

From tears to pride

Des Kirwan talks to **Deborah Condon** and recalls initial reactions to his diagnosis of Type 1 and the amazing adventures that followed when representing Ireland in futsal

Being diagnosed with diabetes can be overwhelming, but living with the condition can also open up opportunities to people that they may never had otherwise. For avid soccer fan, Des Kirwan, that opportunity was putting on the green jersey and playing football for Ireland at DiaEuro – the European Futsal Championship for People with Diabetes.

Futsal is football that is played indoors with five players on each side. It is played on a smaller area than an outdoor pitch with a smaller ball. It is the only indoor football game sanctioned by FIFA.

“I was lucky to play for the Irish futsal squad at DiaEuro in the Ukraine in 2019. As I’ve played soccer for years this was a dream fulfilled. It was such an honour to put on the green jersey,” he says.

Playing football for Ireland is probably the last thing Des was thinking of when he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of 22. Now aged 31 and living in Ferns in Wexford, he recalls that prior to his diagnosis, he was lacking in energy, was always thirsty and was going to the toilet a lot.

After checking his blood glucose levels, Des’ GP suspected diabetes and sent him to hospital where the diagnosis was confirmed. He says that after he was sent home from hospital, he went to the chemist to get the medication he required.

“When I arrived home with this bag of medication, I broke down into floods of tears,” he recalls.

While he considers himself very lucky because he had the support of his then girlfriend and now wife Nikita, his own family and his now mother-in-law, he admits he “struggled a lot over the years”.

“The education wasn’t really there and decent clinics weren’t there or I just couldn’t find them. Now, I attend the



Above Des Kirwan with wife Nikita

endocrinology unit in St Collumcilles Hospital in Loughlinstown. I have completed a DAFNE course and I wear a Dexcom G6 continuous glucose monitor. I now have the education and the determination to have better control over my diabetes,” he explains.

The opportunity to play for the Irish futsal team – DiaEuro Ireland – came up when Des saw information advertised about it by the team’s founder, Cathal Fleming, on Facebook.

“I went along and managed to make the travelling squad. We fought hard and did ourselves proud over in the Ukraine. I learned so much about other people with diabetes from my teammates and that experience will always be ours forever,” he emphasises.

Des firmly believes that with “love, support, education, effort and pride, you can live a very full life” with diabetes.

“If I was able to go back and speak to the Des who broke down and cried when he was diagnosed, I’d tell him, it’s going to be fine, amazing in fact. In the nine years since I was diagnosed I have played for my country, built a house with my lovely fiancée who I then married, went back to education and took control of my diabetes,” he points out.

He urges people to always ask for help when they need it.

“Don’t be afraid to slip up and don’t be afraid to try again. Embrace diabetes and thrive with it. I have diabetes, diabetes doesn’t have me,” he adds.

