

Triumphant TEAM UK return with most medals won at the World Transplant Games: Sweden 17-24 June, 2011

Alison Bloxham

Imagine a world-class sporting event where everyone is a winner even before Team UK wipe the board and bring home 115 Gold, 94 Silver and 77 Bronze medals? Confused? No need – Team UK achieved this incredible medal haul at the World Transplant Games which took place in Göteborg, Sweden from 17-24 June 2011. Some 50 countries from across the globe took part in this spectacular celebration of life, with 1,200 transplant athletes joining hands to raise international awareness of organ donation. Countries such as Bhutan, Nepal and Lithuania joined the larger countries to celebrate life at this unique sporting event. The Games put a global spotlight on the need for organ donation and these amazing successes show how organ donation can transform lives. All the competitors have received a life-saving organ transplant – kidney, liver, lungs, heart or bone marrow – and just being able to compete against world-class competition having been given a second chance of life means that everyone is truly a winner, whatever position they finish the competition in.

I was privileged to accompany the Team UK as one of the team physiotherapists, a role I have undertaken for the past ten years, and spent eight days working flat out to ensure that all the UK team were at their peak of fitness and performing at their best. We treated injuries that were sustained during competition, gave pre-and post-competition massage to the athletes and provided moral support as well where required! Over the years the number of teams bringing physio support has increased and now it is quite a social occasion when all the team physios gather at the athletics – this year saw us with physios from Holland, South Africa, Hungary, Hong Kong, Ireland and New Zealand!

The Games include a wide variety of sports – cycling, volleyball, tennis, squash, badminton, table-tennis, golf, swimming, and a full athletics programme, and the standard of competition seems to get higher every year. Anyone looking for some real-life superheroes should look no further than those athletes who make up Team UK. Every one of these amazing athletes is a successful transplant recipient at their peak of physical fitness, enabling them to compete and win at the World Transplant Games, clearly illustrating the benefits of organ transplantation. But perhaps more importantly, the true champions are those individuals who gave the gift of life, offering all these athletes their second chance to live. Living donors and the donor families are very much a part of the Games and it is always an emotional occasion at the opening ceremony when they are honoured by all the athletes.

The World Transplant Games were the innovation of Mr Maurice Slapak, a transplant surgeon in Portsmouth. In 1978, 99 kidney transplantees from the UK, the US, France and Ireland gathered on the Castle Field, Southsea, Portsmouth for the first British and World Transplant Games. Since that early beginning the British Transplant Games has been staged annually at various centres around the UK, and the World Games take place bi-annually. This year's British Games took place from 4-7 August in Belfast and the next World Games will take place in Durban, South Africa in 2013.

For more information on Transplant Sport UK and the World Transplant Games, visit www.wtgf2011.com or www.transplantsport.org.uk



Hard at work with gold-medal-winning athlete



Alison with the bronze-medal-winning floorball team

The view of an athlete

Naomi Smith was born in Bridlington, East Yorkshire in 1992. At five weeks old, after suffering from prolonged jaundice and a voracious, unsatisfied appetite with no significant weight gain she was diagnosed with congenital biliary atresia. At five and a half weeks, she underwent a six-hour procedure to try to alleviate the condition. This did not work longterm, and at a year old it became obvious that she would require a liver transplant. During her first year, she developed portal hypertension and ascites, causing abdominal discomfort and anaemia. At one stage, she required weekly blood transfusion.

She was put on the transplant list at the age of 13 months and her parents were told she might only survive for another few months. In the days before mobile phones, the hospital gave her a pager to allow her parents to respond to the call for a transplant. After three months the call came through.

She left hospital after just 16 days, and her development and health post-transplant were extremely good. Unfortunately, at the age of five, she developed auto-immune hepatitis which required treatment with a hefty dose of prednisolone. To this day, this condition is controlled in this way.

She completed her AS levels last year, but decided to change direction and study for an Extended Diploma in Sports Studies at Hull College, with the ambition of taking HND in sport and becoming a personal trainer someday.

Naomi attended the British Transplant Games in 2005 at Loughborough, coming away with a silver medal. By this time, she was well and truly hooked! In 2006, in Bath, she competed in the 100 metres, table tennis, badminton and long jump, and as a result of her performance, she was selected to go to Thailand in 2007 for the World Transplant Games as a member of the UK Transplant Team. Walking into the opening ceremony



Naomi Smith (far right) and the gold-medal-winning women's 4 x 100m relay team at the World Games in Sweden

with her UK tracksuit on was a fantastic feeling for her. Naomi has since represented her country at two further World Games – Australia in 2009, and Sweden in 2011. She has maintained contact with all of the people she met in Thailand and has made many more friends, all of whom have benefited from their fantastic gift of life. Her tally of medals now stands at 38, and she holds two World Games records in the 15-17 year age group for high jump and long jump.

The Transplant Games have made an incredible difference to her and to her family. On a personal level, she has grown in self-confidence. Now extremely fit and healthy, she has found a life and a career. But on a broader level she has raised the profile of transplantation, 'the gift of life' as she puts it.

Organ Donation: 'the gift of life'

In the UK we have over 9,000 people on the transplant waiting list; this includes children. Due to the severe shortage of donated organs at least three people will die each day waiting for a life-saving transplant.

The most important thing is that we discuss our wishes regarding organ donation with our family and next of kin, so they are sure of what our decision would be.

In the North West, 1.4 million people are now on the Organ Donor Register; that is 22% of the population. This is a fantastic amount of people but we need more; there are over 900 people in our region on the transplant waiting list and each day they wait to get the telephone call that could give them their life back.

Organ donation is the most amazing and precious gift anyone could give. So if you believe in organ donation and want to show your support you can join the Organ Donor Register:

www.organdonation.org.uk or text **SAVE** to **84118**
or telephone **0300 123 23 23**

Sarah Ralley
Specialist Nurse – Organ Donation
North West Team