

**Ireland Manager Martin O'Neill sends good wishes to Transplant Team Ireland at European Championships in Finland as its success continues with more medals on day 2 of the weeklong games**

As Transplant Team Ireland continues in its medals success on the second day of events at the **9<sup>th</sup> European Transplant & Dialysis Sports Championships** in Finland, the dialysis and transplant athletes were delighted to receive a message of support from Republic of Ireland soccer manager **Martin O'Neill**.

The team of 28 dialysis and transplant athletes got off to a great start at this year's Championships adding 11 more medals this morning to its tally of 7 yesterday, and with hopes for more in events to follow later today and during the rest of the week.

Today's medals including, 1 Gold, 3 Silver and 4 bronze, were won in **Petanque** singles events and **three additional Bronze** medals were won in the **table-tennis**. In the doubles table-tennis event newcomers to the team Finian Farrell from Mullingar and youngest member Matthew McNeive (age 18) from Knock each won a bronze. Matthew also won a bronze medal in the singles table-tennis event. He will take part in badminton tomorrow and track and field events later in the week. Yesterday's events saw the team win 2 Gold, 2 Silver and 3 Bronze medals in Darts.

Good wishes have been pouring in for the inspirational athletes, some of which have been posted on the team blog. They include messages from GAA personalities including Alan Brogan, Mickey Harte and Brian Cody as well as the Finnish Ambassador to Ireland, the Minister for Health Simon Harris and FAI's John Delaney who also wished the team well.

In his letter to Transplant Team Ireland, Republic of Ireland soccer manager Martin O'Neill said, "I am so impressed at how you have already overcome extreme challenges to get this far, and you are now ready to compete on the international sporting stage. As someone who has been lucky enough to have spent a lifetime in sport, I know that the opportunity to challenge the very best is what makes you a sporting competitor. Representing your country against Europe's best is something that I have a recent and very positive experience of, and I hope you can take some of that joy that I took from our time in France at Euro 2016. Please

accept my best wishes as all of you fly the flag for Ireland in Vantaa, and I look forward to hearing about your success as you take on the best that Europe has to offer.”

This morning in Vantaa, **the oldest member of the team John McAleer (age 78) from Antrim**, was delighted to secure his first ever medal in Petanque, a **Bronze**, and is hopeful for more success in Golf on Thursday. **John, a kidney transplant recipient**, said “this is the first time I have won a medal in Petanque. I have won medals for Golf at previous European Championships. I am really thrilled to have won it. I have competed twice before in petanque and haven’t won any medals and I’m delighted to have won a bronze this year. I’m having a brilliant time and I’m grateful to my donor.”

In the Petanque dialysis category, age 30-39 years, **Zimele Brown from Galway** (and a native of New Orleans) won his second medal at the Championships, a **Bronze** medal after yesterday winning a Silver in Darts. Also competing in the same age category today and winning a **Silver medal was Lenny Ryan from Tallaght**, Dublin. **Chikoyo White from Balbriggan**, Dublin competed in the 40-49 years old dialysis category and won a **Bronze** medal.

Two other athletes, like Zimele Brown, continued in their success in winning medals two days in a row. **Charlie Ryan, a liver transplant recipient from Cobh**, who won a Gold medal in Darts yesterday **bagged a Silver** medal in the 70-79 year age category today in Petanque singles. **Eddie McAuliffe, a kidney transplant recipient from Kill, Co Kildare and now living in Portarlinton, Offaly**, competing in the younger 40-49 year age category, added a **Bronze** medal today for **Petanque** to his Gold which he won in Darts yesterday.

Defending her winning title was **Bridie Nicholson, a kidney pancreas transplant recipient from Sligo** who was pipped to the post by another Ireland athlete competing in the 50-59 years age category, **Marie O’Connor, a kidney transplant recipient from Lahinch who secured Gold** with **Bridie coming in second place and adding a Silver** medal to a large haul she has accumulate over previous European and World Transplant events over the past decade.

After the competition, **Marie O’Connor** said, “I am ecstatic. This Gold is for my donor. A big thanks to them for giving me the opportunity to be here. It’s brilliant to be part of this wonderful team. It’s great to beat the world champion Bridie. It was a very close match.”

**Bridie Nicholson** said of the Petanque qualifiers and final, “I am delighted to have won the silver. They were all very tough matches. It is a privilege to be representing the pancreas/kidney patients. It’s a time to remember my donor, the medical people that look after me and other members of the team. I’ve met a lot of people at other transplant games events over the years and it’s nice to reconnect with them here in Vantaa.”

DUBLINER **Lenny Ryan**, who won a Silver at the European Championships in Dublin in 2010 said, “it’s great to be successful once again in securing a Silver medal in Petanque. I’m delighted to be here and really enjoying Vantaa.”

**Finian Farrell from Mullingar** secured a Bronze medal with doubles table-tennis teammate and the youngest member of the team **Matthew McNeive** from Knock. Finian said “It was very enjoyable. It’s my first time to compete at the games. I received this medal today for my donor and I’m really happy that my wife, Tina, encouraged me to take part.”

Matthew said after securing his second bronze today, “I’m delighted to have put Ireland on the medals table in table-tennis. The whole team has been very supportive especially team manager Colin White. It’s my first travelling with Transplant Team Ireland but everyone has been lovely. I’m having a great time and looking forward to the rest of the week.”

Transplant Team Ireland which comprises 22 men and 6 women includes 22 transplant recipients (4 liver, 17 kidney and 1 combined kidney/pancreas) and six athletes that are receiving dialysis treatment.

At the previous biennial European Transplant & Dialysis Sports Championships which were held in Krakow, Poland, in 2014, a slightly larger team of 34 athletes took home an impressive medals haul of 18 Gold, 18 Silver and 31 Bronze medals. Transplant Team Ireland was ranked in top three position on the medals table, just behind Hungary which took first place and the host country Poland which came in second.

The 9<sup>th</sup> European Transplant & Dialysis Sports Championships involve close to 500 participants from 25 countries throughout Europe. Every athlete at the Games will either have already received a kidney, liver, heart, lung, pancreas or bone marrow transplant.

The Irish Kidney Association is responsible for the co-ordination and organisation of Transplant Team Ireland's participation in the European Transplant & Dialysis Championships.

The Team will return home to Dublin airport next Sunday. For more information on the 9<sup>th</sup> European Transplant & Dialysis Sports Championships and the Irish athletes visit the team blog [www.transplantteamireland.wordpress.com](http://www.transplantteamireland.wordpress.com) or visit the Games website [www.vantaa2016.fi/en](http://www.vantaa2016.fi/en)

For an organ donor card Freetext the word DONOR to 50050 or visit website [www.ika.ie](http://www.ika.ie) It is also possible to download an organ donor card on smartphones by searching for 'Donor ECard' at the iPhone store or Android market place. Your wishes to be an organ donor can also be included on the new format driving licence which is represented by Code 115

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