



# Daniel James: On this day last year, my heart stopped

March 31, 2016, by Peter McNamara

Last weekend, while in Dublin for the 1916 Easter Rising Commemorations, I took a moment to appreciate my surroundings and, most pertinently, for the life I still have right now.

At 19 years of age, it's strange to say that. But it's a truism, a reality.

Exactly one year ago today, while walking off the pitch after our Cork U21 Football Championship match against Bishopstown, little did I know my life was about to change permanently.

Playing with Nemo Rangers has always been a massive part of who I am.

It was to be the last occasion I'd share such an environment in that context with my friends.

What happened next, for me, was virtually a blur.

Obviously, though, people have related detailed accounts since.

As I strolled into the dressing room, I dropped to the ground in front of team-mates Barry Madden and Micheál Aodh Martin smashing my face off the floor.

Panic ensued.

All I remember after that was momentarily waking up and hearing Tony Nation screaming in my ear to 'Stay with us'. Scary in hindsight.

The next recollection is of waking up in hospital with my chest feeling as if an anvil had been dropped on it. But at least I had woken up.

Others, in similar situations, haven't been so fortunate. What had occurred was that compressions, for up to 15 minutes, were carried out in the dressing room by Bishopstown physiotherapist Ciarán O'Shaughnessy to revive me.

Alongside our team doctor Conall Hurley, Ciarán performed CPR.

When it became apparent the compressions weren't working my aunt, Nuala Carroll Murphy, frantically attempting to control a chaotic situation, called for a defibrillator.

Thankfully, there was one at the venue. Otherwise, you may not be reading this story now.

I was told I woke up at this time with Tony talking to me again but my only response was 'I can't move'.

Apparently, Nuala was like a gym instructor in the meantime practically roaring to Ciarán to keep going with those compressions.

The crucial work with the defibrillator then began.

Outside, three of my best buddies, Jack and Ross O'Donovan and Jamie Philpott were, like all of the others present, becoming increasingly rattled by the situation. They said later: 'It was crazy to hear one of our best friends being shocked back to life'. About as crazy as it was to hear them say so.

We laugh and joke about it now because there's no point in dwelling on it. Or at least that is how we see it now.

Maybe in years to come, the severity of the situation will be even more profound.

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Daniel James, in conversation with Peter McNamara, recalls this date last year when a defibrillator saved his life after a GAA match in Cork city



Maybe making 'light' of that night a year on is our awkward way of dealing with it.

Maybe. Maybe not. After all, this was no ordinary match-night experience for anybody involved. Still, the defibrillator worked. Ciarán's Herculean efforts and that defibrillator saved my life.

Later, at Cork University Hospital, test after test after test was conducted.

However, no particular reason was coming to light for my collapse and heart going into shutdown mode.

The medical staff at CUH, people for whom I have the utmost respect for their professional excellence and handling of my predicament, incredible individuals each and every one of them, were initially puzzled.

Subsequently, though, it was discovered I had a heart defect from birth. Basically, there was a blood vessel on the wrong side of my heart which was stuck between my Pulmonary Artery and my Aorta.

Whenever I had an adrenaline rush, like when playing a GAA match or whatever, the blood wouldn't be able to get through those two major arteries. Over the years it became a clogged area.

And eventually it culminated in my cardiac arrest this night last year.

Open heart surgery followed, a Coronary bypass, to bypass the blockage in my heart.

They couldn't get rid of the scarring because it would have been too dangerous to do so.

They took a blood vessel from my shoulder and put it in my heart.

I was in hospital three weeks at that stage but when the doctors came in the next day to explain the lie of the land another harsh twist was coming down the tracks.

At the height of it all it never really dawned on me that I might have to stop playing football for good.

Until the doctors confirmed as much in that conversation.

This may sound odd, but, for me, that was the scariest moment of the whole experience, more so than the dying aspect of it all.

I felt that I had been robbed of a part of myself.

Obviously, people will say 'G'way you eejit, you're alive'. And that's true.

My family, my father Barry, mother Nora, brother Ian and my girlfriend Kia have been genuinely amazing in this 12-month period.

But the impact it has had on my life, in the year since, has been tough.



I have been a Gaelic footballer with Nemo Rangers since I was four years of age and a soccer player with College Corinthians.

Meeting the twins, Jack and Ross and Jamie to head down to training was standard. Now things are different.

In fairness to absolutely everybody at our club though, I have nothing but thanks for all of them. Amazing people. GAA people. The best kind.

Harry Cripps even rang just the other day to discuss coaching avenues.

There's no sense of isolation because I can't play anymore. There are countless numbers of people in this world in far worse situations than this. Cribbing about not being able to play would be ridiculously self-indulgent.

What I would say is this: Government figures should ensure every sports ground has a defibrillator to hand, especially as sports nowadays have gotten so intense at nearly every level.

Cost should not be any obstruction to that occurring at all.

Of course, a vast number of sports clubs now have them in place. But not all. And everyone should.

In fact, every shopping centre, every town should have one, at least.

Ballinlough had a defibrillator for three years before it was used so effectively on me.

I'd like to think my being here still justifies the expense of that one alone.

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