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St Northbert College student and swimming athlete Tegan Reder with her guide dog Loui. Photograph — Aaron Van Rongen.

Top athlete is an amazing young achiever

• By Geraldine Alphonse

Tegan Reder has won 49 medals for swimming, represented Western Australia 26 times, holds two national silver medals and she has done it all without sight.

The 16-year-old girl was born with Leber congenital amaurosis, a rare condition in which her retinas do not function.

Despite this, her blindness hasn't stopped the young sporting enthusiast, who only took up swimming two years ago and has recently been nominated for a Young Achiever Award.

Whether it's in the pool, at the beach or the river, it is the feeling of freedom that Tegan said she deeply enjoys.

"As a kid I would often swim in our home pool, water ski and go out on my dad's boat with my family," she said.

"I guess that it is this love of the water that encouraged me

to take up swimming in the first place and later, pursue the sport."

Earlier this year Tegan experienced a first as she competed internationally at the 2020 Para Swimming World Series in Melbourne and in another first Tegan also wowed the audience at a State Swimming Championship last year.

She then went on to represent Western Australia in the 2019 National Championships in Adelaide where she swam a string of personal bests in breaststroke and was then spotted by a Paralympic development coach.

Although she is now training less due to the health crisis, the young athlete is preparing herself for the 2021 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, and if selected she will become one of the youngest participants.

"For me, swimming is very much a tactile activity rather than one that is visual or

verbal," she said. "Swimming is all about the feel of the strokes cutting through the water and the tensing and relaxing of muscles with each pull or kick.

"In this way, I swim by feel, doing the technique that feels most natural, and using the lane rope to guide me in the lane.

"I enjoy the feeling of complete freedom that swimming brings me and the cool lightness of the water as you move through it."

Now nominated for a Surge Fitness Sports Awards in the 2020 Young Achiever Awards, Tegan said she would love to renew her love for swimming and sport.

"I would love to win a young achiever award as it would be a major token of my success as a swimmer," she said.

"My ultimate goal in the sport is to reach the 2021 Paralympic Games in Tokyo or the 2024 Paralympic games in Paris."

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