sledge hockey team, and also one of those 'too good' Ottawa players. "He convinced me to join his club, taught me the ropes and here I am today."

"Before my cancer, I was very active playing baseball, football, street hockey and swimming. I was also a lifeguard, and had participated in several life guarding competitions, including the World Championships in Vancouver in 1986. Then I got cancer, and it put a stop to most of my life's physical activities, mainly because of chemotherapy and my cumbersome straight leg."

Then came the amputation...and I was born again. The change allowed me to renew physical activities, which I missed dearly. I started canoeing, softball, volleyball, rock climbing, swimming, and finally sledge hockey."

Jean now has the opportunity to represent his country and compete with and against some of the best sledge hockey players in the world. With a personal motto of 'Life is great', Jean's sense of humour carries him through most of life's little hiccups.

"I always get up on the right foot," he says. "Because if I don't, I fall flat on my face."