

Baseball Pitcher Dustin McGowan Creating Diabetes All-Stars!

Written by Mike Hoskins | Published on August 1, 2017

We're past the half-way point in the professional baseball season, following the big All-Stars game in July that's seen as the season middle stop. This year, that big game took place in Miami, FL, which leads us to an interesting "All-Stars" story in the Diabetes Community: Miami Marlins pitcher [Dustin McGowan](#), who's been in MLB for more than a decade and is in his second season as a relief pitcher for the Marlins, happens to have been living with type 1 for almost two decades.



Dustin was diagnosed in his early 20s in the minor leagues, and he's now also a D-Dad, as his 8-year-old daughter McKensy was diagnosed a few years back.

With those personal D-connections, Dustin has teamed up with the [Diabetes Research Institute \(DRI\)](#) to host a diabetes baseball experience called [Dustin's T1D All-Stars](#), where he meets with groups of T1 kids and families and gives them a chance to talk diabetes and baseball, attend a baseball game as his guests, and of course get some actual D-education in the process.

These efforts have earned Dustin a prestigious national baseball award for his actions off the field, and we're excited to share more of his story today. We had the chance to connect by phone recently before he hit the field for one of the Marlins' games.

Interview with Pro Baseball Player Dustin McGowan

DM) Hey Dustin, we always like to start by hearing your own personal diabetes story...

Dustin) I was actually a late-bloomer in the Diabetes Community, as I was diagnosed in 1999 at 21 years old. To be honest, I didn't know what it was. My wife was in nursing school at the time and helped me recognize it and understand what I was supposed to do in living with it.

At the time, I was in the minor leagues and had just gone through [Tommy John \(elbow\) surgery](#) and was recovering. They say type 1 is genetic, but it may be triggered by something specific like an illness or having surgery, so we think that surgery is what triggered type 1 in me.

Your daughter McKensy is also type 1?

Yes, she's 8 now and was diagnosed when she was 5, coming off of being pretty sick. We started seeing the symptoms and it all went from there. She wears both an insulin pump and CGM, and is all "electronized out" when she's putting them on. But it's important, first and foremost, to let her be a kid first before diabetes. Everyone knows what it's like to be a carefree kid and we don't want her to miss out on that experience (because of diabetes). We do the best we can, and want her to be happy and enjoy her whole life.

What kind of diabetes technology do you use?

I wear a pump. When I'm pitching, the only place to keep it is in my back pocket. I'm only a pitcher and not a position player having to run and slide around, so it sits back there and we can keep each other protected. I don't wear a CGM, but did try it. We sweat so much when we're playing, so wearing all of the [Tegaderm \(medical adhesive\)](#) over it would just get too be too much and it kept just falling out. I'm not a big fan of it. Maybe once I'm done playing baseball I'll give it a try again.

Can you share some details on how you manage diabetes during games and practice?

Being in the bullpen and not always knowing when I'm going to pitch, I do tend to keep my blood sugars a bit higher. As a relief pitcher, that time can change and it may be for only an inning or two, or more than that. I always check 2 or 3 times to make sure everything's OK before I go in, because the last thing I want is to go low. I can manage highs out there, but not the other end. Luckily, I've never had the experience of going low when out there on the mound. Plus, when I get going adrenaline shoots my blood sugar up anyhow so I'm always running higher. I might feel a bit more sluggish if I'm running really high, but I am pretty good at 170 or 180 mg/dL.

Diabetes does not impact my baseball, for the most part – especially when it comes to stopping me from playing. I've been blessed enough to play baseball this long, and I can't complain because I'm still able to play and I enjoy it. I'm always counting my blessings and enjoying it as much as I can.

Have you had the experience of playing with any other type 1s over the years?

Yes, I actually was in Toronto with the Blue Jays at the same time as [\(pitcher\) Brandon Morrow](#) (now with the [LA Dodgers](#)). He's actually one of the reasons I got a pump. Before that, I just did

shots for the longest time. Brandon had a pump, and I thought it looked uncomfortable and would be poking and messing with me while I'm playing. But he tried to reassure me it wasn't like that. Then, the selling point was in Spring Training with the Toronto Blue Jays when I met a 10-year-old kid who had a pump, and was telling me how awesome it was. I thought, 'If he can do it, I can't be a baby about it and should go get me one.' Between him and Brandon, that's how I became a pumper. I just saw Brandon again a few days ago (in late July) and we had dinner together. It's great knowing him.

Isn't it great how many diabetes inspirational stories are out there these days?

It is, really is. And that's what I try to do, in talking about diabetes and sharing my story with kids.

On that note, tell us about your T1 All-Stars program?

It all started after I'd signed with Miami last year (in 2016) and we were just driving down the road. My daughter looks up and says, "Hey Dad, doesn't that building over there say diabetes on it?" Sure enough, it was the Diabetes Research Institute. We set up a tour of the facility and after that, my wife and I decided that we wanted some of the kids with type 1 to be able to come out to a ballgame. It was really to help them see that diabetes doesn't stop me, and maybe give them an idea that if they want to play professional sports, they can do it. It's not that big of a deal.

That's a great message... can you walk us through the [T1D All-Stars](#) experience?



We had a small group come out in 2016, and once I signed again for this year I wanted them to come out each month. It's a free program held between the Marlins and the DRI, and sponsored by Insulet (makers of the OmniPod). Kids and their families can come watch a game and sit up in a suite as VIPs, meet with players and talk to them and get autographs, go onto the field for batting practice, and just enjoy baseball while talking a bit about diabetes.

They also break into groups for discussions led by the DRI and health coaches, with diabetes information and even talking about psychosocial issues. It's usually 10-20 people, kids with their parents, from around South Florida and it's brought others from states like Massachusetts and Kentucky. We really enjoy having them out there, and it's a blast for them and me as well.

Most recently, we brought the families out on July 27. And our next ones are planned for August and September with specific themes:

Thursday, August 31

Diabetes Back to School

Back to school is usually a very stressful time. Come and learn helpful tidbits!
Lory Gonzalez ARNP, CDE, University of Miami, Diabetes Research Institute
Trisha Artman, Board Certified Health Coach

Friday, September 29

Diabetes Numbers -- Gauging not Judging

Glucose & A1C numbers are there to guide us; they are not a report card.
Dr. Janine Sanchez, Director Pediatric Medicine, UM Miller School of Medicine
Trisha Artman, Board Certified Health Coach

You can find more information on the [T1D All-Stars page](#) at the DRI.

Do you take part in any other D-advocacy outside of baseball throughout the year?

We do try to keep all that to mostly in-season, because the off-season is mostly time I try to spend with my family. That's when we are doing our best to manage our diabetes privately, best we can beyond baseball. I get that chance to interact and spend time with the type 1 kids in-season with this program, and during the off-season it's more difficult because I'm in my hometown.

Congrats on the prestigious [Hutch Award](#) you received at the start of the year, btw...

Thank you, it was very special and pretty cool. One of the things I said there when getting that honor was, "I just never gave up... Even when it seemed like I wouldn't be able to play again, I kept working hard because I believed in myself."

What else would you want the Diabetes Community to know?

This is a disease that as long as you take care of it, it shouldn't stop you from doing what you want. It's just another challenge. If you want to play college or professional sports, you can. I get messages all the time from parents who want me to talk to their kids, because they're feeling like they can't do something sports-related because of diabetes. You just have to say: I'm not going to let it stop me, first of all. It's just another challenge to the chapter. That helps me push through and work that much harder. I want people understand that it's very doable.

Thanks for sharing, Dustin, and for everything you do to inspire people and raise awareness about diabetes. Good luck with the rest of the baseball season, and we'll look forward to cheering you on!

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