

Triathlete's blog up for big award

A SOUTHAMPTON triathlete's blog has proved to be a huge hit with fitness fanatics across the world.

Tamsyn Smith whose blog 'Fat Girl to Ironman' attracts around 5,000 visits every month is one of five shortlisted for a prestigious award.

It is listed in the Bloggers' Lounge Awards in the 'best health and fitness' category.

The 37-year-old, who lives in Bassett in Southampton, decided in 2013 to go for the ultimate fitness aim and take part in an ironman, which is a gruelling one-day event consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, 112 bike ride and a 26.2-mile marathon.

She was inspired when she went on a fitness holiday with her husband.

Mrs Smith said: "I was the worst runner there and one of my coaches had to run with me because everyone was faster than me. I was chatting to him for an hour or so, and he told me about all the things he did as he was once overweight and told me how he was persuaded to do a triathlon. His story inspired me. I thought: 'I do not want to be overweight and unfit for the rest of my life'."

As well as struggling with running, Mrs Smith also could not swim and was not an experienced cyclist – so she set herself a five-year target to complete an iron man by the time she was 40, and decided to document her journey to fitness through her blog.

She added: "I thought if I write a blog about it I would feel accountable because you share your goals with other people."

Unlike many of her fellow nominees, Tamsyn is not a professional blogger – she holds down a full-time job as a learning designer at the University of Southampton, as well as volunteering at her running club, Lordshill Road Runners.

Tamsyn said: "It's a real honour to be recognised in these prestigious awards. When I started my blog in 2013, I never thought it would lead to this – I just hoped that it would make me more accountable and stick to my diet and exercise plans! When I get messages from readers who say that my blog has inspired them to take on a fitness challenge, I get a warm glow."

● To read the blog, visit www.fatgirltoironman.co.uk.



Left: Tamsyn is an inspiration to many fitness enthusiasts

AT the age of two, Paul Butler was given just weeks to live.

Luckily one of his doctors recognised that the 'mystery' symptoms he was displaying were cystic fibrosis.

It was a reprieve, but his parents were told not to expect him to live beyond 20.

Throughout his childhood, Paul, who lives with his partner in Bitterne, was given physiotherapy twice a day, a nebuliser three times a day and a cocktail of drugs.

He was hospitalised every time he had a chest infection, which as he had a weak immune system, was frequently.

He accepted that his life would be a short one.

But his attitude and his life changed when he had a daughter, eight years ago.

"As soon as I saw her, I said to myself that I had to be here for her," says the 35-year-old.

"It was a huge turning point in my life."

Sally Churchward



Up to that point, Paul had made some effort to stay healthy, but he realised there was a lot more he could do.

"I didn't have a death wish or anything – I never smoked, but around 19, 20 was a very difficult age for me," he says.

"I came back from a holiday in Magaluf and my doctor told me that my lung capacity was down 30 per cent and that if I carried on as I was, in a couple of years, I'd be dead."

At this point, Paul was still being hospitalised regularly, including because he was coughing up blood and because he had such severe constipation he was on the verge of having a colostomy bag fitted.

But when he was 27, everything changed.



Paul and Amelia when she was a baby

Paul had been told that he would never be able to have children, but through IVF he and his then wife had a daughter, Amelia.

He no longer wanted to feel like he was living on borrowed time – he knew if he wanted to see his little girl grow up, he was going to have to radically overhaul his lifestyle.

He began running to get fit, but was told by doctors that exercising outdoors was no good for him.

"I started going to the gym and never looked back," he says.

The gym became more than a way to keep fit for

lungs are so healthy I will probably never need one.

"I have an 'MOT' every year, when they check my lungs, my bone density, everything, and everything is doing really well."

Paul exercises on a daily basis, fitting it into his routine between clients.

And he keeps his daughter, Amelia, in the forefront of his mind, to help keep him motivated.

He says that for many people, fitness is too much about external appearances, but for him, it's all about his health.

"Unfortunately, some people just want to look good na-

"I came back from a holiday in Magaluf and my doctor told me that my lung capacity was down 30 per cent and that if I carried on as I was, in a couple of years, I'd be dead"

Paul. It paved the way to a new career.

Paul went on to become a personal trainer, and has even taken part in a natural bodybuilding competition.

He is still on a cocktail of more than 30 pills a day, and has to use a nebuliser, but he no longer needs daily physiotherapy, as he is able to do the exercises himself that he needs to help clear his lungs.

He hasn't been hospitalised for more than seven years and doesn't think about predicted life expectancy for people with cystic fibrosis anymore.

"They have changed it over the years. At first it was 20, then 25," he says.

"When it was changed to 30, I was already 32, so I thought it showed I was winning the game."

"I don't think about it like I used to. I just focus on being as healthy as I can."

"At hospital they have to ask me if I would have a lung transplant, if I ever needed it, but they say my

ked, when it should be about your health," he says.

"How well I am is always going to be my priority."

Two years ago Paul took part in a natural bodybuilding competition, to prove that someone with cystic fibrosis could take to the stage alongside other competitors, but he felt it placed too much strain on his body and the necessary diet was incompatible with his needs as someone living with cystic fibrosis.

"I did it once because I wanted to show that I could do it with what I have been through," he says.

He is considering competitive power lifting as, weighing in at 70 kg, he can deadlift three times his own weight.

That is not bad for someone who as a youngster hated PE classes as he couldn't hope to keep up with his classmates.

Despite the difficulties that Paul has faced, and continues to have ahead of him, he

Hospital at forefront of eye condition research

DOCTORS in Southampton spearheading world-leading research into a rare eye condition have benefited from the lion's share of £60,000 annual funding from a leading health charity – it has been revealed.

Experts at Southampton General Hospital are leading research into nystagmus, a condition which causes eyes to "wobble", leading to strobe vision that makes it difficult to see moving objects, recognise faces or perform everyday activities.

Now the Nystagmus Network has revealed that the Southampton team were the largest beneficiaries of the £60,000 in funding it granted to hospitals and universities during last year.

Specialists from Southampton Children's Hospital received £43,000 towards their genetic

research into identifying the cause of the condition.

The amount was made possible due to a large donation from the Giles Warman Foundation.

The funding was also put towards new scanners allowing the team, led by consultant paediatric ophthalmologist Jay Self, take images of retinas in children's eyes to determine diagnosis.

Previous only youngsters over five could take the test but the scanners mean infants of any age can be assessed.

Network president Vivien Jones said: "The projects we have supported in 2015 will all lead to better support for nystagmus patients and in some cases potential treatments and will give hope to future generations of babies born with

the eye condition. Working collaboratively with donors means we are able to put even more money into nystagmus research."

She thanked families and individuals who have supported the group through personal fundraising challenges and added: "It is thanks to them that we can have an annual Open Day to bring people affected by nystagmus together and a successful Wobbly Wednesday, which raises awareness to the general public."

The condition, commonly found in babies and young children, affects around 1,500 people in the UK and is incurable, but if detected early enough it can be treated to ease the symptoms.

The Southampton team has also benefited from donations from the American Nystagmus Network and the Gift of Sight Appeal charity.