

ATHLETE PROFILE

Darryl Partridge



By Jenna Caputo

It's funny how life changes. Now, he's a personal trainer, but all through elementary and high school, Darryl Partridge hated gym class. "I was always the last pick for teams and was considered an athletic loser by classmates and gym teachers. I almost didn't graduate high school due to failing gym. I had skipped gym class all winter to go ski," he explains.

Originally from Windham, Darryl may have hated gym, but he was still active, spending much of his time skiing, hiking, biking, growing plants, and building things. With a little wood and tools in hand, he would craft anything from furniture to rudimentary structures.

After high school, he lived a "ski bum" life for a while, employed as a certified ski instructor in the winter and working a landscaping job in the summer to offset the cost of his spring ski travels. He skied the Austrian Alps and hiked Mt. Washington in New Hampshire to ski off Tuckerman's Ravine. He served as the director of the Children's Ski School at Windham Mountain for a few years, where he designed programs that are still in place today.

Eventually, he took a job as an elementary school teacher, but life changed again when he suffered a rare ankle fracture at 42 years old. He thinks it happened when he did a simple jump from a low counter to the floor, but he wasn't aware of the injury right away. When he could no longer put pressure on his foot months later, he knew something was wrong. The fracture had happened in the top of the talus, a small but important bone in the ankle joint. The bone around the fracture died, taking the cartilage with it, and causing significant pain. Six unsuccessful surgeries later, the pain was still there, and the anatomy of his lower leg had changed forever. The pain seemed to get worse with each surgery.

Despite 10 leg casts and constant use of crutches, the leg became deformed, he was no longer able to walk without crutches, and had chronic pain that just kept getting worse. "I basically had a live peg leg that caused debilitating pain," he says. "The pain continued getting worse, my knee was beginning to contract, and the rest of my leg was wasting

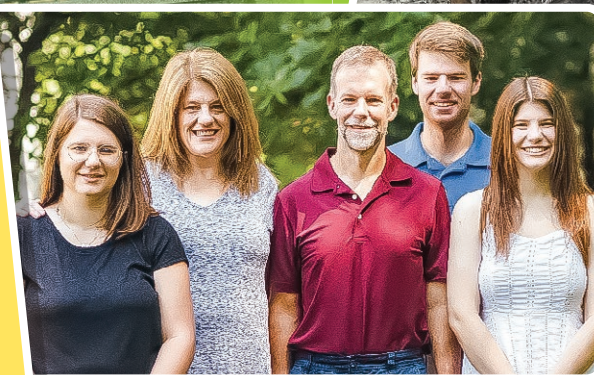
AGE: 57
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away. I was disabled and out of options other than to amputate. The decision to amputate was the most agonizing and difficult decision I have ever had to make. With the help and support of my wife, we felt I had to take the chance with amputation because I could no longer live with the excruciating pain the leg caused. On September 24, 2014, I had my leg amputated and began living again!"

After the amputation, he found himself at the gym. "The more I worked out, the more I wanted to work out," he remembers. "It was addicting because I realized the loss of my leg didn't keep me from challenging myself physically." In addition to constantly challenging himself, he also wanted to find a way to help other amputees after feeling so alone himself during his first year. Despite his relief from his previous pain, he had to learn how to deal with a prosthetic, which is a complicated and insurance-driven process. "Everyone tells you everything will be fine once you get your prosthetic," Darryl says. "What they don't prepare you for are all the skin issues and prosthetic fitting issues that cause a great deal of pain as you are learning to walk with the prosthetic."

He is grateful he had the strength to do the hard work on his own but didn't want others in the area to go through the same ordeal. Becoming an educational support system to other amputees, he served as a sounding board for any of their concerns while also teaching them about limb and skin issues, prosthetics options, and preparing body and limb for successful return to full lives.

When the opportunity presented itself to become a personal trainer, he felt like it was his calling and jumped at the chance. Fifteen months after losing his leg, Darryl became a NASM certified personal trainer and began working full-time. "I lost my disability and got my life back in the gym," he says. "Now it was



my turn to guide, support, and push others to overcome their challenges, discover their capabilities, and give up their excuses. The most rewarding part of my fitness journey was having the ability to inspire people to get out and make improvements in their own lives. With the loss of my leg, I gained an incredible gift – the awesome ability to teach people that it doesn't matter what challenges life has thrown at you, you can accomplish anything you want with determination and hard work."

Initially working at VENT Fitness, Darryl's life took another turn when Covid hit. As soon as the gyms closed, he began posting daily workouts on Facebook to keep his clients going. This soon led to virtual classes and then meeting outdoors in parks and backyards to continue their work. Eventually, Darryl realized he could open his own gym. Reaching out, he procured the support and space he needed to get started. After obtaining equipment, he had a fully functional workout studio that upheld clients as the number one priority. In September 2020, he began training clients in his own studio, and Leg Up On Fitness was born: leguponfitness.com.

He offers personal as well as small group training, bootcamps, adaptive training, amputee training, and Spartan race training. Darryl continues to help other amputees not only within his studio but through websites, virtual and local hospital visits, peer mentoring, and through the Amputee Blade Runners organization, where he assists with education on limb skin care, prosthetics, exercise, and hacks on everyday tasks. ABR is a Nashville-based organization that provides free running legs to amputees who want to live active lives and participate in sports. Darryl works with the recipients to strengthen their bodies to use the running leg and be successful. "Without them, I would not be running," says Darryl. "They provided me with my running leg. Health insurance doesn't cover sports prosthetics, and they cost thousands of dollars."

Darryl had never been a runner before, but after his amputation, running became a freeing and empowering activity. He started when training a client for a Tough Mudder race, promising him that if he went for it, Darryl would

race right alongside. After that, Darryl switched to Spartan races since teams are not needed. "Running and Spartans are my unwind times," says Darryl. "Time for myself; time to clear my head. When I am on the Spartan course, it is all about survival and getting to the fire." Pre-Covid, he ran 15 races a year, which included a mix of 5Ks, 15Ks, half marathons, and a Spartan Trifecta. In 2021, he returned to Trifectas, which include a Sprint 5K with 20 obstacles, Super 10K with 30 obstacles, and a Beast half-marathon with 35 obstacles, and he took a team of 12 training clients to complete the Spartan Sprint at Fenway Park in Boston after several months of coaching them for the event.

Skiing continues to be a big part of his life as well, now holding an even more special meaning after first meeting his wife at a skiing lesson that did not go well. "We avoided each other for a few years until she asked me for a job teaching kids skiing. I hired her and here we are, 30 years and three kids later!" he jokes.

This winter marked a new milestone for Darryl's skiing. He got a skiing-specialty prosthetic and was able to finally participate in his favorite hobby at the level he was at before the amputation. The new leg allowed him to enjoy many weekends on the slopes this year. It's a good reminder of his mantra to "Set your goals high, then become the person who can achieve them."

"Everyone has challenges, problems in their lives," says Darryl. "Do not let those challenges be your excuses to give up on yourself. Overcome what challenges you, by turning those obstacles into fuel to become a strong person." ▲

Jenna Caputo of Porter Corners is a freelance writer and the owner of Silverpen Productions (silverpenproductions.com), providing quality content for local businesses and publications. A past curler, Jenna now enjoys ballroom dancing, yoga, and Zumba when not out hiking or snowshoeing with her family.