

Teacher overcomes serious back ailment to realise his dream

AS an active, sporty teenager dreaming of sharing his passion with future youngsters, Mark Wakeman thought his ambition was dashed when he found out he had an abnormal spinal condition.

He was devastated to find out his spine was rapidly curving to the right due to scoliosis and if it got any worse he would need a nine-hour operation which would involve having metal rods fitted down his back.

Scoliosis is an abnormal curvature of the spine to one side. In people with the condition, the spine bends either to the left or right.

The curvature in the spine can vary from being slight to severe. The bend can occur at any point along the spine, from the top to the bottom.

In the UK, scoliosis affects three to four children out of every 1,000. The condition can develop at any time during childhood and adolescence.

Scoliosis is usually not serious, but treatment is essential. Left untreated, the curvature of the spine can get worse and cause damage to the spine, chest, pelvis, heart and lungs.

After endless X-rays and appointments with various specialists Mark was told that he would need surgery as soon as possible.

Although he was aware that his condition was progressing quickly, he was not in any pain and was desperate to avoid losing his

WHEN Mark Wakeman was 17 he was given what he thought was going to be a 'life sentence' of pain and discomfort when he was told his spine was rapidly curving to the right. Amazingly – six years on – Mr Wakeman, of Biscot Road, Luton, began a job at a secondary school teaching PE two weeks ago, especially as the treatment for his scoliosis only ended last month. SOPHIE SCOTT reports.



ON TRACK:
Mark Wakeman

flexibility. He knew that if he had spinal fusion surgery it would be impossible for him to be involved in contact sports ever again.

Mark, now 23, explained how this outlook affected his life.

He said: "After I had seen the

hospital consultant I slipped into a deep depression. I felt as if I had no hope at all and rarely spoke about my back.

"When I asked what other treatments were available I was told that I was too old and the condi-

tion too severe for a back brace and that general physiotherapy would not work.

"While all this was going on my mum, Kathy, had started to do her own research and had found a Scoliosis SOS clinic in Suffolk that specialised in the treatment of the condition."

Mark had been suffering from excruciating back pain but had completed his teacher training and was applying for jobs. But he was worried his condition would affect his career.

He said: "Although I was very enthusiastic about starting my new career, I was also extremely concerned about the problems I might face teaching young children sports when I was in agony and struggling to move around."

After a consultation at Scoliosis SOS, he booked an intensive course.

Following a long and hard battle, Mark is now pain free and beginning his teaching career.

Mark, who started teaching at a Luton secondary school two weeks ago, said: "I have always wanted to teach. I was devastated when I was told that I had scoliosis.

"I feel like I have been given a new lease of life.



BRIGHT FUTURE:
Mark is now looking forward to his teaching career

"I can't wait to start giving something back to the community. It would be great if we could get all young children to start enjoying exercise again.

"It's so important, especially for

children as they are the future. It's amazing the difference exercise can make, I just wish this treatment was recommended to patients rather than fast-tracking them for surgery."