Rugby Star Gareth Thomas “Forced” to Disclose He Has HIV [VIDEO]

The Welsh sports hero says that following his diagnosis, he met and married a man who is HIV negative.

September 16, 2019 By Trent Straube

Gareth Thomas, a Welsh former pro-rugby star, revealed to the world that he is living with HIV. In a video posted on his Twitter account, Thomas, 45, said he was “forced” to disclose his status before others outed him.

“I’m living with HIV,” Thomas says in the video. “Now you have that information, that makes me extremely vulnerable, but it does not make me weak. Now even though I’ve been forced to tell you this, I choose to fight, to educate and break the stigma around this subject.”

pic.twitter.com/4LOH7yKdlZ

— Gareth Thomas (@gareththomas14) September 14, 2019

Thomas was already a sports star when he came out as gay in 2009, making headlines across the globe. He retired from rugby in 2011.

This past weekend, in an interview with The Mirror, Thomas said that he had been living with the secret of his HIV status for years. Although he reveals details of receiving the diagnosis, he does not share the date. “I had a fear people would judge me and treat me like a leper because of a lack of knowledge. I was in a dark place, feeling suicidal. I thought about driving off a cliff,” he told the paper.

“To me, wanting to die was just a natural thought and felt like the easier way out, but you have to confront things.”

Thomas said he disclosed his status to former sexual partners, explaining, “You have a duty of

care to tell them. I did it over the phone. That was hard." He also said he got educated about the virus.

Since then, he met a man, Stephen, who is HIV negative; the two married three years ago.

BBC News interviewed U.S. HIV activist and blogger Mark S. King about Thomas's disclosure. Watch that video, which includes an emotional statement from Thomas, below and read King's post here.

Outsports notes that Thomas is the first sports star to come out as HIV positive since basketball icon Magic Johnson in 1991, when he was still playing ball, and tennis great Arthur Ashe in 1992, more than 12 years after he retired.

Of course, when Johnson and Ashe disclosed, there were no effective treatments for HIV. That didn't come along until 1996. Today, it is proved that people living with HIV who take treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load not only live longer healthier lives but also cannot transmit HIV via sex. This fact is referred to as undetectable equals untransmittable, or U=U.

On Wednesday, September 18, BBC One Wales will air a special called Gareth Thomas: HIV and Me.

Below is the full transcript of Thomas' HIV disclosure via his Twitter video:

> "Hello, I'm Gareth Thomas, and I want to share my secret with you. Why? Because it's mine to tell you. Not the evils that make my life hell, threatening to tell you before I do. And because I believe in you and I trust you.
>
> "I'm living with HIV. Now you have that information, that makes me extremely vulnerable, but it does not make me weak. Now even though I've been forced to tell you this, I choose to fight, to educate and break the stigma around this subject. And that begins today, when I take on the toughest iron man in the world…and I push myself physically to the limits.
>
> "I'm asking you to help me to show that everyone lives in fear of people reactions and opinions to something about them but that doesn't mean that we should have to hide. But to do this, I really, really need your support."

After Thomas speaks, these hashtags appear on the screen:

#yourraceyourvictory

#cantpassiton

For a related opinion piece in POZ, read Ash Kotak's "Gareth Thomas Coming Out as HIV Positive

Offers Hope.”

For backstory about Thomas’s struggle coming out as gay in an extremely macho sport, watch the below clips from The Ellen Show and Channel 4 News.

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