

## Aurora's Coriat named a 'Game Changer' after public vote



**By Brock Weir**

Aurora's Jessica Coriat will cheer extra loud this month when Canada's top football teams go head to head in Saskatchewan, vying for the Grey Cup.

Earlier this year, Ms. Coriat set out to be the change she wanted to see in the world.

She had valuable lessons to impart about living with cerebral palsy and carving out a sense of normalcy, a new normal, with the very valuable help of the Toronto Rehab Foundation. Joining the foundation with her parents at a young age, the Foundation was able to teach her how to walk with a walker, navigate in a wheelchair, methods to make eating as easy as possible, and how to live her life with independence.

Ms. Coriat and the Foundation put their heads together and put her forward as a possible Scotiabank Game Changer, a contest run by the bank by public vote with the winner collecting \$25,000 for the charity of their choice, and a VIP Trip to Regina for the 101st Grey Cup.

'Courage, determination and compassion are words that describe and define Jessica Coriat,' said the Scotiabank Game Changers program. 'At the age of 24, she is dedicated to educating the public about people living with disability; she is committed to advocating on their behalf. Whether it is through volunteering or sharing her story, Jessica leads by example and aims to make a difference by inspiring people to believe in their own potential.'

Her work as a volunteer, giving back to the very organization that helped her gain her independence, was underscored to readers and voters, noting she shares a message of hope, beating the odds, and being 'living proof' of that philosophy.

'She grew accustomed to her body often not doing what she wanted. She was constantly in pain. Despite several orthopaedic surgeries and ongoing care, Jessica lived with limited mobility. She adapted using special walking devices, but she was determined to improve. [Since finding Toronto Rehab, new therapy] has allowed Jessica to move her legs without pain. That was a remarkable moment she would never forget.'

Indeed, it was a memorable moment Jessica and her parents shared with The Auroran in late September, speaking about her campaign to be a 'game changer' for others living with disabilities. Your votes helped propel Jessica over the top in being named Scotiabank Game Changer for the Hamilton Tiger Cats on October 26.

Her win was announced on the field at the Ti-Cats' final game of the season.

‘This program means so much to us at Scotiabank as it shines a much deserved light on local heroes who devote themselves to helping others,’ said Scotiabank VP Ed Keohane in a statement. ‘Jessica is truly inspiring and a great example of how one person can make a difference to the lives of people in their community.’

Speaking to The Auroran after her win, Ms. Coriat says she had an intuition she was very much in it to win it, but didn't let herself get too carried away. For her, sharing her story and ultimately securing a win has given a voice to people who are often voiceless.

‘A lot of people with my condition don't have their voice,’ she says. ‘I work with a bunch of people who are stuck in bed, they have catheters and feeding tubes because they don't even have their basic functions. This means I am able to show them and show other people what they can give to the community and what the community has to give them.’

It was a no-brainer, she said, to help Toronto Rehab secure the prize money because she knows firsthand where resources are badly needed to give clients and patients the very best care possible. With her voice now having a bit more clout as a Game Changer, Ms. Coriat says she is hoping to start a blog with Toronto Rehab helping people understand the resources available to them and what she, herself, has to give back to the community.

‘[Through the campaign] I heard from parents [of kids with CP] who said it was good to know my story because a lot of people would think there is nothing we can do because the kids are just going to subsequently pass away,’ she says, noting not just helping give parents hope there was light at the end of the tunnel, but also inspiring others to lend their voice.

‘My story inspired parents. There is a little bit of reluctance for people with CP to share their story because you're so much in the spotlight. Sharing is valuable. Just do it, otherwise you won't get the help you need, if you need it.’

As Ms. Coriat's CP will make it difficult for her to travel to Saskatchewan for the Grey Cup, she will be cheering wildly from home, perhaps even louder than she did when she attended in person last year. Her tickets, however, won't go to waste – she has donated her tickets to the family of a friend within Toronto Rehab, whose son is living with a terminal illness, very excited to see the best of the best face off for ultimate CFL supremacy.