

Former Hibs striker Simon Murray opens up on son's autism diagnosis

Former Hibs striker Simon Murray has opened up on son's autism diagnosis that's changed him as a father, a footballer, and a person.

Just a few years ago Murray knew little about autism. Today, it shapes every part of his life through the lens of fatherhood.

Since his young son Nova's diagnosis, Murray and his partner have been on a journey of learning, adapting, and embracing a new understanding of neurodiversity.

"Unpredictable is the best way to describe it," Murray shares. "There are constant challenges—sensory triggers like noise or light—but we're learning and adapting all the time. It's made me a better father, and that's helped my football too."

Nova was around 18 months old when the family began to notice signs of autism. From communication challenges to navigating everyday unpredictability, the experience has been eye-opening for Murray.

"I knew nothing about autism before Nova. Now I'm always learning. There's more awareness and better understanding these days, which makes a huge difference to families like ours."

When the opportunity arose last summer to return to his hometown, Murray made the move back to Dundee to be closer to Nova and provide the support he needed—especially as he started school.

“Since coming home, it’s made a massive difference. I can help with the school run, spend real time with Nova, and be present every day. You can see how much he’s come on.”

With around 700,000 people across the UK on the autism spectrum—and over two-thirds of autistic people in Scotland feeling socially isolated—the need for awareness and support has never been greater. Football, as the national game, has an unmatched power to bring people together, create purpose, and foster belonging.

“Football should be for everyone,” says Murray. “There are so many families who don’t attend games because of anxiety over what might trigger their child. That’s heartbreaking—for the kids and the parents.”

Clubs and organisations are responding. The SPFL Trust’s *A-Team* initiative is one example, introducing mobile sensory units and staff training to ensure matchdays are more inclusive. Aberdeen FC has been recognised as Scotland’s first autism-friendly football club, leading the way with quiet areas and speedy turnstile options.

Murray believes Scottish football must keep going further—and he’s happy to be part of that movement.

“We should make it as easy as possible for everyone to enjoy football. Kids on the spectrum deserve that experience too. Football can be a powerful source of confidence, identity, and joy.”

This season, Murray is enjoying one of the most successful periods of his playing career, but it’s what’s happening off the pitch that fuels him most.

“I play for my family now. Nova gives me purpose. After facing real-life challenges, the pressure of a game feels different. Football is an outlet—but also a way to give back.”

As Nova nears the end of his first school year, Murray continues to raise awareness, speak openly, and support other families whenever he can.

“I don’t have all the answers—I’m still learning every day. But if sharing our story helps even one family feel less alone, it’s worth it.”