



# On the ball

Adam Kavanagh recently represented Ireland in a pan-European futsal tournament for people with diabetes, writes **Max Ryan**

Type 1 diabetes is most commonly diagnosed in childhood, but for some people, like 26-year-old Adam Kavanagh from Dublin, the condition can emerge in adulthood.

Adam was 21 years old and spending the summer in Philadelphia when he began to exhibit symptoms.

"When I came home that August my parents told me I had lost a lot of weight." He also recalls making more frequent trips to the toilet.

"I was getting up to go to the bathroom a couple of times in the middle of the night," he says.

Adam was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes by his GP, who sent him straight to the hospital.

"I did the urine and blood glucose tests with the GP in the morning and by the evening she was calling me to tell me to go to the hospital right away."

Adam, who now lives in Vancouver, Canada, has been a keen sportsman his whole life, and took part in athletics during his time in university.

"I competed in 100-metre and 200-metre events to a decent standard for a couple of years in college and then after I finished college as well," he says.

How has his diagnosis affected his participation in sport?

"I wouldn't say that it has changed – I'm more aware of diet, carb counting and everything that goes into it from a preparation point of view.

"But it certainly hasn't reduced my willingness to continue in sport."

#### International stage

Adam, a keen soccer player, represented Ireland in the European Futsal Championship for Diabetes in Poland in June, finishing as the team's joint-top scorer with four goals.

The tournament sees teams from

around the world compete in futsal, a version of soccer played indoors with five players per team, for the Diaeuro Cup.

"I knew a few of the lads from training with the team before Covid, and we trained a handful of times between lockdowns," he says.

"We were drawn in a tough group with Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. We were unlucky to lose to Slovakia in our first game, and then 4-1 to Hungary and 2-1 to Poland."

Although Ireland failed to progress to the knockout stages, the team played two further matches against Portugal and Bulgaria to determine rankings for future competitions.

"We lost 4-3 against Portugal and I think we took our frustrations out on Bulgaria because we beat them 8-0."

Adam, who used to play soccer for UCD, now togs out for Ares FC, a semi-professional team in the Canadian third division.

When it comes to his diabetes management ahead of a match or a race, he keeps things "measured and methodical".

"I'll allow two hours at an absolute minimum if I eat something beforehand and I'll check my levels up until about 15 minutes before I start.

"I have to determine if my glucose levels are a little bit on the high side, do I take that as nerves or do I take a correction and potentially get it wrong and risk dropping during the match?

"It's a balancing act and you're never going to get it right 100% of the time."

#### Life abroad

Adam says that his diabetes care in Canada is covered by a health insurance policy paid for by his employer.

Diabetes services in Canada are covered through Medicare, a publicly funded healthcare system paid for by general taxation and divided into 13 regional healthcare insurance plans.

However, in many cases, people with diabetes still incur high out-of-pocket costs due to insufficient coverage, according to Diabetes Canada.

Adam will have to wait until he is approved for permanent residency in



Adam (back left) lining out with his teammates from Team Ireland ahead of a match at the European Futsal Championship for Diabetes in Poland in June



Adam with his award for top scorer, with coaches Cathal Fleming and Jose Ferreira



Adam plays soccer semi-professionally for Ares FC in Vancouver

Canada before becoming eligible for full coverage under Medicare.

"British Columbia as a province has a shortage of GPs. I have a doctor who I can go to, but they're not diabetes specific," he explains.

"Thankfully I have healthcare and my prescriptions are covered through my insurance with work."

Continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) are among the diabetes supplies covered by Medicare and Adam says he will look into getting one in the next couple of years.

Adam describes his current diabetes self-management regime as "old school" and uses daily finger-prick tests

to monitor his blood glucose levels.

CGMs are recommended for people with Type 1 diabetes because they can show real-time trends in blood glucose levels and remove the hassle of multiple daily finger pricks.

Adam says that being diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in adulthood is an adjustment, but that it doesn't have to be a barrier to living a healthy, active life.

"It doesn't limit you and it doesn't necessarily mean the end of you wanting to play sport. It just means that you're a lot more accountable for your own health, and you're a lot more accountable for your own work and preparation in ensuring that all of those boxes are checked."