

Payan continues to check off accomplishments

ari amezaga | staff reporter

She felt strange in the pit of her stomach as she approached the large purple campus doors for the first time.

She was used to everyone in her middle school knowing her, but now she would have to start from scratch. There would be familiar questions, more people, and more stares.

Freshman Jayden Payan was born with Amniotic Band Syndrome (ABS). ABS is a birth defect in which the lining of the amniotic sack peels away from itself and attaches to different parts of the baby's body inside the womb.

Jayden has had to make accommodations to do everything, from tying her shoes to straightening her hair. Being self-sufficient from a young age enabled her to experience new activities that she wasn't able to do before.

"I kind of have a bucket list of things I want to learn how to do and usually spend time practicing them," she said. "When I was really little my mom wanted to help me, but I would never let her because I always knew I had to learn to do things myself. I used to get so frustrated. Don't get me wrong, I still do, but I've learned over the years that being angry doesn't get me anywhere. I just need to relax and keep practicing."

Jayden spends much of her time practicing after school with the JROTC unarmed drill team.

"Arms and legs don't make a person," drill team coach Sgt. Jose Hernandez said. "It's everything on the inside. When I first met Jayden I saw a very shy individual with no self-confidence. I started picking on her in class to bring her out of her shell and help her realize her potential. She is a very special and unique part of the JROTC family. My advice to her is to always lead from the front and eat no man's dust because nothing will ever stop her from succeeding."

Jayden's mom, Catherine Payan, didn't find out that her daughter had



genesis barraza/stampede
After school in the back of the campus, freshman Jayden Payan practices an unarmed drill team routine with JROTC teammate Brianna Muñoz. The team won the Fall district drill meet and will perform Dec. 19 at halftime of the annual Senior All-Star game in the Sun Bowl.

ABS until she was born. Catherine said she received support from her family, friends, and church to become the rock Jayden needed. As a baby, Jayden learned to walk at a faster pace than other kids because she wasn't able to crawl.

"I had many things going through my head," Catherine said. "I was confused, sad, hurt, and scared. I thought that it was my fault. I couldn't believe the doctors didn't see her arm not developing in the sonograms. It was hard for me, but I knew that I had to look at the positive side of the situation in order to help her. It's frustrating sometimes knowing that I can't help her but just watching her at times, I can't believe how incredible she is."

Jayden is hoping to receive a prosthetic arm soon which will have the ability to open and close the hand along with full movement of the fingers. The arm costs about \$10,000.

"I've always wanted a prosthetic,"

Jayden said. "When I was in elementary I thought my arm would grow like the other one at some point, but as I got older I realized that wasn't the case. The first time I realized I wanted it was in sixth grade. My mom was hesitant, but after talking to her she understood. When I got my first arm, I was a bit disappointed because the hand only open and closed, plus I felt like I received even more attention and it was a little odd, but I'm really excited for this new one."

With support from her JROTC family, Jayden said she can finally open up to experience something she has always been interested in doing. Jayden's father Jaime inspired her to join JROTC. He served in the Marine Corps.

"When I saw her on the first day of school I saw a shy and independent girl," junior Alejandra Valdez said, "but soon we grew close. I wish everyone could see what a beautiful personality she radiates

"I've never considered myself to be disabled. It's a bit of a struggle to do everything that kids my age do, but it's not impossible. My life has shaped who I am as a person. I only have one life, and I'm not going to spend it thinking about what could've been. I've learned to accept myself as I am and move forward."

-jayden payan
freshman

and her amazing sense of humor. I know I'm not alone when I say I'm so proud of her success in JROTC because she always pushes to do the best."

Jayden plans to stay in the program all four years. She also plans to pursue a career as a forensic medical examiner.

Jayden says she isn't worried about her future because of her differences.

"I want everyone to know that I'm not as scary as I look," she said. "This is something I was born with and I deal with on a daily basis. I know that in the eyes of everyone else I look disabled, but in all reality I'm not, and I've never considered myself to be disabled. It is a bit of a struggle to do everything that kids my age do, but it's not impossible. My life has shaped who I am as a person. I only have one life, and I'm not going to spend it thinking about what could've been. I've learned to accept myself as I am and move forward."