



## That's Champion! Mark honoured at awards gala

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**Posted On:** November 18, 2016

A Widnes table tennis ace who received a double lung transplant is the Sporting Champion of the Year.

Mark Allen, who only has 23% lung capacity, won the accolade in the regional Your Champions ceremony in the north west.

It follows the 44-year-old taking gold in both the singles and doubles in this year's Vantaa 2016 European Heart And Lung Transplant Championships in Vantaa in Finland.

That took his gold tally to six, in addition to adding silver and bronze medals to his British titles.

Mark was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis – which caused mucus to develop in his lungs – when he was nine months old. Already challenged with limited lung capacity, he later fell ill with pneumonia while working as an English teacher in Korea in 2005.

It led to him needing a double lung transplant, which he received at The Freeman Hospital in Newcastle but suffered rejection in 2006 leaving him with just between 20 and 25% overall lung capacity.

Mark said:

“The medals were a bonus, but it was great seeing people from different countries all with something in common, some of whom I have known for years, and raise awareness Europe-wide about the benefits of transplantation.

“Sport has always been an important part of my lifestyle and I keep as active as my lungs will allow. Winning medals at the European Games just goes to show people that you don't have to let your health problems get in the way of living life to the full.

"I'm a walking demonstration of just how important and amazing organ donation is.

"I love the transplant competitions as it brings people together. The main aim is to raise awareness of how being on the donor register can make the world of difference."

Former journalist Mark plays at Halton Table Tennis Club, a Table Tennis Ability Club for players with disabilities, where he is coached by club chairman Karen Tonge MBE.

He proudly carried the Paralympic Torch through London on the opening day of London 2012.

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