

Batek chosen for Invictus Games

Cochrane Eagle Staff

Aug 23, 2018 1:00 AM



Cochranite MJ Batek will be competing for Canada in the Invictus Games Oct. 20-27.

By MJ Batek, special to the Eagle A local Cochrane athlete has been training hard as a member of Team Canada for the Invictus Games that are being held in Sydney, Australia, Oct 20 to 27. MJ Batek, a retired veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, will be competing in swimming, archery and wheelchair basketball. Batek was training to be one of the first female Artillery Officers in Canada when she was injured during a training exercise in the 1990s. Her physical injury was career ending and is something

she deals with on a daily basis as it now affects other areas in her body. However, it was the sexual assaults she experienced during her military service and military domestic violence that have brought about her complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). "It is difficult for people to understand PTSD from "friendly fire". The first question I always get asked is if I served overseas," Batek said. "The concept that your injuries were inflicted by your fellow soldiers, leadership or military spouse is difficult to comprehend or talk about." While also saying that she kept the secret of MST and abuse for many years before finally seeking help to cope and that the Invictus Games are part of Batek's journey of healing. Never having competed in swimming, Batek has had to learn proper swimming technique. She joined the local Masters Swim Club under coach Breanna Hendriks and has been using the new warm water therapy pool in Cochrane to aid in her physiotherapy. "The Cochrane Sport Physio clinic and A Touch of Health Massage run by Erin Bender have been key to aiding in my rehabilitation," Batek said. She also mentions that 6 a.m. sessions in the Therapy Pool have become a great way to meet other Cochranites recovering from various injuries. "Seeing a smiling, friendly and familiar face really helps get the day started." Batek, or otherwise better known as "MJ", also credits the Cochrane Addiction and Mental Health clinic run out of the Cochrane Urgent Care Centre for looking after the mental health care needs of herself and her children. "We are very lucky to live in a town with access to services like this. When you are dealing with PTSD and abuse issues, you need a strong mental health support network." Batek said since she moved to Cochrane six years ago, she has personally seen the need for a women's shelter to help those families in similar situations to what she experienced. "The decision to stay in a women's shelter is often the very last resort. I have stayed in a shelter and I can tell you the relief it brings is incredible," Batek said. "We need Big Hill Haven to become a reality in Cochrane. We need land developers and builders who are creating neighborhoods in our town to come together to raise the \$3 million dollars needed to build the women's shelter." To prepare herself for the competition atmosphere of the Invictus Games, Batek entered the Across the Lake swim in

Kelowna held in July. She achieved her goal of swimming the approximately 2.1 km distance in under an hour solely using the breaststroke. "There were 1,308 swimmers competing. It was nerve-racking as I have never really swam in open water before." She placed ahead of 405 other swimmers at 54 minutes and 18 seconds. At the first Team Canada training camp in Esquimalt, B.C. in April, Batek discovered wheelchair basketball. Wheelchair basketball was a completely new experience for the Cochrane athlete. "It was amazing! Most of us have never sat in a chair and it was incredible to learn as a team and to be able to play with our team mates who need chairs," she said. "This game lets us all participate together." Batek has also been playing wheelchair basketball with a local club in Calgary and shoots archery "wherever she can find a range" and hopes a wheelchair basketball club can be started in the Cochrane area. Batek said she's looking forward to chance of representing her country at the Games and hopes to make everyone whose supported her proud. "This Invictus journey has been a life changing experience. I will be competing for all those who still suffer from abuse and trauma in silence," the future town representative said. "I want my kids to understand resilience and to know that your past does not define your future. The opportunity to represent Canada internationally and just participate in my events with my inspiring team mates are all the victory I need." Team Canada is represented at the Invictus Games this year by 40 athletes: 18 members of the Canadian Armed Forces and 22 veterans, who acquired an illness or a physical or mental health injury while serving Canada. Team Canada will be competing alongside more than 500 competitors from a record 18 participating allied nations including Afghanistan, Australia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Invictus Games is an international adaptive multi-sport event, created by Prince Harry, in which wounded, injured or sick armed services personnel and their associated veterans compete with the idea that sport can help heal. Named after Invictus, Latin for "unconquered" or "undefeated", the event was inspired

by the Warrior Games, a similar event held in the United States. The 2020 games are scheduled to be held in The Hague, Netherlands.