

Tony Gavigan enjoys World Games experience

Contributed by Liam Horan
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A Co. Meath Garda, who received a new kidney nine years ago, has just returned from Bangkok where he represented Ireland in the World Transplant Games.

Tony Gavigan, who lives at Athlumney near Navan, who was one of a 23 strong Irish team, took part in the petanque, ten-pin bowling and golf at the Games in Bangkok, Thailand.

"It was a huge honour. All my working life I have served the green, white and gold of Ireland as a Garda, and it was a great privilege to represent my country in international sport," said Tony, who is a member of Headfort Golf Club in Kells.

Although Tony did not bring home any medals he thoroughly enjoyed the experience and the opportunity. "The Games were so special. It's not about the medals. It's about telling people that you can lead a great life after a kidney transplant. The Games celebrate life," he said.

Without the gift of life he was given when he received his kidney in October 1998 none of it would have been possible. "I was on dialysis for almost two years, and it was just such a relief to get the kidney," added Tony, who won the Longest Drive competition when the Irish team competed in the Five-Nations Transplant Competition in Portmarnock earlier this year.

"When I was on dialysis, there were times when I felt I was dying. I was that sick. Fortunately, I was only sick for two years, and I have had a successful kidney transplant."

For Tony and his family, there was an emotional backdrop to the World Games. "We lost our son Kyle in a car accident in January 1996. He was aged 13, and we donated all of his organs that we could," said Tony, who plays off a 21 handicap.

"Later that year, I was diagnosed with my kidney complaint. Little did we think that I'd need a kidney transplant so soon after Kyle dying.

"It's like being reborn. It's a whole new lease of life. I have a new birthday every year now.

"You never stop thinking about the person who donated the kidney to you. For the family of that person, there is the consolation of knowing that they helped to keep somebody else alive, in the midst of their terrible grief."

Tony urges members of the public to carry donor cards. "Awareness of the need to carry a donor card is very important," he said.

"Only for people carrying donor cards, many people who are now leading a full and healthy life would be dead. It's as simple as that.

Listen to the World Transplant Games Theme Song {audio}mp3/The_Official_Song.mp3{/audio}

For more information on the World Games and the Irish team's performance visit www.transplantteamireland.com.

For an organ donor card free text the word 'DONOR' to 50050 or log on to www.ika.ie for more information.