



Education Department Resource

Outside the Lines

The World of the Gay Athlete

*a discussion guide to accompany the video exploring
homophobia in sports originally produced by ESPN*

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Acknowledgments

Outside the Lines, The World of the Gay Athlete: Discussion Guide is a publication of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). GLSEN is the largest national organization fighting to end anti-gay bigotry in K-12 schools. Established nationally in 1994, GLSEN now has 100 community-based chapters and provides support and resources to over 1,200 high-school based Gay-Straight Alliances. GLSEN strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

GLSEN wishes to acknowledge Pat Griffin of the University of Massachusetts and Jeff Perrotti of the Massachusetts Department of Education for lending their talent, expertise, and time to the *Outside the Lines* project.

Thanks to Craig Lazarus of ESPN for his generous donation of time and support to this project, and for his commitment to developing a tool for increasing awareness.

Special thanks to ESPN for their original production of *Outside the Lines*, and for allowing GLSEN to use this important resource as a tool for teaching acceptance in athletic settings throughout the country.

Introduction

It is hard to imagine a world without sport. Historians speculate that the origins of tennis date back to the Stone Age, when humans first used clubs to hit rocks back and forth over barricades of dirt and stone. By 776 BC, the Greeks had organized a tournament at Olympia, though the only event at that first competition was the ‘stadion’ foot race. When the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock in 1620, they found American Indians along the Massachusetts Coast playing a form of soccer called ‘pasuckquakkohowog’ or ‘they gather to play football.’ Baseball fever exploded in 1846 when the Knickerbockers lost the first recorded contest to the New York Baseball Club at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey. Racism and Jim Crow Laws could not stop Rube Foster from partaking in our national pastime; he founded the Negro National League in 1920. And women defied similar boundaries, first in the 1970s and then again in 1996, when the WNBA was approved as a professional basketball league—this after a gymnastics instructor first introduced women’s basketball at Smith College over a hundred years earlier in 1892!

For thousands of years athletic competitions have crossed race, class, and gender lines in their mass appeal to the public. From peasants to princes, people have embraced sport for physical fitness, the thrill of competition, and a sense of community belonging. Regrettably, however, the playing field has not been equally level for all those who wish to compete. Even as we leave racial segregation and many of our sexist attitudes behind, many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) athletes face harassment and exclusion on a regular basis from teammates, coaches, and teachers. In order to make the playing field a tolerable place, most of these athletes have been forced to conceal their true identities, and to live with the fear and pain of secrecy. In recent years, a small number of professional athletes—including tennis great Martina Navratilova, figure skater Rudy Galindo, and golf pro Muffin Spencer-Devlin—have come out of the closet and become role models for LGBT athletes. When it comes to athletes from professional team sports, however, the silence is deafening. Within the four major professional team sports—baseball, football, hockey, and basketball— only four players have identified themselves as gay, all *after* retiring, and management shows little interest in creating more hospitable environments for LGBT athletes.

Billy Bean, a former major league baseball player, is the most recent player to join the thin ranks of openly gay athletes. In an interview with the *Advocate*, Bean was asked if there would be a day when there are openly gay professional-team-sports athletes. “It would take a triple-crown winner who won the MVP award,” replied Bean. “It would take someone with the stature of Michael Jordan, someone whose job security was so extreme that he could break down the barriers in Middle America.” This statement presents a conundrum. While a high profile, openly LGBT athlete would greatly impact attitudes toward homosexuality within the world of professional sport, what superstar—with so much at stake—would risk coming out within such a forbidding environment? Are LGBT athletes caught in a Catch-22 that renders their situation hopeless? At GLSEN we believe that the answer to this question is an emphatic *no*.

While we support and encourage greater visibility amongst LGBT celebrities, we have dedicated ourselves to a less glamorous and more fundamental solution—education. We believe that the most enduring change will follow when coaches and teachers challenge homophobic behavior on and off the field, institute and model non-discriminatory policy and practice, and openly embrace the individual identities of all students and athletes. Coaches and physical educators are often the most important and influential role models in the young lives of students, and the lessons they teach are as important and frequently more long lasting than those imparted in the classroom. When educators and mentors—from the Lassie and Pee Wee Leagues to the NCAA—make accepting, prejudice-free athletic environments a top priority, we will ultimately delight in competitive atmospheres in which sexual orientation and gender identity/expression cease to be taboo, and grow to be irrelevant. It is for this reason that GLSEN, with cooperation from ESPN, has worked to bring “Outside the Lines” into the hands of coaches and physical education specialists around the country.

“Outside the Lines” will help you to open the dialogue around sexual orientation and gender identity/expression with your students and athletes, perhaps for the first time, and will provide you with some strategies for chipping away at the wall of homophobia that narrows the human boundaries of athletic competition. We encourage you to make “Outside the Lines” a regular part of your educational programming, and to join us in our effort to teach respect for all.

**“Outside the Lines: The World of the Gay Athlete”
Discussion Guide**

Developed by Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Jeff Perrotti, Safe Schools Program, Massachusetts Department of Education; and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

Overall Description: This discussion guide is intended for use with middle or high school-aged youth in classrooms or on sports teams. The purpose of these discussions is to express and examine different perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) athletes with the goal of making athletics a safer and more inclusive climate for all athletes and coaches.

The following activities can be completed in two 45-minute periods:

Ground Rules.....	5 minutes
Warm-up.....	10 minutes
Fair or Foul?.....	15 minutes
Greg Congdon Segment and Discussion.....	25 minutes
Boky Vidic Segment and Discussion.....	25 minutes
Leveling the Field.....	10 minutes

Ground Rules (5 minutes) Identify some group discussion guidelines or “ground rules.” The purpose of these guidelines is to create an environment in which participants can express their perspectives and opinions, feel respected, and explore their own and others perspectives.

- **Respect Others:** You will hear ideas today that may be new or different for you. As you participate, try to take in new information without judgment and to keep an open mind. Make sure that your words and body language reflect a respectful attitude toward others.
- **Speak From the “I”:** Speak from your own personal experiences and set your own boundaries for personal disclosure. Do not judge the thoughts or experiences of others. Use I-statements such as “*I feel...*” or “*In my experience...*” Avoid “*You should*” statements, and generalizations or put-downs of any kind.
- **Ask Questions:** Much of the information we will cover today will be new to many of you. Please feel free to ask any question that comes up for you without fear that it is too “silly,” “stupid,” or explicit. Make sure to phrase all questions in respectful and value-neutral ways.

- **Respect Confidentiality:** Please make sure that everything said in the room stays in the room. When sharing personal anecdotes, make sure to avoid using the real names of other people.
- **Share “Air Time”:** While you are encouraged to express your ideas and opinions, make sure not to monopolize the group’s time, and to help create a safe space in which everyone can speak. No one, however, is obligated to speak. Just listening is okay.

Ask all participants to agree to these guidelines and post them in the room in case you need to refer to them during the discussion.

Warm-up: Stand Up, Sit Down (10 minutes) To warm up the group and get them thinking about the topic and how it touches their lives, read the following statements. For each statement, invite participants to stand up if the statement is true for them. Give students the option of just listening during this activity—no one should be singled out or put on the spot in responding to these statements.

Stand up if:

1. You have been discriminated against or made fun of because of your race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnic background, size, or for any other reason.
Note: While they are standing, ask if anyone is willing to share that experience and how it made them feel.
2. You think every student has a right to come to school and be free from harassment or ridicule.
3. You have heard someone in your school use negative terms to refer to or describe LGBT people.
Note: While they are standing, ask them to name some of those terms.
4. You have a friend, a family member, or you yourself are LGBT.
Note: While they are standing, ask if, without outing anyone without their permission or breaching confidentiality, they are willing to share their experiences.
5. You think a student at this school would be safe (free of verbal and physical harassment) if she or he were open about being LGBT.

Use this last item to explain that one of the purposes of this discussion is to talk about the atmosphere in your school for LGBT athletes. Tell participants that the next activity will help to talk more about this.

Fair or Foul? (15 minutes) Ask participants whether or not they agree or disagree with the following statements. If they agree with the statement, ask them to move to one side of the room. If they disagree with the statement, ask them to move to the other side of the room. If they don’t know they can stand in the middle of the room. As an alternative if there is not much space to move around, students can remain in their seats and indicate agreement with thumbs up, disagreement with thumbs down and thumbs horizontal for not sure. After participants

indicate their agreement or disagreement with a statement, invite some of them to say why they agree or disagree.

Note: Select a smaller number of these statements if time is limited.

1. Gay football players are just as tough and competitive as other football players are.
2. Lesbian athletes would find it easier to be open in this school than gay athletes would.
3. LGBT players shouldn't be in the locker room with other athletes.
4. Having openly LGBT teammates hurts team chemistry.
5. I would feel comfortable playing on a team with an LGBT teammate.
6. Our school would welcome openly LGBT athletes.

Tell participants that this activity will help them to begin thinking about what it might be like to be an LGBT athlete and how teammates and coaches can play a role in making sure everyone on a team feels safe and welcomed. After this introduction, show one of the "Outside the Lines" segments below.

"Outside the Lines" Segments and Discussion Questions (25 minutes for each segment):

Greg Congdon, High School Football Player (6 minutes)

After viewing this segment, invite participants to spend one minute writing down their reactions to the segment or ask them to talk about their reactions to the segment with a partner for two minutes. After this initial time for participants to express their reactions, choose a few of the following discussion questions to rise with the whole group.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Greg's former teammates said they would make it hard on him if he played football again. What concerns do you think some athletes have about playing on a team with an openly gay teammate?
2. What stereotypes about gay men do you think make it difficult for some people to believe that football, basketball, baseball, or ice hockey players could be gay?
3. This segment seems to say that if you are a gay football player in high school, you'd better not come out. Is that what you would advise a friend at your school?
4. What would happen if a gay football player in your school came out? How would teammates and coaches react? How would you react?
5. What traits would a friend need to stand up for Greg? Could you be that kind of friend?
6. Can you name several things Greg's teammates could do or say to show support for him?
7. What could the school principal or the football coach do to help Greg's teammates understand their feelings about Greg's being gay?

Boky Vidic, College Basketball Player (6 minutes)

After viewing this segment, invite participants to spend one minute writing down their reactions to the segment or ask them to talk about their reactions to the segment with a partner

for two minutes. After this initial time for participants to express their reactions, choose a few of the following discussion questions to raise with the whole group.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Boky Vidic decided to come out to her teammates? How did coming out improve both Boky's feelings about herself and the team's chemistry?
2. If someone on your team revealed that she is a lesbian, how would it affect your friendship with her?
3. How would your team react to a teammate who revealed her lesbian identity to the rest of the team? To the whole school?
4. What concerns would you have about playing on a team with an openly lesbian or gay teammate?
5. Boky's coach said coaches from other schools told high school recruits about Boky to scare them away from Oregon State. How would you react if a college coach told you something like this?
6. What do you think is the best way to respond to anyone who makes anti-lesbian or gay comments?
7. How can straight athletes and coaches show their support for openly lesbian team members?
8. What rules should teams have to make sure that all athletes—LGBT and straight—are respected and included?

Leveling the Field (10 minutes) This activity is intended to identify participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions they can take to make sports safer for all athletes. On a large piece of flip chart paper or on the chalkboard, draw a person: a big circle representing the head, a big heart for the body representing feelings, and legs representing action. Give each participant three different color post-it notes. Ask participants to identify one thought they have, one feeling they have, and one action they can take to make their team more welcoming for LGBT athletes. Have them write each of these on different post-it notes. Then have participants stick the "thought" post-it on the head of the picture, the feeling post-it note on the heart, and the action post-it on the legs.

Ask a few participants to read some of the thoughts, feelings, and action steps from the post-its. Invite participants to think about one thing they can do to make their teams safer and more respectful for everyone.

[The 4 sections below are sidebars that will be interspersed throughout the Lesson Plan section of the discussion guide and ordered as follows.]

Jargon: A Brief Glossary of Terms

- **LGBT:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. This acronym is used by many as a way to be inclusive. “Gay” alone does not accurately reflect the varied communities about whom we are talking when we address issues of anti-LGBT and heterosexism.
- **Sexual Orientation:** This is determined by whom we are emotionally and/or sexually attracted to. Categories of sexual orientation include *homosexuals*—gay (usually male), lesbian (female)—attracted to some members of the same sex; *bisexuals*, attracted to some members of more than one sex to varying degrees; *heterosexuals*, attracted to some members of another sex; and *asexuals*, attracted to no other sex.
- **“Coming Out” or “Out of the Closet”:** Being “closeted” refers to not disclosing one’s sexual orientation. “Coming Out” is the process of recognizing and acknowledging one’s non-heterosexual orientation to both oneself and others. Since heterosexuality is often assumed or made apparent through such items as wedding rings, the term “coming out” generally applies to LGBT people.
- **Heterosexism:** An ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community.
- **Homophobia:** The fear or hatred of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behavior. Internalized homophobia refers to the experience of shame or self-hatred in response to one’s own feelings of attraction for a person of the same sex.
- **Gender Identity/Expression:** One’s inner sense of oneself as male, female, both, or neither and how people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, etc. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.
- **Gender Role:** The socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and appearance expectations imposed on women (femininity) and men (masculinity).
- **Transgender:** A broad term used to describe the continuum of individuals whose gender identity/expression, to varying degrees and measured against conventional notions of sexuality and gender, do not correspond with their genetic sex. Examples of people who may identify as transgender include, but are not limited to, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, transgender butch individuals, and transsexuals (only some of whom hormonally and/or surgically alter their biological sex).

Coaches' Scoreboard: How Safe is Your Team for LGBT Athletes?
A Checklist for Assessing Inclusivity

- Do you use or allow athletes to use language or jokes that demean or ridicule women, LGBT people, or other minority groups?
- Do you expect LGBT athletes or coaches to keep their identities a secret?
- Do you stop anti-LGBT language and behavior consistently?
- Do you discuss anti-LGBT with your team?
- Do you respond to parent or prospective athlete concerns about LGBT athletes or coaches in your program in ways that are supportive of LGBT people?
- Have you ever attended sessions on anti-LGBT bias at coaches conferences?
- Do supportive coaches and staff make themselves known to athletes?
- Are any LGBT athletes or coaches publicly out?
- Are resources on LGBT-related topics available for coaches and athletes?
- Do you know of and encourage the use of resources on campus that provide social and support services for LGBT students?
- Has the athletic department sponsored staff development programs on LGBT-related topics for coaches, support staff, administration, or athletes?
- Are sexual orientation and gender identity/expression included in athletic department non-discrimination policies?

From "Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport" by Pat Griffin (see Further Resources)

A Winning Attitude: Tips for Coaches and Physical Education Teachers

- ***Recognize that LGBT athletes exist.*** Don't assume that everyone on your team is straight. Recognize that every player on your team does not dream about dating or marrying the opposite sex; that this may be causing concern and worry -- and watch your language! Never use words like "faggot" or "queer" to demean anyone, even on the other team. Create an open and accepting atmosphere. By speaking neutrally about homosexuality, you communicate that same-sex attraction is natural and acceptable.
- ***Deal decisively with anti-gay slurs and actions.*** Of course you do not permit bias based on race and ethnicity; do the same for bias based on sexual orientation and gender

identity/expression. Don't fear reprimanding a player for anti-LGBT bias ("What will my team think about my own sexuality if I stand up for gay people?"); coaches are in a unique position to teach about social justice and diversity. Most athletes want to respect their coaches for being good, respectful people -- and those who don't need role models who are.

- ***Understand that LGBT people are everywhere.*** If they're not on your team, they're among the men and women who provide medical services, write about your games, clean your uniforms and locker rooms, drive your buses...you get the idea. When you figure that one out of every four extended families has an LGBT member -- brother, sister, parent, grandparent, cousin, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew -- you'll realize that virtually everyone knows someone who is LGBT.
- ***Remember that being LGBT is natural.*** Despite popular myth, sexuality is an orientation, not a choice. The American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association agree that homosexuality is neither a mental nor an emotional disorder. Most LGBT people recognize their orientation/identity at an early age; it is society's actions and values, not their own identities that causes worry and anguish.

From "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Soccer" by Dan Woog (see Further Resources)

Game Plan: Strategies for Transforming Sports

- **Education**
 - Provide sensitivity workshop training for athletes, coaches, and other personnel.
 - Identify campus and community LGBT resources and provide a list to athletes and coaches.
 - Collect a departmental resource library on LGBT issues in athletics.
- **Policy**
 - Adopt or amend non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies to specifically include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
 - Adopt coaching ethics policies that address ethical violations without regard to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.
 - Review department materials and procedures to identify changes needed to make athletics more welcoming and safer for all athletes and coaches.
- **Institutionalization**
 - Create a standing committee of coaches and athletes that focuses on promoting awareness for LGBT issues in athletics.
 - Organize or identify existing support groups and resources for potentially marginalized athletes and coaches.

- Develop an ongoing series of educational events focused on social justice issues in athletics.
- Develop materials for and conduct annual orientation sessions for new coaches, athletes, and families that highlight nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, and coaching ethics policies, as well as resources related to LGBT issues.
- **Connection**
 - Identify ways for athletes/coaches to socialize and get to know others who are different from them, and to learn about the cultures and experiences of others.
 - Identify specific projects related to LGBT issues on which athletes/coaches can work together.
 - Organize intergroup dialogues among coaches/athletes.
- **Visibility**
 - Support LGBT athletes and coaches who make the decision to come out to friends, teammates, and colleagues.
 - Object to anti-LGBT behaviors, slurs, or policies.
 - Support LGBT colleagues and teammates by learning more about heterosexism and anti-LGBT bias.

From “Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport” by Pat Griffin (see Further Resources)

Off the Field: Further Resources

Books and Videos

*Griffin, P. 1998. *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*. Illinois: Human Kinetics.

Louganis, G., and E. Marcus. 1995. *Breaking the Surface*. New York: Random House.

Mosbacher, D. 1992. *Out for a Change: Addressing Homophobia in Women's Sports*. Produced and directed by Dee Mosbacher and Woman Vision Educational Media Productions: 3145 Geary Blvd., Box 421, San Francisco, CA 94118, 415-642-6050 (information), 800-343-5540 (orders).

Pielert, B. 1999. *Kiss My Cleats*. Directed by Beth Pielert and produced by Beth Pielert and Gail Ostrow. Henrietta Productions: 78 Bartram Avenue, Bridgeport, CT 06605, 203-384-9996, fullgail@megahits.com.

Pronger, B. 1990. *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Rogers, S.F. 1994. *Sportsdykes*. New York: St. Martin's.

Waddell, T., and D. Schaap. 1996. *Gay Olympian: The Life and Death of Dr. Tom Waddell*. New York: Random House.

*Woog, D. 1998. *Jocks: True Tales of America's Gay Male Athletes*. Los Angeles: Alyson.

Young, P.D. 1994. *Lesbians and Gays and Sports: Issues in Lesbian and Gay Life*. New York: Chelsea House.

Zwerman, G. 1995. *Martina Navratilova: Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians*. New York: Chelsea House.

* **Available from the GLSEN Bookstore (<http://www.atlasbooks.com/glsen/> or 800-247-6553)**

Articles

Look for the following articles in the *School Safety* section of GLSEN's *Resource Library* (<http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/index.html?section=112>)

- Creating a Safer Climate for LGBT Athletes and Coaches by Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

- “H—The Scarlet Letter In Sports,” an article by NCAA News
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Athletes Have the Right to... by Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Websites

The following sites may be of interest to students and staff interested in getting more involved in LGBT athletics in their communities. GLSEN urges educators to preview each site before recommending it to youth in order to determine the age appropriateness of site content, as well as links to other pages/sites that may be unsuitable for student viewing.

Outsports.com: www.outsports.com (This encompasses sports fans, and teams and leagues and a mixture of breaking news, commentary, features, member profiles, photo galleries, chat rooms and discussion boards.)

Gay.com: <http://channels.gay.com/health/fitness> (This is the sports and fitness page of the larger site, which provides news, entertainment, and information of general interest to the LGBT communities).

Gaywired.com: <http://www.gaywired.com/sport.cfm> (Information about LGBT regional athletic activities and events)

Rainbowlinks: <http://www.rainbowlinks.com/sports.shtml> (LGBT sports resources and thousands of links to LGBT athletic organizations and events)

About the Authors

Pat Griffin is a professor in the Social Justice Education Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She leads classes and workshops on sexism, racism, ableism, heterosexism/anti-gay bias, and other forms of social injustice in education. She has served as an expert consultant on homophobia and heterosexism in sport for numerous organizations and publications. Dr. Griffin played basketball at the University of Maryland and coached high school basketball and field hockey in Silver Spring, Maryland. She also coached swimming at the University of Massachusetts. She was a member of the U.S. Field Hockey squad in 1971. She won a bronze medal in the triathlon at Gay Games IV in 1994 and a gold medal in the hammer throw at Gay Games V in 1998. Dr. Griffin has written a book entitled, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbian and Homophobia in Sports* (Human Kinetics, 1998) and is co-editor of *Teaching For Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Trainers* (Routledge, 1997).

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is the largest national organization that brings together concerned citizens from all walks of life in order to end the destructive effects of anti-gay bias in schools across the country. GLSEN strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. GLSEN welcomes as members any and all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, who share this philosophy. For more information, visit GLSEN online at www.glsen.org or call (212) 727-0135.