

Irish rugby players support positive mental wellbeing in Ireland with the launch of Tackle Your Feelings

21st March 2016

IRUPA's three year, all-island campaign will see players tell their personal stories of dealing with significant life events and how they overcame them

The Irish Rugby Union Players' Association (IRUPA) in partnership with Zurich today launched Tackle Your Feelings, a new mental wellbeing campaign that will see national and international rugby stars come forward to tell their own personal story of the issues they have faced off the pitch. The first player to tell his personal story is Ireland and Leinster front-row Jack McGrath who speaks emotively about how he coped with the death of his brother by suicide in 2010 and his video is hosted on the new website www.tackleyourfeelings.com.

Research conducted by IRUPA demonstrated that although 95% of Irish adults think it's important for them to be proactive in taking care of their mental wellbeing, almost 1 in 4 (22%) are unaware or have low levels of awareness of the ways they deal with stress or life challenges. Additionally, 71% feel that they would be treated differently if they had a mental health issue and other people knew about it. There is still a large proportion of us who do not tackle our feelings on a regular basis. 1 in 2 (53%) Irish adults have gone through a challenging life event and didn't discuss their feelings with anyone.

This is significant because 1 in 4 Irish adults will experience mental illness at some point in our lives. Tackle Your Feelings seeks to emphasise the importance of preventative measures in maintaining good mental wellbeing. By asking people to be honest with themselves about how they are feeling and to take appropriate action, the campaign aims to encourage people to resolve emotional challenges before they escalate into a crisis. The campaign website, www.tackleyourfeelings.com, will host a number of practical resources to help people develop their emotional self-awareness and proactively work on their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Jack speaks of the anger and anxiety he felt and how he kept his feelings bottled up at first, "It was like a gas valve releasing when I started to speak about how I felt. It can be the smallest thing that you say to somebody that can make you feel better. The longer you keep it bottled up, the worse it's going to get. Nobody is going to slag you for feeling a certain way. It's human nature. After what happened to my brother I think it's really important to be open about mental health." Speaking at the launch, Omar Hassanein, CEO, IRUPA said, "Our campaign is intended to be disruptive in challenging people to tackle their feelings on a daily basis. Professional rugby players are seen as strong, robust and are known for how they protect and manage their physical health but rugby, like everything in life, requires both physical and mental strength. We want to show people that vulnerability doesn't need to be considered a weakness. Rugby players need to work on their mental wellbeing just like everybody else. We hope that Ireland's rugby players, through the Tackle Your Feelings campaign, can play a role in encouraging people in Ireland to be more proactive and comfortable in looking after their mental wellbeing given it is such a key component in the health of an individual. I'd ask everyone to visit www.tackleyourfeelings.com to watch Jack McGrath's video. Jack has been so courageous in speaking

publicly about his and his family's great loss and I hope that others will take strength from it to tackle their own feelings as a result."

Dr Eddie Murphy, Clinical Psychologist and Tackle Your Feelings advisor said, "Tackle Your Feelings is a really important campaign as it challenges us to consider how we are feeling on a daily basis so as to prevent a more serious mental health issue from developing. Just like physical fitness, mental fitness can also be enhanced through practical training. The resources available at tackleyourfeelings.com can help you do this. I'm sure that Jack McGrath's story will resonate with lots of people in the country as the death by suicide rate in Ireland is the fourth highest in the EU."

Elaine Hayes, Corporate Responsibility spokesperson at Zurich, commented, "Zurich prides itself on a commitment to making a difference in the local communities in which we operate, and we are delighted to be partnering with IRUPA, with the support of the Zurich Foundation, to encourage greater debate and awareness of mental wellbeing in Ireland. As an issue which affects such a large proportion of Irish people, mental health is something that needs to be discussed more openly and honestly; be it on the pitch, in the office, or in general day to day life. The individual player stories which feature in the Tackle Your Feelings campaign should inspire a national conversation amongst both rugby supporters and non-rugby supporters alike and keep mental wellbeing top of mind."

Visit www.tackleyourfeelings.com to find out more.

For further information please contact:

Emma Walsh, Wilson Hartnell, E:emma.walsh@ogilvy.com PH: 087 317 0897

David Foster, Wilson Hartnell, E:david.foster@ogilvy.com PH: 086 847 0821

Editors Notes:

About IRUPA

IRUPA, as the representative body for Ireland's professional rugby players, consistently strives to make Ireland the best place in the world to play rugby. IRUPA is working towards achieving this vision by ensuring player welfare is prioritised, the existence of fair and equitable terms and conditions for players, adopting a whole of life approach to player development and ensuring that the profile enjoyed by Ireland's rugby players contributes to the future development not just of Irish rugby but Irish society as a whole. For more information log on to www.irupa.ie or on Twitter <https://twitter.com/IRUPA>

About the Research

This research was carried out online by Empathy Research on behalf of IRUPA between 1st and 14th December 2015. Results are based on a nationally representative sample of 1,042 18+ year olds living in Ireland; quota controlled by gender, age and region with results weighted to the profile of all adults based on the latest CSO data.