

Ally McCoist Leads Donor Hunt For Little Jack

[Jan 27 2008](#) Exclusive By Grace MacAskill

ALLY McCOIST has been a football legend to little Jack Rice for all of his seven short years.

Now the Scotland legend could be the hero who helps save his life.

The Rangers assistant manager is begging Scots to join the bone marrow transplant register to give Jack the chance of survival as he fights a rare disease.

Jack suffers from a severe form of aplastic anaemia, which means his body can not produce blood cells to fight infection or control bleeding.

He has been in isolation at the Sick Kids Hospital at Yorkhill, Glasgow, for the last three weeks and doctors say he could die without a transplant.

Ally, 45, said: "Jack is a very special wee boy. His strength and courage are an inspiration and he refuses to let the disease get him down."

"Less than a teaspoon of blood could save Jack and others like him. That's all people have to give."

Ally joined the Anthony Nolan Trust bone marrow register in 1999 after meeting inspirational Scots leukaemia victim Johanna MacVicar.

Johanna persuaded a host of celebrities, including singer Robbie Williams, to join the register before she died aged 27 in 2005.

Her mum Angela now works for the trust, which supports Jack's family while they anxiously await a donor.

Ally said: "Johanna became part of my life and Jack's plight has relit my fire to get the message across.

"I was lucky enough to meet Jack when Rangers and Celtic players visited the hospital at Christmas and was immediately struck by his bravery.

"He is a real character. Primarily this appeal is about Jack but joining the register means you could be a match for anyone in the same position."

One in 50,000 people have aplastic anaemia. Jack's parents - Johnny, 40, and Carrie Anne, 37 - suspected something was wrong when he fell over and developed dark bruises over his legs, chin and arms.

Blood tests revealed he did not have enough platelets, the cells that repair body tissue and clot blood.



He was rushed to hospital last month, where tests revealed he had the most severe form of the disorder. His three-year-old sister Jodi was tested as a bone marrow donor but she was not a match.

Dad Johnny, 40, a self-employed builder, said: "We'd never heard of the disease.

"The doctors told us Jack was a very sick little boy and needed a bone marrow transplant. It was then the shock set in. Jack had never shown any signs of being ill before. Now he's at risk from everything.

"If we touch him he could bruise, if he gets cut the bleeding is hard to stop and his lack of blood cells means his immune system is wrecked, which makes him more likely to get infections."

Jack was given a brief respite from hospital when he was allowed home to Cumbernauld before Christmas.

But he was rushed back in the early hours of Christmas morning, minutes after opening gifts, when he complained of feeling unwell.

Now presents from aunts and uncles lie unopened at home, waiting for his return.

Johnny said: "He opened his Nintendo Wii then said he felt ill. We spent Christmas Day in hospital with him."

On Hogmanay, he started treatment to wipe out his bone marrow and immune system so it can be replaced if a transplant is found.

Only his parents are allowed to visit him and have to wear gowns and masks.

Johnny said: "We had to stop taking Jodi to visit because she always wants to get into the isolation unit. She wants to fix him with glue and a screwdriver!"

Jack now needs a cocktail of drugs in hospital every day and is still highly vulnerable to infections.

Johnny added: "These have been the worst days so far. The drugs made Jack so very ill. He was really out of it.

"We knew the treatment was necessary but it is terrible to watch."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

YOU can join the crusade to help Jack by joining the Anthony Nolan Trust register. Call the donor hotline on 0901 882 2234.

A nurse will test less than a teaspoon of blood from your arm to find out your tissue type.

Your sample may immediately match a recipient, you could wait years to donate or never be called.

There are two donation methods. One involves an overnight hospital stay with cells extracted under general anaesthetic.

The other way coaxes cells into the bloodstream to be collected and requires no overnight stays or anaesthetic.

The Trust's Angela MacVicar said: "The more people who join the register, the more likely we are to save Jack. You might be afraid of needles but so are people with leukaemia and aplastic anaemia."