

The Glen Ellyn Sun

Local teen takes gold at Transplant Games

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By **RON PAZOLA** rpazola@scn1.com

Ian Kamphuis takes pride in his gold medals.

No, the 17-year-old student at Glenbard West High School isn't an athlete in the Olympics, but the games he competed in are just as meaningful.



Ian Kamphuis, 17, of Glen Ellyn takes a break with a couple of his tennis students, 7-year-olds Reid Peterson and Griffin Foster at Memorial Park. Kamphuis recently won a gold medal in tennis at the U.S. Transplant Games in Pittsburgh.

(Danielle Gardner/Special to The Sun)

Kamphuis and his family recently returned from Pittsburgh, where he won a gold medal in tennis at the 2008 U.S. Transplant Games, presented by the National Kidney Foundation.

Joining this year's 160-member Team Illinois, he also took a bronze medal in volleyball.

Kamphuis has been competing in the games since 2002 and in that time has racked up one silver and four gold medals in tennis.

The Transplant Games, modeled after the Olympics, are held every two years in cities throughout the United States. There's also an international version, in which Kamphuis won his first gold medal in France in 2003.

Although he seems to be a magnet for medals, Kamphuis' path to athletic stardom has not been easy.

"The first seven years of Ian's life were precarious," Sue Kamphuis of her son, who underwent two kidney transplant surgeries before his eighth birthday.

Kamphuis was born with end-stage renal disease, which causes the kidney to shut down. At only 22 months old, he was in desperate need of a new kidney and went on dialysis. His father donated one of his own kidneys, but the boy's body rejected the organ two weeks later.

Then at age 7, he received a new kidney from the family of a young man who had died in a motorcycle accident. Ten years later, the kidney is still working, and Kamphuis is living a full life.

"I've been given a second chance at life," said Kamphuis, who plays on several varsity teams at Glenbard West and is giving children tennis lessons this summer through the Wheaton Park District.

The Transplant Games provide a platform to celebrate the success of organ transplantation and call attention to the critical need for more organ donors in the U.S. All participants have received at least one lifesaving organ, including a kidney, lung, liver, heart or pancreas.

The Olympic-style games were held July 11 to 16, when athletes competed for gold, silver and bronze medals in 12 sports, including golf, swimming, 3-on-3 basketball, bowling, track and field, racquetball and tennis. The games attract athletes ages 2 to 85 from all 50 states. More than 6,000 people, including the families of organ donors and more than 1,300 athletes, gathered in Pittsburgh this year, according to the National Kidney Foundation.

"I don't think Ian realizes all of the obstacles he has had, how far he has come and what an inspiration he is to others," his mother said. "I have so much hope for his future."

Kamphuis' success at the games is a flame of hope for other transplant patients and serves as a reminder that in Illinois alone, there are more than 4,700 patients in need of lifesaving organ transplants, according to Donate Life Illinois - a coalition of agencies responsible for organ, tissue, eye, blood and marrow donation. In addition, more than 300 patients at the state's nine transplant centers die each year waiting for organ donations.

Illinois established its new "first person consent" donor registry Jan. 1, 2006, to help save more of those lives by ensuring that a person's end-of-life wish to donate is honored and cannot be overridden at the time of death.

Despite the concern that one day Kamphuis' donated kidney may stop functioning, his mother is grateful for the quality time he has had so far.

"We are one of the most blessed families, there is," she said. "Ian is able to live life to the fullest with the help of a donor family. It's a gift you can never repay."

HOW TO HELP

Illinois residents can join the new donor registry by visiting www.donatelifellinois.org or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ-Tissue Donor Program at 800-210-2106. To learn more about organ donation, visit www.donatelifellinois.org or call 888-307-3668.

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