

## **January 2008, the lowest point of my career**

In the summer of 2007 I decided that I would diet properly just to see if I would be able to do the hard dieting that would be imperative if I was going to compete in the spring of 2009. I was successful and very pleased with the results. So by July 2007 I had got into the best condition of my life and then took the whole of August off to live in my place in Spain for a month which was brilliant as I have a lot of friends out there. When I got back home in September though I started having stomach problems.

Health is so fragile and I had this illustrated to me in no uncertain terms. Here's a brief version of what happened. I'd just come back from a great weekend away in Early September 2007. I'd stayed in Brighton and spent the Saturday at Goodwood Races. That night I had a huge lobster in a very nice fish restaurant, a nice way to round off a lovely day out. On the Sunday when I got home though I felt rough and I blamed the lobster and thought that it was food poisoning, it got worse and worse throughout the Monday and eventually I called an ambulance because I thought that I had Salmonella poisoning again, which I'd got from eating raw egg whites about 10 years before, at that time I nearly died and was only saved by a brilliant lady paramedic so as you can imagine I was greatly concerned at the unbearable stomach pains caused by what I thought was a new bout of salmonella.

When I got to the hospital they did an X-Ray and it turned out to something even worse. About 20 years before, I'd had my appendix out and a few weeks later I got bowel adhesions, that is when your intestines and bowels both try to grow into the gap where the appendix used to be and end up growing around each other and all of your internal organs begin to stick together, it's horrible, absolute agony and they have to cut you open to untangle everything. So you can imagine how I felt when they said that it was the same thing again 20 years later. They were very good though and put the 10" scar in between the centre line of my abs so that if I ever did go into competition bodybuilding the abs would actually look even better because there would be a centre line drawn down the middle. The scar started from just above my navel and went down in a straight line; it took 32 metal staples to hold it together after the operation. I was in hospital for 2 weeks, I lost over 2 stone as I was "nil by mouth" while I lay in a hospital bed waiting for my body to start working again after surgery, because everything temporarily shuts down with this sort of trauma. Less than a week after I came out I was just beginning to look human again when the small bowel started playing up again so it was back into hospital and back to "nil by mouth" for another 4 days. This time there was no operation, just a return to the pain and suffering that I'd hoped was just a memory. The small bowel apparently repaired itself within those 4 days, leaving me to hope that I wouldn't be "unlucky" again.

I managed to get back into some kind of decent shape by mid November and was best man at a wedding in Mauritius for my good friends Rob and Emily. We all had two of the best weeks of our lives; we did so many incredible things, nothing more amazing than swimming with wild dolphins which is indescribably brilliant. Rob is also a competition bodybuilder and as we were

all inclusive in a 5 star hotel for 2 weeks we really made the most of it at meal times as you can imagine!

I was fine while I was away, but in December I started getting pains again and went back to the hospital 4 different times, until on Christmas Day the pains became unbearable and they took me back in. This time it was a lot worse. I was nil by mouth for a week before they could even operate because there were so many adhesions this time. They had to cut away so much of the bowels that they weren't sure what would happen, whether I would need a colostomy bag for life or even worse whether the internal organs would all start shutting down as the bowels had, this of course would have been fatal. They had a specialist operate on me on Wednesday January 2nd, I had been "nil by mouth" since I got there on Christmas Day. They did the same op as before and also fixed a hernia that had developed in the original scar. In addition to this, they left 3 metres of plastic tubing inside me, running through the intestine and bowels with the end exposed and hanging out of my stomach and attached to a bag, they said I then had to live like that for as long as it took for the new bowels to grow around it and for the stomach to function with any level of reliability. They took the tube out after a week, they actually pulled it out while I was awake and watching, the pain was excruciating. Unfortunately though, the bowels didn't start working again and on Friday January 11th the doctors said that the bowels were probably dead and that as the team were all off for the weekend they would fit me for the colostomy bag on Monday 14th. I would have this for the rest of my life and would never be able to train properly again or ever be the person that I had been for so many years.

I was scared, so much so that most of my hair turned grey overnight. It was a time that I had to decide whether or not I was going to let this happen without a fight, it didn't take long for me to decide what to do. I had been "nil by mouth" and bed ridden for almost 3 weeks but somehow I managed to find some fight in me. I dragged myself out of bed and managed to get into the toilet where I sat for hours willing my stomach and bowels to work again. The big breakthrough came when out of the blue the bowels showed signs of life either on the Friday night or in the early hours of Saturday morning. I was so drugged up I can't remember. They slowly continued to improve and 24 hours later the doctors managed to get me off of the morphine that I had been on since I got there by substituting the morphine drip for a morphine patch which is nowhere near as strong. Apparently the morphine drip was contributing greatly to the non functioning of the bowels but as I had been in such pain there was no other solution. I was still in a lot of pain but they treated that by different non opium based pain killers, they are not as good but as time went on the pain got less and less as the bowels continued to improve.

The doctors said that they wanted me to go home very soon, albeit on the basis that I report in daily or at least be visited by a nurse. The feeling was that after almost 4 weeks I was becoming susceptible to any hospital "superbugs" that might have attacked me. The bowels were improving slowly but surely and as I was taken off of intra venous fluids and morphine on the Sunday they sent me home with a pile of different drugs which I had to take

daily instead. They needed the bed and quite frankly after all that time I needed to be out of there. So life for the next few weeks was just solitude at home, with daily visits from a nurse and regular contact with the hospital if I thought anything was wrong.

In the event I hardly called them, I decided that I had to be a "Lone Wolf" and get myself better before I returned to the pack. I have always believed that solitude builds strength of character and it did. There were low points, when the scar was hurting and bleeding and worst of all when I started to come down from being pumped full of morphine for weeks. That was a bad experience, as the drugs slowly left my body and my own system took over again I was an emotional wreck. Again though, being alone allowed me to get on with it and in time it passed.

I then went on to make a complete and full recovery. The doctors said that they had never seen such a miracle. I was supposed to spend all of February and March in bed but instead I was back working full time and back at the gym 5 days a week before the end of February. I always heal quickly, but even I was amazed at how quick I went from being at death's door to getting back to my old self. On Christmas Day I weighed 17stone 4lbs, when I came out I weighed 14 stone 4lbs. That's a loss of 2lb a day while I was in there, but I put it all back on almost as quickly as it came off and the muscles came back almost instantly. In fact apart from the extra hair dye that I had to buy you wouldn't know that anything had ever happened!

Well actually that last bit isn't quite true. It's what I tell people now and went to great lengths to tell people at the time because I wanted everyone to think that I felt as good as I looked. In truth it took much longer to recover mentally.

The whole stomach issue is an ongoing one however and I don't think that it will ever be right. There will always be a good chance of the adhesions coming back, that's something that I have to live with. Furthermore there is always a risk of hernias developing in the multiple scarring. I had another one, a huge one; open up about six months after the big op and it got steadily worse until they had to repair it by putting a mesh inside the stomach wall. It was just another painful and scarring operation but it was something that I had to have.

These days my stomach looks like a roadmap, but with a good suntan it is reasonably well disguised, and that is a small price to pay for being brought back from the edge of death as I was.

I believe in looking for a positive in everything that happens in life and I believe that these things happen to us for a reason. You can trust me when I tell you that if you really want to take a good look at yourself there is no better opportunity than when you spend a few weeks unable to get out of bed, being fed and constantly drugged intravenously as well as by endless injection, with tubes draining both your stomach and your bladder. Basically you just lie there, hoping that your heart keeps on beating and that your brain stays alert

enough to know what to do with all of the drips, wires and tubes that are running in and out of your body.

I think that it was life's way of giving me a reality check, after all this is something that the doctors assured me can happen to *"anyone of any age at any time"* but it happened to me, a picture of perfect health & fitness. The doctors just said that I'd been unlucky, twice in twenty years apparently, but I think that life was just putting me in my place and making me look in the mirror. On the weekend just before it happened I'd walked about Brighton and at Goodwood Races as if I was bullet proof. Self confidence and presence is one thing but when it turns into arrogance then you do need to be slapped down and taught some humility, I had reached that stage. I generally stroll around with such confidence that people often look and look again, even though they have no idea who I am and I am certainly no one special or famous that's for sure, I guess it must be the spray on T shirts. In the restaurant on Saturday night I spent a lot of time chatting to a waiter who made it very clear to anyone who would listen that he thought that I looked as good as Arnold Schwarzenegger which clearly I didn't. OK, I know he saw a friendly bloke with a few quid and was after a decent tip but it was a lot of fun for me and everyone else there and I walked out of there feeling on top of the world, and again with everyone looking.

So contrast that then with the sad figure that 48 hours later had to be helped into an ambulance, or with the person that a week or so later was two stone lighter, with all of those "look at me" muscles, albeit temporarily, completely gone.

The whole thing puts you into a period of transition. The first thing that you do is to question your mortality, that pretty much starts from day 1, and then when you realise that you will indeed live you begin to wonder about the life form that you take and consider that most of the things that you do are determined by the image that you portray to others. I am blessed with lots of good friends and the party invites and offers to go out still came in after I was out of hospital, even though I was still far from my normal self, but I declined everything and carried on taking a proper look in the mirror, it was far more rewarding.

I remember that during my time in hospital I was only keeping in touch with people by emailing them during the odd few hours when the morphine had taken away the pain without sending me to sleep. The hospital allowed me to have my laptop brought in and I connected it to my mobile phone which I used as a modem, these were the days before smart phones of course. My friends wanted to know what was going on and when I was told the seriousness of the situation by one of the doctors I wrote this and emailed it to them all so that everyone would know exactly how I was feeling.

*They now have a specialist who will operate on me on Wednesday January 2nd assuming that I'm strong enough as I've been "nil by mouth" since I got here on Christmas Day. They will do the same op as before and also the hernia that developed in the original scar. In addition to this, they will leave*

*some plastic tubing inside me with the end exposed and hanging out of my stomach and attached to a bag, I'll send you a picture when I'm able to. I then have to live like that for as long as it takes for the stomach to function with any level of reliability. They will then send me home to rest for as long as I need to. My life will change beyond all recognition and my new life will be as follows.*

*Regular hospital visits for scans and adjustments to the tubes and bag. Work will now consist of me sitting at a desk all day and within easy reach of a toilet. My earnings capacity will be slashed as I can no longer go to sites and do what I used to do. I will have to give up body building. I will no longer be able to drink alcohol. I will live on a whole new diet, mainly of liquids, as I will continue to vomit most solid foods. I will no longer be able to go out to pubs & clubs etc. as my abdomen will be so fragile. I have no idea if or when I will ever be able to have any kind of holiday again. I will need certain drugs daily for the rest of my life.*

*All of this means that I will now be virtually the same as a pensioner who needs looking after all of the time.*

*It was great being "Big Kev" for all these years. Great for everyone that was part of the whole thing, we all had a lot of fun. Big Kev has gone now, and I don't see any way that he is coming back, I hope that you can look at it like I do, and be grateful for the time that I had being someone who was a bit different from the rest.*



I know that does not sound like something that I would ever say or even write but I was in a bad way; how bad? Well here's the only photo of me taken during those three weeks, even now I can't remember the circumstances in which it was taken, I think that I sent it to my friends to make them realise how serious this whole thing was.

It was unlike me to be pessimistic or give up and my good friends told me so in no uncertain terms. I will always be grateful for the verbal slaps around the face that they all gave me. I wouldn't let anyone come into the hospital to see me and they all respected that but they also knew that the best way to bring me out of all of this was to make me fight, rather than show sympathy. They would still refer to me as "Big Kev" or "Big guy" and when I responded by saying that I wasn't him any more they told me very strongly that I would be him again and that they would make sure of that! Real friends, too many to name or embarrass here, but they know who they are and they know that they have my eternal gratitude and my love forever.

It was always going to be a very long road back though, even as I started to improve physically, my mental state was already lagging behind. Here is the last email that I sent to my friends from the hospital.

*The doctors say that they will allow me to come home very soon, albeit on the basis that I report in daily. The bowels are improving slowly but surely and*

*as I was taken off of intra venous fluids and morphine on Sunday they will send me home with a pile of different drugs which I have to take daily instead. They need the bed and quite frankly after three weeks I need to be out of here.*

*The big breakthrough came when out of the blue the bowels showed signs of life on Friday night and then 24 hours later the doctors managed to get me off of the morphine that I had been on since I got here by substituting the drip for a morphine patch which is nowhere near as strong. Apparently the morphine drip was contributing greatly to the non functioning of the bowels but as I have been in such pain there was no other solution. I'm still in a lot of pain which is now being treated by different non opium based pain killers, they are not as good but as time goes on the pain will get less and the bowels will continue to improve so it's worth the suffering for a few more days.*

*The main conditions of my release are that I stay close to a toilet, the bowels are very unpredictable but any action is good action by all accounts. I also have to go back daily for the abdomen to be re dressed. As you can see from the attached photo (which I a bit gory so be prepared) they have taken away all of the various drains but what with the scar bursting too it has left quite a mess that needs properly cleaning and dressing every day. The abdomen is still very swollen but will go back to normal in time. I'm eating again at last, just small amounts of Weetabix & the like, but I've lost almost 3 stone so I'm very happy just to be eating again.*

*I'm not out of the woods yet, but it's looking more likely every day that I will recover from this. I'll keep you informed, but thanks so very much for your support throughout all of this.*

With my body and my mind totally wrecked I had to find a start point to rebuild my life and I looked deeply into what life I had before the whole thing and what of that life I wanted to get back. By doing this I found the beginning of the road to recovery, because when you look deep enough, you realise that the most important things in life are actually the simplest things. You realise that of all the things that you do, the ones that bring you the most pleasure are not the ones that you need to be a millionaire for. Whilst I lay in a hospital bed for all of that time feeling close to death, on the odd occasions when the negativity got the better of me, I played the "24 hours to live" game. I realised then that if I could only do one more thing in life it would not be another expensive holiday or another flashy car, but instead it would be to spend an afternoon in a sunny park eating Ice Cream with someone that I loved. For a long time now I've lived by the saying "You should live each day like it's your last and dance like there is nobody watching" The whole experience reinforced my belief that I'm right to feel that way, but I realised, in my drugged up and totally useless state that there are many different ways to live your last day, and many different ways to dance.

Yes it's great fun to fly to Las Vegas and turn £5000 into £5 and a giant hangover, but you know it's just as much fun, just as naughty, to have fish and chips, covered in salt & vinegar, eaten straight off the paper. The trick is

knowing what really makes you happy, and not being blinded by the adage that if it's expensive it must be more fun, because that's simply not true. I don't know about the best things in life being free, but I do know that when I spent hours and hours looking back at everything I'd done over the last year, falling asleep on the sofa in front of the TV cuddling someone I loved, actually ranked higher than all the glamorous holidays, hotels and restaurants. Do you know I had promised myself so many days of the simple pleasure of a day at the seaside that summer and ended up having none, that won't happen again, I've learned my lesson.

*Taken from "Remain" by Kevan Wilson.*