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For NDIS participant Daynah Hopkins, shining his talent upon the sporting landscape is a sure fire pathway to achieving goals.

Daynah, 26, who lives with autism and an intellectual disability, loves all playing cricket, Aussie rules and basketball, but is happiest with (a cricket) ball in hand, or at the crease across the various fields of Melbourne.

Fresh off playing in a state carnival this month where his Victorian side won two T20 matches from two, Daynah said his achievements are a reflection of the impact sport has on his life.

“I play for the Victorian Vikings, Victoria’s cricket team for players who have intellectual disability. I’ve also played in two national-championship winning sides, and I’ve represented Australia twice,” Daynah said.

While he has a natural talent for sport, Daynah often reflects on where he would be if it weren’t for the NDIS.

Before joining the NDIS in 2017, Daynah didn’t have any formal disability supports in place.

“The NDIS has really helped me become independent, and they have helped me continue with my sport and I’m very thankful for that,” Daynah said.

“Before the NDIS, life was a bit of a struggle. When it comes to my sport I can understand things just fine, but I found it hard learning how to do everyday things that came so easy for other people. It was frustrating.”

Now, Daynah uses his NDIS plan to have a support worker help him with day-to-day tasks like cooking, to access transport and supports to build skills so he can work.

“The NDIS has helped me out a lot with my personal development. I’m still learning how to cook, but since the NDIS supported me I know how to make steak and chicken schnitzel now.”

Daynah’s independence has been growing, and his confidence to take on new challenges extends beyond the cricket ground.

Twice a week, Daynah attends Jigsaw, an NDIS provider offering pathways for people with a disability to train and transition into mainstream employment.

“The first thing I learned going to Jigsaw was how to be punctual very quickly,” laughs Daynah.

“I’ve learned so much at Jigsaw and the people who work there are so nice. It’s also around the corner from where I grew up in Melbourne so it gives me a sense of home too.

“The latest work experience I did was computer work, doing quality control and file management. It’s quite rewarding, I felt really good about myself at the end of the day and my trainers were really happy with my work.”

Daynah hopes what he learns at Jigsaw will help him land his dream job of working in recruitment for Cricket Victoria or Cricket Australia.

He’s also one of many young Australians whose dream career comes from a hobby they love, but for Daynah, the reason why is a little closer to his heart.

“I have a passion for recruiting the next generation of cricketers with disability because I’ve been in that environment as a player. I really think it would be a perfect way to give back to the sport that’s given me so much.”

As a young person with disability, Daynah said World Autism Awareness Day was a great time to share his hopes of one day having sports like cricket accessible for everyone.

“It’s great to see all these young players with disability coming through but I still think we can make sport and society more inclusive and accessible.

“From my experience, I’ve learned that more people need to give people with disability a chance. They should focus on their ability and not on their disability.

“It’s an absolute privilege to promote autism in a positive way.”

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