

It's end of the 2013-14 Weetabix league season and Sam Fitzgerald has just completed his 17<sup>TH</sup> appearance for AFC Rushden & Diamonds Youth under 14's, not the most successful of spells for the Cosmos that season, but one I know for a fact that Sam enjoyed, I had the pleasure of being at several of the teams training sessions that season, shadowing former Under 21's coach Andy Keen in the first few months of his time within the youth set up.

Sam a lad full of energy and as cheeky as you like, always a quick witted remark for every message sent his way, sharp as a razor that boy, not too shabby in the football department either, good touch and an eye for a trick to beat his opponent. Towards the end of that season his mum was noticing a change in mood and temperament, the medical profession turned them around telling them that it was teenage angst causing the changes, there were other symptoms but these too were not picked up on, after a long struggle and pressing by his Mother Jackie, Sam was tested for and had confirmation of an extremely rare genetic condition, Wilsons disease. Here's how the support group we are raising awareness for describe the disease;

"Wilson's Disease is a rare genetic disorder that is fatal unless detected and treated before serious illness develops from copper poisoning. Wilson's Disease affects about one in thirty thousand people worldwide.

The genetic defect causes excessive copper accumulation. Small amounts of copper are essential for the body to maintain its life functions. Copper is present in most foods, appearing in various quantities and this depends on the food type, location where it is grown and how the food is processed. Most people get much more dietary copper than they need and healthy people excrete the copper they don't need. However, Wilson's Disease patients cannot excrete copper.

Copper begins to accumulate immediately after birth and gradually builds up to toxic levels within the body. Excess copper attacks the liver and brain resulting in liver disease, psychiatric, or neurological symptoms or any combination of these.

No matter how the disease begins, it is always fatal if it is not correctly diagnosed and treated."

When you read more about Wilsons it's clear that if caught in time it can be lived with, but failure to spot it in time leads only one way. Sam's diagnosis came too late and now he is very poorly indeed.

After visiting Sam for the first time and listening to his Mum tell me how devastated she was that the medical profession hadn't spotted the signs and that part of the reason for that was the lack of knowledge out there about this rare condition I knew we had to do something to help her and the Wilsons support group raise awareness in our area.

So the youth teams have two aims within the next two seasons, firstly to raise £500 per season to be donated to the Wilson's support group, aiding them continue to offer support to those with the illness and their families, and secondly to increase the number of people who are aware of the signs and symptoms of this rare condition. There is a fundraising page set up at <https://www.goldengiving.com/fundraising/wilsonsdisensedonations>.

Raising money will be achieved through fundraising events, some of which we would like you to join in with, starting with the Man In The Mirror Event - <http://www.afcdiamonds.com/man-in-the-mirror-event> The beginning of our awareness campaign will start with every shirt worn by our youth teams bearing the Wilson's support group emblem, in addition, the First team shorts will also boast the same.

During the season I will bring more information pertaining to Wilsons within the match day programmes, maybe you could spread the word for us after reading these notes?

One final thing of note, on that visit to see Sam, I'm happy to report that he is still just as cheeky and witty as he ever was. He has to communicate through a speech board now, which just adds to the expectation of what he is about to say 😊.

Mark Cullen