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GO HARD



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You buy this magazine because you are one of the hundreds of thousands of Australians who love adventure. Adventure of any sort – camping, multistage adventure racing, rock climbing, mountain biking, skiing, hiking – you name it. Aussies are known for this adventurous streak worldwide.

So ... what would you do if on one of these amazing adventures something happened and it left you paralysed? How would you recover? How would it affect your life?

Would you continue being adventurous?

The questions above suddenly became reality for one young

mountain biker one Sunday morning.

As usual, November 30th 2008 saw a couple of mates out mountain biking in the Daisy Hills area of Brisbane. They hit the trails every couple of weeks. An adrenalin addiction they had to feed.

Andrew Liddawi had moved to Brisbane from Perth to start his new career only a couple of months earlier. New trails, new friends, new adventures.

But a combination of speed, loose gravel, tree roots, a steep incline and a sharp turn had him reaching for his brakes. And with the back wheel locked and moving out from

underneath him, Andrew was launched into the air. The inevitable impact left him on the ground in a foetal position.

Andrew remembers: "I kept telling myself, 'get up, get up....get up.' It didn't take long to realise something was wrong. I couldn't feel anything below my waist."

Doctors confirmed Andrew's worst fears – he was paralysed from the waist down.

A long journey of rehabilitation was about to commence and all the things that we take for granted in our lives – friendships, family, moving around our house, driving – were about to change. Andrew

made the move back to Perth to be with family.

Rewind to Andrew's youth and it is clear that sport had not been an optional extra in his life. "As young kids you can't avoid sports. Cricket, basketball and AFL were big on my childhood agenda, along with wall-ball, riding other peoples push bikes and climbing trees."

But it wasn't until he reached university that he started to take his sporting pursuits more seriously, with a building interest in indoor soccer, the gym and Taekwondo.

"I trained for almost three years and competed in a local inter-club tournament. I got my arse so badly kicked that I wanted more!"

It didn't end there - Andrew's involvement with the University engineering club meant involvement in an assortment of different interfaculty sports.

At that time, mountain biking was simply a form of transport - commuting to and from university with the occasional blat on a trail in the suburbs that had been dug out by kids. The increased interest in MTB came when he moved to Brisbane in mid-2008 to take up a graduate program position with GHD, his new employer. Andrew's competitive nature coming through: "I wanted to get into some MTB races, but never started because of my injury only a few months later."

After the accident it would have been almost natural or expected for Andrew to turn his back on sport and adventure. Instead he grabbed the bull by the horns and made it his goal to return to what he loved, including MTB.

Almost unbelievably, Andrew returned to sport just eight months after his accident.

"I was still emotionally and physically damaged from my injury so I had to take it easy," he said. But with encouragement from Wheelchair Sports WA, he started by venturing into social wheelchair basketball. It wasn't long until the cycling bug bit and he tried both handcycling and wheelchair racing, but neither really worked for him.

After spending time playing basketball socially, Andrew was invited to join the Be Active Perth Wheelcats, WA's state wheelchair basketball team. Persistence paid off and just three seasons later Andrew was training with the Mens Australian Wheelchair Basketball team, the Rollers. Andrew's enthusiasm for the sport is evident: "It's madness, pure madness. And I love it!"

Despite all of his successes, his need to get back to the trails was as strong

OR GO HOME

