

# Julie Matthews-Eva dances Ballroom on a bionic leg



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Korweinguboorra resident Julie Matthews-Eva is the first person in the world to compete at national level in Ballroom and Latin dancing on a bionic leg.



**DANCE DREAMS: Julie Matthews-Eva and Mark Vanderkley during a lesson at The Dance Studio in Ballarat. Pictures: Kate Healy**

She first started learning to dance in April 2018 and less than one year later had entered her first competition.

It was a pledge she made in front of a national audience as a guest on reality television show *This Time Next Year*.

Her remarkable achievement was shared one year on from the initial pledge on episode six of the show that aired on September 16.

The journey did not come without its challenges. Ms Matthews-Eva was provided with a bionic leg to replace her previous less-functional cosmetic prosthetic only three weeks before she had to dance on set for the filming of the show.

She had to learn to walk on the new leg, before considering being able to dance.

"I love doing things that are challenging. If someone says I can't do something I am more determined to do it," she said.

Ms Matthews-Eva's leg was amputated at the hip in 1980 when she was 16-years-old after rare bone cancer Osteogenic Sarcoma was found above her left knee.

She is described as a hip disarticulation amputee and is one of less than two per cent of amputees in the world with this type of amputation.

Ms Matthews-Eva said the rarity of the amputation meant there had been little research and development into creating prosthetic legs for hip disarticulation until the past seven years.

She said her new bionic leg was an example of prosthetic development that was reducing the 'wear and tear' on her right leg, required less energy for walking and provided improved movement at the hip and ankle that was beneficial for dancing.

Before the amputation, Ms Matthews-Eva was an avid ice skater - since she has enjoyed snow skiing, scuba diving, flying planes, sailing, driving the tractor around her farm and now dancing, and she is already thinking about what her next challenge will be.

"My prosthetic leg has made me who I am. It has got me to do so many more things in my life than I probably would have done otherwise. It has made me appreciate every day as a bonus and I just get on with it," she said.

"When I was younger I disguised my prosthetic leg with a cosmetic cover and did everything I could to not stand out. Now 39 years later, I now wear a leg that is fully bionic and all of the machinery is very visible.



"That has been a bit of a learning curve for me, but people are now far more curious in a positive way rather than a negative way. Now they glance at it and think it's amazing.

"I go commando and I own it. When kids come up to me I say I am a bionic women.

"For me the new limb has opened up people's eyes a bit more to see what is possible."

While continuing to dance competitively almost every month, Ms Matthews-Eva is mentoring other amputees and cancer patients and is a full-time carer for her 97 and 91-year-old parents.