

Skiing helps Scholte get back on track

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Mike Scholte lost more than his left arm; for nearly a decade, he lost a way of life.

In 1994, Scholte had been hiking the Bruce trail near Collingwood, Ont., with his wife when part of the Niagara Escarpment broke off, severing his left arm near the shoulder and breaking his ankle in the process.

The two then had to hike seven kilo-metres in order to get out of the woods before Scholte, a native of Duntroon, Ont., was taken to hospital.

He stayed there for 22 weeks followed by months of home care as he recovered from the severed arm and adapted to a left ankle full of metal supports.

But what made it worse was the fact he could no longer enjoy sports.

It was tough at the beginning because I was always really athletic," Scholte said. It was almost like taking it all away at once and it took a long time to get back to things the way they were.

But I have a really supportive family and I had my son, Ben, a few years after that, and it was motivating to have kids and do sports with them. He keeps me on my toes and that helps a lot."

Three years ago, when Scholte's ankle was finally in good enough shape, he began competing in sports, eventually taking up nordic skiing.

Saturday, he was one of nine skiers (four in standing events in and five in sitski events) to take part in Para Nordic races that were part of the Ontario Cup/Ontario University Athletics events at North Bay Nordic Ski Club.

Scholte, a member of the Highlands Trailblazers and the first-ever Ontario Para-Nordic ski team, completed the 10-kilometre classic race in 41 minutes and 16.2 seconds, hitting his stride down the final stretch with a smile on his face -- though he admitted he was just trying to finish the race with some dignity."

The sport is still a work in progress for Scholte, who has to compensate for a lack of balance without his left arm and just the one pole to work with.

Like today for example I'm trying to use my left arm, if you can believe that," said Scholte, whose arm was cut off just below shoulder. The first half of the race, it was almost like the Riverdancers, it was straight down and not doing anything. I really had to throw my body into it.

It's all the really tiny adaptations you have to make and planning your race so you know when the hills are and how you are going to take them. But it's no different than an able-bodied skier, it's just knowing where your strengths are and how to make up time."

While no locals were registered for the race, that may change in the future as Scholte believes the sport of Para-Nordic racing is growing and the Ontario team is able to receive funding now. When he first started, there would only be a couple of racers compared to the nine who took part Saturday.

We've come a long, long way," said Scholte, who has competed at NorAm races as well. So it's very exciting."

On the web: www.xco.org/paranordic/paranordichome.htm