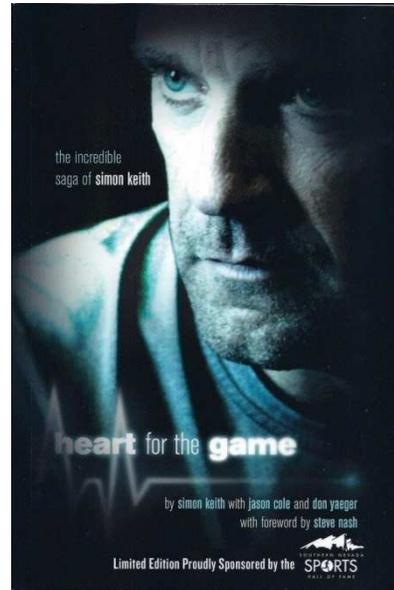


A Review of
Heart for the Game (2013)

Author: Simon Keith
with Jason Cole and Don Yaeger

For a transplant recipient, candidate or family of same, there is nothing more inspiring than to read about long term post-transplant survivors living life to the fullest. In **Heart for the Game** we meet Simon Keith who holds the distinction of being a really LONG term, if not one of the longest survivors – as of this writing 27 years – and going on to be the first athlete in the world to play a professional sport after undergoing a heart transplant. Keep in mind, for heart transplants, the mid-eighties were truly still the pioneering days, not like today's many improvements in surgical procedures and variety of effective meds and lower cost generics. So when you meet Keith from those pioneering days, you say **"Wow!"**



A seventeen year old soccer player died on the field, donating a heart that saved the life of 21 year old Keith, himself a world class soccer player before heart disease had taken him out of the game. With determination and an athletic passion for self-discipline, he fought back to his "normal" playing condition, convincing the coach and University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) administration to allow him to play for two seasons in this rough and tumble sport. One can only imagine what it took for them to take on that obvious risk given his heart transplant background, but he convinced them through hard work and perseverance. Based on that performance, just three years out from surgery, Keith is the #1 draft pick in the Major Indoor Soccer League, adjusting his game to a sport very different from his outdoor playing experiences.

He finds himself challenged by the notoriety of being in the professional sports limelight focusing on his heart transplant story, not his outstanding athletic skills. Searching for "heart anonymity" as it were, suffering years of being used by team management to promote their games with his heart story with constant interviews that detract from needed practice and sleep, eventually he is recognized for his field excellence alone in a different league environment. This will change later in life when he realizes the gift he has to share with those facing transplant through his inspiring long term accomplishments both on the field and off, captivating audiences with his "moments of truth" speeches and daring people to live, in appearances all across the country.

Without giving away too much in this review, look forward to reading Simon's discovery of his soul-mate wife, his meeting with the donor family 25 years after his transplant and eventually finding a calling in working with the organ procurement organization. In post speaking feedback he awakens to the importance of being open to the emotions of life, rather than speaking too factually of his experience that comes across to some as being "callous" in his message, being perceived as "not having enough respect to the donor." Truly transformative in receiving that message, he continues to give inspiring and emotional presentations. He founded The Simon Keith Foundation, dedicated to increasing organ donor awareness and educating transplant recipients and uses proceeds from his speaking engagements to provide athletic training for transplant recipients returning to an active and healthy lifestyle. As if that weren't enough, in addition to such philanthropic efforts and professional soccer career, he is a successful entrepreneur in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Simon has truly taken to heart the advice he was given by his heart surgeon, Dr. Mohsin Hakim, in response to his wanting to know "how much could I really do?" The surgeon's response that freed him for post-transplant life was **"Simon, the idea behind heart transplantation is to live**

the life you lived prior to being sick.” Simon writes, “In many ways it was more important than the actual surgery.”

This is a book that would really appeal to true sports fans, with so much detailed background story that makes Simon’s accomplishments even more awesome and inspiring. Recipients and candidates are challenged in this reading to live their own lives unlimited by misconceptions that often limit through lowered expectations. Families who sometimes tend to over protect their loved one post-transplant would benefit from reading this example of what life after surgical recovery can be like. Don’t get me wrong, every life story has its own unique challenges. Not everyone can be the athlete Simon is, but within those realities there is much opportunity and life potential that opens up when one believes the possibilities that are around us throughout life, especially when viewed through the lens of having faced their own mortality and having survived a lifesaving transplant. Simon inspires us to see beyond just surviving to a life fulfilled thriving with our unique gifted transplant experience.

Heart for the Game is available in paperback on Amazon.com

Reviewer bio: Jim Gleason, receiving his own heart transplant Oct. ’94, retired after 37 years with Unisys Corporation in 2005, is a volunteer leader with TRIO, UNOS and the Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia, as well as a nationally recognized speaker and author. His own book, **A Gift from the Heart**, is offered in thanks to his donor family and can be viewed on-line from his blog at <http://gleasonjim.wordpress.com> or obtained (without cost) on a CD in PC readable format by contacting him at GleasonJim@aol.com