Article of the Week (8) Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ pd:\_\_\_\_\_

# **The girl with the 'zebra leg' wows Hog country**

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – Jean Nail has been judging cheerleaders longer than most current cheerleaders have been alive. She started as spirit coordinator for the University of Arkansas 30 years ago, and let's just say her standards are as tough as her name.

So her heart didn't immediately melt earlier this year when she saw the DVD application of a blonde Texarkana girl named Patience Beard. Nail knew thousands of people would go "wow" when they took one look at the girl, and not in the way most red-blooded males say "wow" when they look at a cheerleader.

Patience was different than any other applicant Nail had ever seen: She had a prosthetic left leg. Nail was sympathetic, but this incoming freshman would have to inspire more than concern to become one of 12 freshmen to cheer for the Razorbacks. The coach would offer "no special consideration" here. Beard would have to do all the stunts, and do them perfectly. There would be no charity for Patience.

When she was six months old, Patience Beard was diagnosed with Proximal Femoral Focal Deficiency (PFFD), a disease that affects bone growth. Put simply, her left leg would always be shorter than her right. And over the course of years, that would create all kinds of structural problems. So when she was nine months old, Beard's parents allowed doctors to amputate their daughter's left foot and ankle. She would be able to walk, but not without a prosthetic.

Beard's mom and dad worried about their girl falling down. Patience, however, didn't seem to have those concerns. When she was 3, her dad made her a bike with training wheels and a special sleeve that could accommodate her prosthetic leg. Patience demanded the training wheels be removed. Mom said no, but Dad relented. And off Patience went, riding along without training wheels.

There would be trying times, of course. Patience remembers going to the beach in fifth grade and feeling embarrassed when everyone around her started noticing her leg. "What happened to you?" they asked. Patience told her mom she wanted to wear pants. Her mom told her no.

"That's who you are," she told her daughter. "Don't be ashamed. This is you."

Over time, Patience became a little bit of a show-off. Not in an obnoxious or arrogant way, but in a proud way. Instead of hiding her disability – and that term should be used quite loosely here – she was happy to draw attention to what she could do. She started gymnastics at 4 and cheering in seventh grade. She learned to do pretty much every stunt imaginable, including running flips that look like something out of [Gabrielle Douglas](http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/london-2012/gymnastics/gabrielle-douglas-1132742/)' playbook.

In ninth grade, a time when girls are at their most self-conscious, Patience asked her doctors at the Scottish Rite Hospital for Children in Dallas to outfit her prosthetic leg with a zebra pattern. She kept thinking of new designs, the way most of us look for sleeves for our iPhones. One of her favorites is an M&Ms skin. She also had an American flag skin around the time of 9/11. Patience would win over her high school classmates so much that they named her homecoming queen.

It's a long way from Texarkana to Division I football. Nail knew the cameras would be all over Patience, and some people watching at home would not be kind. Beard would not only have to master all of the difficult moves the squad executes during a 60-minute football game, she'd have to withstand the glare of the spotlight, too.

But she's been fine with that. Beard laughs when told some people in Northwest Arkansas are already describing her as "the girl with the zebra leg." She's still "in shock" that she made Arkansas' cheerleading squad and was deeply moved when a 4-year-old boy with a prosthetic right leg noticed her at a recent Hogs game and wanted to meet her. It was one of the proudest moments of Patience's life.

"She's the kind of person we want," Nail says. "She's a good role model. And she's absolutely qualified."

So qualified, in fact, that when the cheerleaders run laps around the edge of the football field for warm-ups each day, Patience has never come in last. Not once.

The challenges are mostly unseen. That's the thing about cheering – it's supposed to look effortless. You don't see the pain Patience feels from jumping, running, even walking the hills around Fayetteville. All amputees feel it because no prosthetic feels completely comfortable. But you'll never hear Patience mutter a word about that. No special consideration from her coach, no excuses from her.

There is a bit of a challenge, however, for Patience's partner, Kevin Ellstrand. He's the one who has to lift her, and he admits it's a little bit tricky holding a girl up with one arm when a disproportionate amount of her weight is on one side. But Ellstrand and Beard haven't had any issues in the three home games so far. They know the smile should remain even on a rainy Saturday when the team is losing 52-0 to Alabama.

"She's the most positive person I've ever met," says Ellstrand, 22. "I'm inspired every day."

And soon he might be a little bit jealous, too. Patience is considering asking her Dallas hospital for a new prosthetic, in Razorbacks red. "How many people do you know who have an Arkansas leg?" she asks.

For now, she's the one on the sidelines with the zebra leg. She explains she uses that one the most because it goes with just about every outfit she wears.

"You know," she jokes, "I'm a girl."

**ANNOATIONS/NOTES\_\_\_\_/50**

**QUESTIONS ANSWERED ON SEPARATE PAPER \_\_\_\_/50**

***Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as I read:***

**Questions from AOW: DO NO ANSWER THEM ON THIS PAPER!**

1. Why didn’t Jean Nail’s “heart melt” when she saw Patience Beard’s tryout application?
2. Explain the difference between the two “wow’s” listed in the first paragraph.
3. Do you think the coaches should have had special consideration for Patience? Why or why not?
4. How does PFFD affect someone?
5. Why didn’t Patience choose to wear pants to cover her prostechic leg? Would you?
6. What one challenge does Patience and her stunting partner have?
7. Cite two lines from the text that demonstrate that Patience has a great outlook on life.
8. List one word that demonstrates how the author feels about Patience. Cite (write) one line from the text that demonstrates this feeling.
9. How do you think Patience would answer the question “How do we make life worthwhile even if it seems unfair?”