



# Reaching for the stars . . .

**W**hen you first meet Joshua Gordon, his physical strength is obvious – a young man, healthy and strong – as he moves with a grace and power over the ice. A professional skater, Josh is touring the country with ISkate Productions and living his dream.

Not bad for someone who had never put on a pair of ice skates until four years ago.

But Josh is exceptional in more ways than one. Now 21, Josh had a precarious start to life. Born 12 weeks premature and weighing just 1185grams (2.6lbs), Joshua's first three months of life were touch and go. Attached to tubes, a ventilator and confined to a humidity crib, his tiny body was spread out like an extended frog. Ironically, this actually gave him the physical flexibility to enable him to achieve the movements he is now known for as a figure skater.

At around 12 months of age, developmental issues began to surface. Doctors discovered that his hearing was impaired; and he had continuous lung infections that developed into asthma. In 2000, at age 10, Joshua's disabilities were categorized as Level 6 Speech-Language impairment (SLI), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual Impairment (II). Joshua also has epilepsy.

In 2007, his father's work meant that Joshua and his family had to move to Canberra. This was extremely hard on Joshua as he thrives and relies on consistency and stability. The secure environment and familiarity with his Special School and friends in Queensland had gone.

In Canberra, his mother was looking for something to give Joshua some fun. She took him to the ice rink but had no idea at the time that this was the beginning of something very special. Joshua took to the ice like a 'duck to water'. He was 17.

Joshua showed an interest in playing ice hockey but was told he needed to learn to skate first and learn he did! Within six weeks of beginning lessons, Joshua had passed 10 Aussie Skate Badges and within five months, he was representing Australia at the New Zealand National Figure Skating Championships – he brought home the first Gold medal ever won by an Australian in the Special Olympics division.

In January 2008, Joshua won first prize in the Technical Preliminary Division, in the mainstream competition, at the Summer Trophy in Brisbane.

In August 2008, unexpectedly, and for no apparent reason, Joshua began to have seizures putting him behind in his schedule and goals. However, by 2009, his medication had brought the seizures well under control and Joshua was back on track chasing his dream.

Joshua's natural ability, intensive training regime and unconditional commitment to his sport have seen Joshua progress rapidly through the National Ice Skating levels. Joshua found his sport late for a beginner skater, which meant he had to work three times as hard to reach Senior Ice Dance and Novice Men's Skater level.

But Josh's life really turned around when he met coach and mentor Kristian Ryan. Recognizing something unique in Josh, Kristian has been responsible for helping Josh transition from a very quiet boy, to one who can perform for the public.

'My first impression was a kid with such ambition and devotion to the sport. He was so keen to learn, so respectful and his motivation is amazing,' said Kristian. 'He is unique in that he will just train and train. Sometimes I have to drag him off the ice.'

When asked about Kristian, Josh said he had helped him in ways he really can't explain. 'I kept my emotions to myself. Kristian got me to act more, to show expression. He showed me how to release my inner self,' said Josh.

Josh's mum, Anita, agrees. Prior to skating, Josh would be always in his room watching Disney DVDs. He found it difficult to talk to people, to interact socially. Now to see him be a part of Kristian's production company touring the country in the Winter Festival and performing on ice, Anita just can't

believe that Josh has finally found what he was born to do. When asked about Kristian, she just says (a little tearfully) 'He has given this kid life.'

Since the completion of the Winter Festival, Josh competed in the 2011 Dragon City Trophy & Sun Loong Artistic Challenge recently held at the newly opened, world class venue, Medibank ICEHOUSE in Melbourne where he won the Dragon City Trophy in his Division, and the Judges' Trophy for Best Overall Performance in the Competition.

Josh's dream is to perform with

his mind to and if his dream is to be on Disney on Ice, then my hope is that he can fulfill that dream,' said Kristian.

Josh has got past the first round with the great news that he has been granted an audition.

While Joshua's ultimate dream is to skate for Disney on Ice he wants to build a successful career within the sport and become a professional

coach to young skaters. Josh is currently undertaking Level 1 Coaching Accreditation, having recently achieved his certificate for the On Ice section of Training. His determination and

**'You don't need to read, you don't need to write – you just have to show expressions – who you are inside'.**



Josh as 'Louie the Chef' from *The Little Mermaid* with mentor and coach Kristian Ryan.

Disney on Ice. 'You can do different characters such as Goofy, and I thought why not! I'll give it a go.'

Kristian, himself a past member of the Disney on Ice troupe, knew how much training and dedication would be needed to secure an audition, and guided Josh through his audition tape.

'Josh is capable of anything he puts

commitment to achieve what many people would once have thought unachievable has been met with the greatest admiration from his coaches, judges and officials within the sport.

Most importantly, Joshua wants to show to world that people with a disability are just as capable of achieving their dreams as anyone else.