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Dean is one of the world's strongest powerlifters in his weight class, able to lift 150kg, more than twice his body weight.

But it's the Moreton Bay resident's mental toughness that's seen him smash life's expectations to become one of Australia's most prolific motivational speakers.

For more than 20 years, Dean has touched the lives of millions of people sharing his powerful story of living with a severe form of the skin disease Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB).

A rare disease, EB is a condition whereby the skin is considered as delicate as tissue paper or butterfly wings, it can blister and peel at the slightest touch. The pain for those living with EB has been likened to living with third degree burns.

Typically people with the severest form of this disease have a life expectancy of 30, making Dean, 43, one of the oldest known living survivors of this condition.

'I've got wounds that come and are with me for 1 week or 2 weeks, 6 months, 18 months, then heal only to leave fragile, weak skin to break down the second it's all healed over and then I go through the same process all over again,' Dean said.

Diagnosed with EB at 18 months, the former Kingaroy local was not expected to live past the age of 5. At 10, he and his family were told he'd never walk again.

With no 'binding' between skin layers, even the slightest brushing against an object created wounds and pain. From months in hospital, to being close to death, Dean has experienced extreme levels of emotional and physical pain.

But in true Dean style, he turned every negative medical prediction, every stare and every nasty comment into a positive. He did this to just to survive but thrived under the extreme hardships and aversity he faced, and faces, every day.

'A normal day for me, if I've got nothing planned, is my alarm goes off at 5am. I get out of bed and start the process of getting my skin in the best possible condition. That involves a 4-to-5-hour process with my nurses,' Dean said.

Dean, who is supported by Carers Queensland to access the NDIS, has support workers who help him daily. The Scheme also funds assistive technologies such as a motorised scooter and home modifications.

Yet it's Dean's sheer grit and determination to dig deep through unimaginable pain that has allowed him to live life on his terms and share his story to help others going through rough

patches.

‘It wasn’t until I was in my 20s that I reflected on my past and realised that I do have a pretty unique story of how I survived all the really difficult times and how I have overcome all the really negative and dark periods of my life,’ Dean said.

“So piece-by-piece I started to think about different stories and different things I had achieve and what my head space was like at that time. Being able to share these experiences is what gives me a deep sense of purpose.”

As a motivational speaker Dean’s past clients include the Australian Federal Government, Qantas, Toyota, NRL, Australian Federal Police and the New Zealand Warriors. He’s rubbed shoulders with Prime Ministers, world leaders and some of the world’s most successful businesspeople.

Dean was an International Brand Ambassador for Toyota Australia for 15 years, and in 2018 he was inducted into the Australian Hall of Fame for Disability Employment for his tireless work in this sector.

He’s also an ambassador for Debra Australia, the organisation supporting people living EB.

But Dean’s true love is sport. At least 4 times a week he works out in his home gym, focusing on upper body and core strength work.

‘Being able to lift 150kg puts me somewhere in the top 2 to 3% in the world,’ Dean said.

‘I’m just trying to get as healthy as I can because having upper body strength and power in my legs helps me to get out of the car and do everyday tasks a lot easier.

‘When I’m not lifting extreme weights, I’m just focusing on the rest of my body, making sure everything’s working to the best of its ability.’

Dean is also an ambassador for the Brisbane Broncos Football Club, and arguably their biggest fan.

‘I’ve been a sporting person my entire life, which doesn't make sense when you look at my how fragile my skin is and you look at the medical side of things,’ Dean said.

‘But I also sort of think that's one of the tools that has got me to where I am today. My parents have been great throughout my entire life, allowing me to push my limits from a really young age.’

Dean says he’s proud to be an inspiration to others, particularly because his condition is so extreme, and he has to think carefully about every step and every move he makes.

‘I respect that some people with disability get offended by being considered inspirational, but for me, it is pretty amazing that I am a functioning member of the community,’ he said.

‘Whether you're inspired by me just doing the everyday things, going to do the groceries at the shopping centre, or standing in front of 7000 people speaking, then yeah, I’m okay with that.’

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