



## EDTG 2008 Competitor Story: Jens Rikus

Every single muscle of his body is tensed. He winds up and hits a hard ball into the courtside of his opponent. The ball returns short. He jumps forward and barely lobs the shuttlecock over the net. The opponent isn't fast enough and misses it. Badminton is a fast and dynamic. It has nothing in common with a recreational game between friends. For this sport you need power and endurance, a fast reaction and must be sharp-eyed.

You can't see it but Jens Rikus has had a heart transplant three years ago. In November 2004 he injured his knee during sport. Before surgery an ECG (electrocardiogram) was recorded to minimise the risks and complications of anaesthesia. The doctor told him that something wasn't "normal". That was a total understatement. They diagnosed a tumour on his heart – as big as a golf-ball.

It was a benign tumour but inoperable because of its size. At that time Jens Rikus was 34 years old and set on a transplantation list. "I noticed nothing," he says. "I had done a lot of sport as teenager; it became less at university and nearly stopped when I started to work. I thought it was normal that I gasp for breath after running up the stairs."

Rikus was set on the "HU" list which stands for High Urgency. He had to wait in the hospital for his transplantation. There he continued his practise but dosed and under medical control. "I had the intention to be as fit as possible for the transplantation." Fortunately, everything went very fast. Already a few weeks later there was the redeeming call.

He was prepared for the surgery; then, the bitter disappointment – the heart didn't meet all the medical requirements. The transplantation was cancelled. The second call arrived three days later and that time everything went right. No more than four days after the transplantation Jens Rikus was able to walk around and after two weeks he left the hospital and went to a physical rehabilitation clinic. Five weeks later he was discharged.

Shortly afterwards he returned to work. Today Rikus works three days a week as a lawyer and is specialised in business law. He is again as sporty as he was as a youngster. He plays badminton and drives racing cycle. He also often exercises with an ergometer.

Heart-transplanted don't have any neural connections to their new heart – those have been severed during the transplantation. Heart-transplanted have a higher resting pulse rate than healthy persons. During physical stress their pulse doesn't increase as fast as normal. Also their maximum pulse rate is low. However, here helps sport. "Today I've got a resting pulse of 60 and during my exercises I reach the 160 BPM," says Rikus. He assumes that new neural connections have built. The 37-year-old doesn't need so much immunosuppressives anymore – strong drugs which prevents the rejection of transplanted organs. However he must take them for a lifetime and those drugs have rough side effects.

So, what are the goals of this young man? His priorities have changed. "I want to live as long and healthy as possible." His family and his friends are very important to him. And Rikus wants to "advocate for THE cause." THE cause – that's the organ donation. He would like to contribute to give sick people the chance of a new life by transplantation. "Not many people feel as good as I feel today," he describes his motivation. It would be nice if every citizen thinks about the matter and decides for himself. "It's unimportant to me which decision someone makes. That's his privacy," emphasises Rikus. Anyone could be affected and it's just important that everyone has thought about it and documented his decision, for example on his insurance card.

He also hopes for more activity from the government. Many transplant and dialysis patients cannot effort an appearance at the ETDG (European Transplant and Dialysis Games). People who are transplanted are important idols and they should be supported.

Jens Rikus is one of the competitors at the ETDG 2008 in Würzburg. "I'm looking forward to a fantastic week and



to meeting interesting people,” he explains. Which sportive achievements does he expect? “I want to be content with myself. A medal would be great but that’s secondary.

(Text: Peik Bremer / Picture: ETDG)