

Jack be quick

In 2006, when he was 21, Melbourne's Jack Swift had to have his lower right leg amputated after it was crushed by a 14-tonne excavator in a workplace accident. With just one year's training, he represented Australia at the 2011 IPC Athletics World Championships in New Zealand in the 400 metres – and at the London Paralympics in 2012. By **Rashida Tayabali**.

● **The 400 metres is one of the toughest track events. How do you attack the distance?**

I concentrate on getting there clean and fast, letting the momentum take over, and giving it my all at the end.

● **What do racing blades cost?**

For a below-the-knee amputee like myself, the blades are about \$10,000 plus additional fitting and labour costs. For above-the-knee amputees, because the knee component has to be customised and fitted, it can end up costing about \$20,000.

● **Do you ever play a prank on people who don't know you have a prosthetic limb?**

I've had mishaps more. When wearing the leg for the first time, I released the catch to prevent soreness while talking to someone at a function in a nightclub. I turned to go down some stairs, having forgotten the catch was off, and it rolled down 10 flights of stairs and hit a security guard standing at the bottom. I asked if he would run my leg up to me and he did. Over summer, I had a water leg made for waterskiing at a mate's holiday place in Yarrowonga, Victoria. While I was skiing, the leg came off and sank to the bottom of the lake. I had to hire professional divers to try to find it. Luckily, it was discovered 15 minutes into the search and I was very relieved I didn't "lose" a leg there!

● **What was your experience at your first competition in 2011?**

It was a great experience, although I didn't know what to expect with only a year of training. I qualified for the 400m and ended up achieving a PB and ranked fourth in the world.

● **Got a motto you like?**

"To get what you don't have, you must do what you've never done". I apply it to every aspect of my life – training, my studies and business. You need to continually change to progress or you keep obtaining the same results.

● **How do you focus mentally when you're competing?**

I go through the race in my head before the competition starts and believe that if I've put in four years of hard work I don't need to second-



guess myself – I just have to get out there and do it.

● **What keeps you motivated on difficult days?**

I find hard exercise the best remedy for those days when I'm not feeling 100 percent. After an exhausting training session, I feel on top of the world, with the belief that if I can get through that, I can deal with anything

● **Do you have a role model?**

Growing up, my hero was Nathan Buckley, because I loved AFL footy and I still do. After my accident, athletes such as Kurt Fearnley and Tim Matthews [Paralympic athlete and coach] are my inspiration.

● **Where would you have been today if the accident hadn't happened?**

I'd have been a qualified tradesman, most likely. Sport was always my passion, but it would have been a lot different. The accident made me mature and grow up a lot quicker.

● **You're an ambassador for Worksafe Victoria.**

I'm involved in their Return to Work campaign, highlighting the physical, mental and social benefits of going back to work after a workplace accident. I also meet people who have lost limbs not related to workplace injuries. It helps them to hear what it's like trying to live with a prosthetic limb separately from what doctors tell them.

● **Plans for this year?**

To complete my Bachelor of Exercise Science degree – and I'm gearing up for the 2016 Paralympics in Rio, where the triathlon will be my main focus. [@jswift](#)



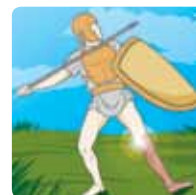
A short history of very old artificial legs



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Prosthetic devices are high-tech today, but artificial limbs have existed for thousands of years. **1.** Archaeologists in Egypt unearthed a splint dating from the fifth Egyptian Dynasty (2750-2625 BC). **2.** The earliest known written reference to an artificial limb was made around 500 BC, when the historian Herodotus wrote of a prisoner who escaped from his chains by cutting off his foot, which he later replaced with a wooden substitute. **3.** An artificial leg made of copper and wood, dating from the Samite Wars in 300 BC, was unearthed at Capri in Italy in 1858.