

WHO'S ON THE PLAYING FIELD?: A JOURNALISTIC SERIES ABOUT
HOMOSEXUALITY IN SPORTS

Brian Conlin

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the School of
Journalism and Mass Communication

Chapel Hill
2010

Committee:

Adviser: Walter Spearman Professor Jan Yopp

Reader: John Thomas Kerr Jr. Distinguished Professor Richard Cole

Reader: Professor Karla A. Henderson

© 2010

Brian Conlin

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

**BRIAN CONLIN: Who's on the Playing Field?: A Journalistic Series about
Homosexuality in Sports**
(Under the direction of Jan Yopp, Dr. Richard Cole and Dr. Karla Henderson)

The number of openly gay and lesbian athletes has boomed since the 1980s. The Gay Games is one example of this. The first Gay Games in 1982 had 1,300 participants. By 1994, the Gay Games drew 11,000 participants. In three articles, this master's thesis examines various aspects of gays and lesbians in sports. The first article covers the Gay Games. It includes information about its supporters and protestors, a brief history and a look ahead to the upcoming Gay Games and beyond. The second article profiles a rugby player on the Carolina Kodiaks, one of two gay rugby teams in North Carolina. The third article examines how journalists, especially those in sports departments, cover LGBT issues. The thesis aims to explore the issues of the gay and lesbian community as they pursue sports and to show that LGBT issues in sport will become more important as society becomes more tolerant.

To my family who has only ever offered unconditional support for all of my pursuits.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their love and support as I pursued this degree. Without The Monkey's attentive ear and thoughtful suggestions, Mom's encouragement and compliments and Paul and Kristin's baked goods and distractions, I doubt I could have made it through. I am indebted to my advisor Jan Yopp. Her tireless copy editing, thoughtful feedback and consistent encouragement made me a better reporter. I would also like to thank Richard Cole. His passion for journalism is contagious and his teaching priceless. A big thank you goes to Karla Henderson. Her thoughtful insights made this project stronger. I owe a special thank you to Amy Horton, who thinks she deserves half of a master's degree for sifting through many of my first drafts. Thanks also to all my friends and colleagues in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The love, support and camaraderie ensured there were no boring days

And finally, thank you to all the people I interviewed for this project. You took time out of your busy lives to help me with my humble project. I am truly grateful for your openness, honesty and kindness.

Thank you.

.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Methodology.....	32
Limitations.....	33
Article Summaries.....	35
Chapter One – Isolated to Mainstream: Gay Games Gaining Exposure.....	37
Chapter Two – Lost then Found: A Journey of Self-discovery in Rugby.....	52
Sidebar – Fun in the Scrum:	67
Chapter Three – No Consensus: Covering Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sports	70
Reflection.....	80
Works Cited in the Introduction and Literature Review.....	85
Interviews and Other Sources Cited in Articles.....	89

Introduction and Theoretical Justification

Sport measures more than an individual's or a team's physical ability. It can measure progress, and it can be a progressive place. Well before the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Jackie Robinson gained national attention as the first black to play Major League Baseball in 1947. He was not the first black athlete to break into white-dominated arenas through sports: Oliver Lewis won the first Kentucky Derby in 1875, George Poage was the first black Olympic medalist in 1904, Jack Johnson became the first black world heavyweight boxing champ in 1908, Fritz Pollard and Bobby Marshall integrated the National Football League in 1920. Robinson's debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers cracked the dam in the United States' favorite pastime. While 43 World Series were played before a black player entered the league, more than one-quarter of all Major League players were black 28 years after Robinson integrated baseball (Dodd 2007). In 2009, 10.2 percent of players were black. While that percentage shows a decline, Major League Baseball had five black managers and three general managers (Anonymous April 16, 2009).

Women also made inroads in many male-dominated sports in the 20th century, forming soccer, hockey and basketball teams and participating in boxing and other traditionally male sports. The Independent Women's Football League has 51 teams with

1,600 participants. The teams are not integrated male-female. In some high schools and colleges, women have made their way onto football teams, primarily as kickers. Three women have kicked a field goal in college, all since 2003 (Vecsey 2009).

Sports have played a role in introducing under-represented groups to the public, often well before they gained rights politically or legally. Despite being a venue for progress, sport—along with the military—has not openly accepted gays and lesbians onto its teams, although both sports and the military were among the first national institutions to integrate racially (Dreier 2003).

In the United States, gays and lesbians have been elected to Congress and have been successful in business, entertainment and industry, and as clergy members and as educators. Television programs have featured leading characters who are openly homosexual (Dreier 2003).

Even though gay and lesbian athletes are generally not accepted in the sporting world, they still make up a significant portion of the sporting population. The last few decades have shown a growth in the number of organizations designed for gay and lesbian athletes. But an environment of segregation and exclusion still largely persists (Jones & LeBlanc 2005).

This project, a series of articles, will examine public, player and administrator attitudes toward sexual orientation in adult recreational sports leagues and college athletics. The topic is particularly relevant with the approach of the 2010 Gay Games, an international sports and cultural event organized by and specifically for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Gay Games VIII will take place in Cologne, Germany from the end of July to the beginning of August. This project will also consider

the role of mass media coverage of sexual orientation in sports, which often reflects and influences public attitude toward that issue.

Literature Review

Sports have been an important venue for teaching males and females, regardless of sexuality, about competition and teamwork and providing physical and mental benefits (Krane & Kauer 2007). The role sports play in social development is so well-documented that sport researchers no longer need to cite facts and figures to argue this point (Pringle 2009). Students involved in athletics generally perform better in the classroom than their non-sporting peers. Young people involved in sports are also less likely to use illicit drugs, smoke cigarettes or practice unsafe sexual behaviors. “Compared with their non-sporting peers, athletic girls have a more positive body image, are less likely to experience depression, have higher self-esteem and more positive self-worth” (Krane & Kauer 2007).

The structure and rules of sports allow men to form non-intimate relationships. These non-intimate relationships often do not involve any sort of deep emotional connection among the men (Messner 2005). Male athletes tend to define themselves by how they are not feminine. One way athletes attempt to show their masculinity is by remaining stoic (Curry 1991). “In World Series baseball, for example, although displays of negative emotion—anger or disappointment—are sometimes captured by the television cameras, it is a rare sight to see a player smile after he makes a good play.

Even the high fives in the dugout are exchanged with relatively little change in players' expressions" (Lenskyi 1994). Male athletes will also objectify women by talking about a woman's physical attributes and their sexual actions with women in order to show that they are not feminine. As part of increasing their masculinity, male athletes may also see asking for help as a feminine trait, a factor that appears off the playing field and in other aspects of their lives. Curry uses the example that male athletes tend to face more academic difficulties than their female counterparts (Curry 1991). Messner's study (2005) found that some men have unrealistic definitions of masculinity that were traced to feelings of inadequacy and failure.

By excelling in sports and thus appearing masculine, male athletes can improve their social standing, according to feminist scholars. The same scholars note that female athletes do not improve their social standing through sports. Women do not value physical superiority as men do (Curry 1991). A study of rugby players in New Zealand does not consider sexual orientation but shows that the sport gave the school-aged players an opportunity to gain attention from peers and teachers. The study completed and the subjects now adults, these players recall that their participation in sport allowed them to feel normal. Because of these positive social benefits, players associated the game with pleasure (Pringle 2009).

While it is now widely believed that sports provide benefits to participants, Curry notes that some theorists from the 1970s saw sports as a means of alienating athletes from their bodies. "Standardized rules and rigid structure destroy the spontaneity, freedom, and inventiveness characteristic in play" (Curry 1991). When these attributes are lost, athletes view their bodies as a tool and lose the pleasure and self-fulfillment that can be attributed

to sport. As a tool, pleasure is gained only when goals are achieved or contests won. The financial and commercial aspects found at the professional levels “require [athletes] to forfeit the control of their bodies and become ‘gladiators’ performing for the benefit of others” (Curry, 1991).

Historical Relationship of Homosexuality and Sport

Athletes want to be judged by their performance. While scores and stopwatches are unbiased, participants in sport—teammates, opponents, coaches, managers and administrators—have traditionally reinforced the ideal of masculinity and shunned homosexuality (Anderson 2002).

Many researchers agree that organized sport is a “highly homophobic institution” (Anderson 2002). Links between athletics and lesbianism have origins extending to the 1880s. One theory of the origins of sports as a homophobic institution has roots to the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, the loss of frontier land and changes to work and home environments created the idea that the United States had become too feminine (Messner 2005)

In the latter part of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, doctors warned women against participating in rigorous activity because it could harm their reproductive system and have other “masculinizing effects”—such as gaining a deeper voice, growing facial hair, and overdeveloping arm and leg muscles. Instead, women were encouraged to take up feminine sports, such as archery, and to develop intimate bonds with other women (Griffin 1992).

This idea began to change in the 1920s and 1930s as Freud made his “discovery” of female sexuality. Lesbianism was considered a curable disorder. The press warned

parents to keep their daughters away from exclusively female environments. Because women were likely to participate in sport in an all-female environment, an assumption that female sports had a high percentage of lesbians developed. Additionally, the aggressiveness and strength required in sport was thought to make women ill-prepared to be good wives and mothers (Griffin 1992). Women were not allowed to participate in the Olympics until 1928. Six decades later, women represented only one quarter of the participants at the Olympic Games in Seoul. Women who do pursue sports are often considered unfeminine (Pronger 1992).

Sexologists believed that having a sexual desire for women was a masculine trait and female homosexuality was an inversion of the gender role, a male soul imprisoned in a female body. Based on this thinking, medical theorists concluded that lesbians enjoyed masculine things, including sports (Caudwell 2000).

These portrayals may be a reflection of societal views. In the first three decades of the 20th century, a widely held belief asserted that “masculine” sport would “loosen women’s inhibitions towards men.” Additionally, hand-holding, the trading of jewelry, and spending time together was an accepted sign of nonsexual friendship between women. These activities were considered improper in the early 20th century. Many physical education classes in the 1930’s became coed in order to encourage heterosexuality and traditional physical forms of beauty as opposed to the traditional ideals of sport, such as teamwork and companionship (Cahn 1994).

Alfred Kinsey collected data on 5,300 white men in the 1940’s in what is now known as the Kinsey Report. He found that one in eight men had been “predominantly homosexual over a three-year period.” Four percent of males considered themselves

exclusively homosexual; 37 percent of men had an adult homosexual experience that involved orgasm. Four years later, Kinsey published “Sexual Behavior in the Human Female.” This study of 5,900 women showed that 13 percent had a homosexual experience that ended in orgasm. Two percent identified themselves as exclusively homosexual; six percent had been “predominantly lesbian over a three-year period” (Bianco 1999).

Masculinity in sports evolved a bit differently in European countries than in the United States. When the Industrial Revolution moved through England and people moved from rural to urban areas, sport was generally seen as the domain of the upper-class. The upper-class used sports to build character for future roles as business leaders. The British Empire also used sports to provide structure and order to what was considered uncivilized and undisciplined forms of recreation both at home and in its colonies. By the 20th century, the working classes, ethnic minorities and colonials had learned to play the games with skill. As the games became more universal, sports became a means of achieving a “public masculine status” (Feasey 2008).

The culture of Euro-American sport bestows masculinity on participants and those who follow sports (Pronger 1999). “Sports (particularly contact sports) have been described as a place in which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and defined, as an athlete represents the ideal of what it means to be a man, a definition that contrasts what it means to be feminine and/or gay” (Anderson 2002).

After World War II, many men again felt the threat of femininity because they lost their position as their family’s sole moneymaker. It’s no coincidence that in the post-World War II era American football became the nation’s most popular game. American

football emphasizes traditionally masculine characteristics such as power, strength and violence (Messner 2005).

Men see sports as a means of validating male ideals and feeling superior to women. Additionally, male socialization into sports “constitutes training in sexism and homophobia”—a development oftentimes unanticipated (Harry 1995).

This homophobia perpetuates “hyperheterosexuality” as a form of resistance against homosexuality in sports. In organized sport, “heterosexism” (a belief system that heterosexuality is the norm and dominant sexual orientation) and “homonegativism” (discrimination against people who are not heterosexual) exist (Krane & Kauer 2007; Anderson 2002). Heterosexism is built into various aspects of the game, including jargon. Expressions such as “Take defeat like a man” encourage emotional closure and mean “Don’t let it show that your phallic esteem, your phallic self-worth, has been penetrated” (Pronger 1999).

Heterosexuality has also been enhanced as women have gained access to sports traditionally dominated by men (Anderson 2002).

Physical sports enable men to outperform women, thereby dominating them symbolically. If gay male athletes are classified as women and can be as strong and competitive as heterosexual male athletes, then they present a threat. Anderson concludes that gay male athletes who are commensurate with or superior to heterosexual athletes “threaten to soften hegemonic masculinity” (Anderson 2002). For the last 50 years, the “youthful masculinity” of athletes has been featured as part of gay male erotic culture (Pronger 1999).

Who’s on the Playing Field

Few studies, particularly in recent years, have looked at the numbers of gays and lesbians who have integrated sports teams. One fairly current study in The Netherlands shows little variance between the percent of gays and lesbians who participate in sport and those in the general population. Of the gay males surveyed, 63 percent participated in sports as opposed to 69 percent of heterosexual males. Of those participating in sport, gay males pursued their sport more frequently than heterosexual males (77 to 66 times per year). Lesbians and heterosexual women both participated in sport at the same rate (70 percent). Lesbians pursued their sport an average of 83 times per year, about one-third more than heterosexual women (Janssens & Elling 2007).

In a study 15 years ago, Susan K. Cahn determined that because competitive athletics in professional and semi-professional leagues have schedules filled with practices and games, these leagues appeal more to women who are single. Statistics showed that lesbians are more likely to be unmarried and without children (Cahn 1994). She did not make any suggestions on why gay males might be underrepresented in sport.

In the middle of the 20th century, it was generally believed that lesbians were more likely to participate in athletics. Sports became a place for lesbians to create social networks, form both sexual and nonsexual intimate relationships, build a shared culture and express themselves. As the social network expanded, lesbians who were not athletically inclined would be spectators and mingle with athletes after the games. In this way, sports provided a “point of entry” into lesbian culture for the middle 20th century woman (Cahn 1994).

Cahn’s study also noted that the number of gays and lesbians in sport was inconclusive. She wrote that there had been no study that either proved or disproved the

assertion that the percentage of lesbians in sport was greater than the percentage of lesbians in the population. But she noted: “The firsthand reports of both lesbian and homosexual athletes do suggest that lesbians maintained a greater, or at least more visible, presence in athletics than in most other realms of culture” (Cahn 1994). Although 10 years old, a more recent estimate states that approximately 11 million gay and lesbian athletes participate in sports in the United States (Pitts 1999). More recent data were not found.

While the number of gay and lesbian athletes can be debated, the last few decades have shown growth in the number of organizations designed for gay and lesbian athletes. A 1989 study showed that gay and lesbian athletics organizations were formed at a rate of three per year in Southern California in 1976-81. In 1982-86, the rate increased to 4.4 organizations per year. By the 1990s, growth could be seen in the rest of the United States, Western Europe and Australia (Jones & LeBlanc 2005).

Even though the previously mentioned study in The Netherlands shows the presence of a large number of homosexual athletes, there has been no equivalent to Jackie Robinson for the homosexual community in the professional sports arena. Some athletes, perhaps most notably tennis player Martina Navratilova, have come out as they played, but many players wait until their career ends (Dreier 2003).

While many theorize that successful gay athletes actively participate in the four major sports (baseball, basketball, football and hockey) in the United States, the players fear coming out for personal and financial reasons. In the past, teammates and executives have openly ostracized homosexual players (Dreier 2003).

Homophobia in sports is not always hidden inside locker rooms. Because transactions in the major sports are national news, it is difficult for teams to cut players quietly. In the 1970s, the Los Angeles Dodgers suspected that Glenn Burke, an outfielder for the team, was gay. The Dodgers offered him an all-expense-paid honeymoon if he agreed to a “marriage of convenience.” After he refused, he was traded to the Oakland Athletics in 1978. His career ended in 1979 (Dreier 2003).

Perry Deane Young, co-author of *The David Kopay Story*, recalls seeing Esera Tuaolo speak about his life as a homosexual in the National Football League on the Oprah Winfrey Show in 2004. Tuaolo held a copy of *The David Kopay Story*, the story about the first professional athlete to come out publicly and his search for his sexual identity, and said that it saved his life. Before reading Young’s book, Tuaolo considered suicide after feeling isolated because of the homophobic jokes and comments his teammates made consistently (P. Young, personal communication, Sept. 18, 2009).

Young wrote about why he thinks so many athletes are closeted. “These people—especially professional athletes—would lose their jobs and possibly live out their lives in disgrace” (Kopay & Young 1988). In addition to athletes, male and female coaches and officials have been the victims of discrimination based on sexual identity (Bianco 1999; Griffin 1992).

Isolation and Acceptance of Lesbian Athletes

Despite the use of sports as a means of social networking, lesbians tend to feel the need for silence in order to feel safe and welcomed on sports teams. The organizations running the sport also maintain silence about homosexuality. Griffin sees the silence as the most visible sign of homophobia in women’s sports (Griffin 1992).

When Billie Jean King revealed her lesbian relationship in 1981, the Women's Tennis Association responded with silence. When a 1986 *Chicago Sun-Times* article revealed that Penn State women's basketball coach, Rene Portland, instituted a no-lesbian policy, the college sports establishments also responded to the public attention with silence. Based on these reactions, organizations see lesbianism as an issue that can be ignored. For example, few conferences for coaches and athletic administrators organize programs on homophobia in sport. "Lesbians in sport are treated like nasty secrets that must be kept locked tightly in the closet. Lesbians, of course, are expected to maintain deep cover at all times" (Griffin 1992).

Athletes are not the only ones who feel isolated and excluded. Homosexual coaches feel that in order to be successful they must hide their sexual identity. Additionally, many programs hire male coaches for their women's programs in order to combat a team's lesbian image. The hiring of males may be related to a survey of female athletes that showed that 84 percent of their family members had a positive view of a male coach. Sixty-five percent had a positive view of a female coach (Griffin 1992).

Because of the homophobic environment, coaches often deny the existence of homosexuality in their program if asked about it. Additionally, some coaches use homophobia as a recruiting tool. They tell recruits that they have heard about homosexual activity at a rival school (Griffin 1992). Portland, Penn State University's former women's basketball coach, said in a 1986 *Chicago Sun-Times* article that her anti-lesbian stance lost her only one recruit in six years of coaching (Figel 1986).

This homophobic and silencing environment plays a critical role in professional and personal lives. A study revealed that the lesbian label may force female coaches to

leave because of the pressure and stress the label places on them. When women in sports are forced to silence their homosexuality, they often attempt to distance themselves from anything that may label them a lesbian. They may shun friendships with other women and speak openly about relationships with men. This “can devastate friendships among teammates, poison coach-athlete relationships, and taint feelings about one’s identity as an athlete and a woman” (Griffin 1992).

Lesbian athletes and referees have a similar problem. Griffin writes, “Not surprisingly, most lesbians in sport choose to remain hidden rather than face potential public condemnation” (Griffin 1992).

While isolation is a problem in sporting programs, it has not pervaded every inch of the sporting landscape. For example, the University of North Carolina women’s soccer team has displayed an unparalleled dominance, winning 20 national titles. Beyond its success, this team proves that not all administrations are homophobic. One notable anecdote occurred when head coach Anson Dorrance saw that one of his players did not look right in practice. He took her out to lunch and discovered that she had broken up with her girlfriend. He counseled her for three hours. Later Dorrance read books about homosexuality in order to relate better to his homosexual players (Crothers 2006). While the actions are not extraordinary, they show that homophobia doesn’t pervade every aspect of the sporting world.

In order for progress to be made, female athletes need to stand up to the lesbian label, eschew social approval, and focus their efforts on social change (fighting sexism, homophobia and heterosexism), Griffin advocates. Sporting organizations must have conferences and information sessions that provide coaches and administrators with

statistics, facts and ways to understand and address homophobia. Similar training for athletes is also necessary (Griffin 1992).

Studies show that a majority of people who have contact with “out” gay men and lesbians have less prejudice. Therefore, more openly homosexual coaches and athletes will help the gay community. Openly vocal heterosexual peers supporting a player who comes out are essential in the team’s accepting the player (Griffin 1992).

Isolation and Acceptance of Gay Athletes

Despite the homophobia and the perception of masculinity that exist in the media and sport, Anderson says that openly gay male athletes were surprised with how well they were accepted after coming out and credited their teammates and coaches for being open-minded. The acceptance reported may include a lack of physical and verbal abuse. Sports tolerate athletes that play an instrumental role in winning. Outside of the players who help the team win, sports are full of homophobic discourse, including threats of violence toward gays, which prevent homosexuality from being accepted (Anderson 2002).

Results may breed acceptance, however. Bobby Valentine, manager of the New York Mets in 1996-2002, said that baseball was “probably ready” for an openly homosexual player. But, Larry Bowa, formerly a manager of the Philadelphia Phillies, responded to a question about homosexuality in baseball by saying, “If it was me, I’d probably wait until my career was over. I’m sure it would depend on who the player was. If he hits .340, it probably would be easier than if he hits .220” (Dreier 2003).

In the 1970s, Glenn Burke, a homosexual outfielder for the Los Angeles Dodgers and the credited inventor of the high five, a celebratory smack of the hands with a

teammate, was “supposed to be another Willie Mays,” according to one of his coaches. But his career statistics do not stack up to Mays’. Rumors of his homosexuality were well-known in the organization, and his relationship with Tommy Lasorda Jr., the openly gay son of the manager of the Dodgers, was deemed too close (Bianco 1999).

While Burke may have simply failed to progress as many highly touted prospects do, he says that he never felt comfortable in the Major Leagues because of his sexuality (Bianco 1999). Professional clubs do not want homosexual players because they could harm the masculine image of the clubs (Pronger 1992). The discomfort does not always occur in a team setting. Greg Louganis, a five-time Olympic medalist in diving, competed in an individual sport. Even though he was not on a team, Louganis, a closeted gay man when he competed in the Olympics, said he felt like an outsider in his sport (Louganis 1995).

Being openly gay can affect more than an athlete’s sporting career. One professional athlete, who remains anonymous, had a \$70,000 contract but changed his name after coming out publicly so he could get a job as a janitor at a public school (Young 1988). Kopay’s parents blamed him and his choice to come out publicly for his brother’s not getting a job at Oregon State University as a football coach. Kopay tried to convince his mother that his brother would get a job based on his merit. “People think of homosexuality as some kind of curse” (Kopay 1988).

Using Alfred Kinsey’s projections, millions of Americans identify themselves as exclusively homosexual, spending much of their youth, and perhaps their entire lives, hiding it. Not all homosexuals avoid participating in athletics, whether they choose a heterosexual or gay team. Those who do participate in the heterosexual environment

often feel estranged and alone. Pronger writes, “The gay experience of athletics is a lived metaphor for the more general experience of being gay in a straight world, the experience of being an outsider on the inside, of being a stranger in one’s own home” (Pronger 1992).

The discrimination against homosexual professional athletes by employers and sponsors shows how homosexuality is viewed in society. Pronger argues that homosexual males are ostracized because their desires threaten the perception of a gender divide. Society views male homosexuality as a “violation of masculinity, a denigration of the mythic power of men” (Pronger 1992).

As a result, some homosexual men choose to participate in sports traditionally defined as masculine. They can use the sport as a place to hide their sexual identity (Pronger 1992). Rebecca Feasey writes that “football and rugby have tended to present the aggressive, powerful, forceful and stoic player as the very zenith of contemporary masculinity” (Feasey 2008). Others use their experiences to prove their masculinity is at the same level as their heterosexual peers (Pronger 1992).

Still others prove that they can have masculine attributes on a predominantly gay, amateur team. “I do think there’s an overachieving aspect of gay men trying to show that there aren’t going to be obstacles in our way,” said Jim, a member of the Chicago Dragons who was referenced only by his first name. “Maybe rugby is part of that. That we’re showing I don’t care how aggressive, how mean, how ugly the sport is. We’re going to try it and try to win,” he said (Richmond 2009).

Professional athletes—whether heterosexual or gay—play for a paycheck. Amateurs who form the gay teams have no economic incentive. Paul Cannella of the

Chicago Dragons, a predominantly homosexual rugby club, said, “That’s the great thing about rugby. You get to go out there, compete, and be human” (Richmond 2009). The athletes on the Dragons play the game for the camaraderie, competition and social networking (Richmond 2009).

In the News – Journalism’s Coverage of Homosexuality in Sports

A search of newspapers using several databases revealed that newspapers did not start covering homosexuality in sports extensively until the latter part of the 1980s. Most of that coverage was dedicated to homosexuality in professional sports with news stories by reporters and commentators adding observations. Coverage ranged from events generated by gay athletes coming out to comments such as those of Doug Single, athletic director of Northwestern University, when he spoke of tolerance and acceptance (Figel 1986).

Some of the lack of coverage could be explained by psychologist Steven R. Heyman’s position given in an article from *The New York Daily News*. He called homosexuality in sports the last great taboo and noted that a “conspiracy of silence” existed (Meisel 1993). Sports psychologist Dan Ogilvie said of the hypothetical first athlete to come out while active, “The man who could do that would truly have to be an emotional giant. What courage that would take” (Padecky 2001). Mike Piazza, a catcher for the New York Mets, held a press conference in 2002 to announce he was not gay. The fact that the media attention became so great at the speculation of his homosexuality indicates that it would be difficult to be a homosexual professional athlete because of the scrutiny that would accompany it (Brewer 2002).

The New York Daily News in 1993 conducted an extensive study about why it is difficult to be openly homosexual in sports. Some executives quoted in the article said that athletes have enough concerns in their profession. They might become overwhelmed if they had to worry about their perception as a homosexual. Another executive thought an openly homosexual player would get run out of the league by the players. But most of those interviewed agreed that the athletes' fears were similar to those of non-sporting homosexuals. They feared rejection from family, friends and society. They feared jeopardizing their career. Additionally, athletes worried about losing endorsements and the respect of teammates (Meisel 1993). The founder of a gays-only soccer team in The Netherlands said in 1989, "It may sometimes be more a fear of rejection than rejection itself which discourages gays from sports" (Vromen 1989).

Beyond fearing rejection and the loss of a career and money, players spend much of their time in a homophobic locker room (Padecky 2001). The locker room is full of misconceptions about homosexuals. One is that homosexual athletes are not as tough as straight athletes. Heterosexual athletes also fear being hit on by a teammate (Brewer 2002). This ideology is not unique to the United States. In Italy, a gay soccer team plays in Milan. According to one of the players, people fear that homosexuals would attack another person in the locker room as they become overwhelmed with lust. The player predicted, "In Italy, it will take another 100 years to get rid of these misconceptions" (Leicester 2009).

When *USA Today* discussed homosexuality in sports in one of its "Sportsviews" pages in 1991, the newspaper received letters from people arguing that the editors put a liberal slant on the news by running four articles written by "pro-homosexuals." One

reader called homosexuality an “abominable sin.” The same reader believed that some of the poll results were inaccurate. Specifically, the reader disagreed with the results that showed 50 percent of people thought homosexuality was morally wrong and that 61 percent said a homosexual could be a positive role model. He felt the numbers were skewed high. Some readers did commend *USA Today* for writing such an article. But a majority of the letters published gave negative comments about homosexuality, homosexuality in sports, or about the coverage (Anonymous 1991).

A more recent poll in 2005 showed how conflicted society continued to be. Nearly one quarter of Americans surveyed by *Sports Illustrated* said that a homosexual athlete hurts the team. Fourteen percent said that homosexuals should be banned from team sports. This view extended beyond players to coaches. About one-third of respondents said that homosexuals should not be allowed to work with Little League children. Forty-eight percent did say they would admire an athlete who came out of the closet (Goldiner 2005).

While the 2005 survey shows that support for an out athlete would not be unanimous and would have some major, potentially vocal, dissenters, an openly gay athlete could push the numbers toward acceptance. The contact theory states that the more contact with a minority group a member of the majority has, the more tolerant the person in the majority becomes (Overby & Barth 2002; Oskamp 2000). A 2000 study by Stuart Oskamp shows that people who have more contact with homosexuals tend to be less prejudiced (Oskamp, 2000). Supporting Oskamp’s finding, a 2002 study by L. Marvin Overby and Jay Barth reinforces the contact theory. Their results show “that exposure to gays and lesbians has tolerating effects” (Overby & Barth 2002).

Interestingly, Overby and Barth note that whites who live in areas with a high concentration of blacks generally have less tolerance for blacks and are more likely to leave the Democratic party to move to the “more racially homogenous Republican party” (Overby & Barth 2002). To understand if the roots of racism and homophobia are different, more research needs to be completed (Overby & Barth 2002).

Determining the number of homosexual professional athletes is difficult, even among those who cover sports. In general, athletes have been unwilling to admit that homosexuality exists in sporting environments. The Italian national soccer team’s manager, Marcello Lippi, had spent 40 years in soccer when he said that he never knew a gay player. Lippi has also said that a gay soccer player should stay in the closet because it would create scandal (Leicester 2009).

A coach’s performance is largely judged on the number of victories produced. If a gay player can help a team win, then that athlete is helping the coach do the job. “Sexual preference never has had and never will have anything to do with hitting a baseball. In fact, it does not guarantee anything at all” (Padecky 2001).

Journalists have had to become sensitive to language in their stories and commentaries, whether their own word choice or quotes containing locker-room language. If the wrong words are used, the media can stir up frustration and anger with inappropriate word usage.

Pejoratives are used to demean players. University of Hawaii head coach Greg McMackin used a derogatory term for homosexuals to describe another football team three times in a press conference. He received a 30-day unpaid suspension and a seven percent pay cut. By making these remarks, McMackin likely limited his chances of

coaching in the NFL. The author argues that freedom of speech goes only so far (Anonymous August 6, 2009).

Events, not just individuals, drive coverage. Gay teams in a variety of sports have formed. In 1989, a gays-only soccer team started in The Netherlands and eventually attracted enough interest to have games between two sides consisting entirely of gay players. They hoped to play predominantly heterosexual teams to show that they have as much ability. At the time the article was published, the club had not played a predominantly heterosexual team. When it comes to relationships among teammates, the coach said that he had no problem with it (Vromen 1989).

Portrayals in Coverage

Babe Didrikson Zaharias was a multisport star in the first half of the 20th century. She starred in track at the Olympics and eventually founded the Ladies Professional Golf Association. Despite her athletic success, the press attacked her unfeminine looks even as she battled cancer in the 1950s. Articles spoke about her masculine appearance and overtly questioned her femininity. A writer for *Esquire* wrote that he was not sure “whether to invite the Babe into the men’s locker room.” These passages from the press made Didrikson change her clothing and her hairstyle. In 1938, she married George Zaharias, a professional wrestler (Bianco 1999). Stories insinuated that she needed a man to save her. The press “gleefully described how ‘along came a great big he-man wrestler and the Babe forgot all her man-hating chatter’” (Cahn 1994).

Didrikson was not alone as she battled the lesbian label and attempted to change her image. In the post-World War II era, female athletes and their advocates attempted to

create an image of attractive femininity. But female athletes could not shake the stereotype of having a “rough ill-bred ‘mannishness’” (Cahn 1994).

A “mannish” female style was mentioned as a means of identifying lesbians. But lesbian athletes noted that some heterosexual players appeared “butchy” and some homosexual players were “very feminine” (Cahn 1994).

In women’s sports, most audiences prefer female athletes who fulfill feminine stereotypes. During the 1960 Olympics, author William Furlong wrote that sports that didn’t help a woman’s “decorative” appeal were “unwomanly.” Other journalists shared this sentiment. They criticized female athletes who did not follow the maxim “athletes second, girls first” (Cahn 1994).

In addition to audiences shunning the butch image, others in sports have, too. “The butch identity also gives rise to tensions for women within sport” (Caudwell 2000). Caudwell notes that research on sports and the butch label has been limited but says that UK soccer players often dress to avoid being considered butch. Additionally, a survey revealed that none of these players classified themselves as butch and often described how they were not butch (Caudwell 2000). Despite the differences among appearance of the athletes, Euro-American lesbian culture has valued the power of the athletic female body (Pronger 1999).

Researchers have also examined media coverage of homosexuality in sports. Authors agree that professional sports leagues have closeted athletes who fear coming out for a variety of reasons. At the professional level, athletes fear coming out because of a loss of sponsorships. Traditionally, male athletes who appear masculine and female athletes who appear feminine are rewarded with more endorsements because they are

more marketable. Low-profile athletes risk getting cut from their team even if they are only suspected of being gay.

Media appealed to the insecurities and ideals of masculinity, according to a 1991 study. Media portrayed Nolan Ryan, a Major League pitcher, as the consummate athletic hero and symbol of hegemonic masculinity, “the culturally idealized form of masculine character” (Trujillo 1991). The media reinforced this image by classifying Ryan as a “power pitcher” and by lauding his toughness. His accomplishments were attributed to having a terrific work ethic. Through his hard work, Ryan matched the ideals of the male worker in an industrial capitalist society (Trujillo 1991).

While Ryan’s masculinity earned sponsorships, articles written about female athletes tended to speak about the athlete’s husband and children. Such articles seldom appeared about male athletes, creating a double standard for lesbians because speaking about their same-sex relationships was considered improper. For example, Martina Navratilova received criticism from Margaret Court, a former professional tennis player, for hugging her partner after winning the 1990 Wimbledon Championship (Griffin 1992).

Several studies conclude that athletic and muscular bodies in women have become desirable, leading to more explicit presentations of female athletes. Female athletes, including LPGA golfers in 1989, posed in swimsuits to market their sport. Double entendres and sexual innuendo have been used to sell college sports teams (Griffin 1992). Female athletes have continued to be featured in men’s magazines.

At the same time, more women are participating in sports considered masculine, such as soccer, rugby and boxing. Perhaps as a result of these marketing campaigns and greater involvement in traditionally masculine sports by females, the once idealized lean

body is no longer as attractive; developed muscles are an important factor in a woman's attractiveness (Caudwell 2000).

Marketing Both Ways

While muscular bodies in women may be desirable, female professional athletes still present themselves as heterosexual, or they risk losing sponsorships (Dreier 2003). When Martina Navratilova admitted that she was bisexual, she lost endorsement money even though she maintained her international popularity (Meisel 1993; Spander 1991).

A more recent example is professional surfer Amee Donohoe. Donohoe cannot find a sponsor, and it is not because she spends more time in the water than on her board. She is ranked fifth in the world. Every other woman on the Surfing Professionals Women's World Tour has at least one sponsor. "A lot of girls were making a lot of money off surfing, through sponsorship," Donohoe said in an interview. "One of the main reasons was they were the typical surfer—long blond hair, blue eyes—and they were straight." Donohoe had a sponsor but was dropped because she shaved her head and became the only openly lesbian surfer who was "visually identifiable as queer." By losing her sponsorship, she earns only enough money to cover her travel expenses (Kendall 2009).

Fifteen years before the article about Donohoe, Bill Reel, a columnist for *Newsday*, asked if sexuality belonged in sports. Reel provides two anecdotes of a gay man and a heterosexual woman following sports because of the sexual attractions they had toward the players. The previews of the 1994 Gay Games in *The Village Voice* and *Out* magazine reflect this. Reel wrote, "Lady flag football players are featured cavorting under the shower. Erotic is the word for this layout. It's bolder than the *Sports Illustrated*

swimsuit issue.” Reel writes that the Gay Games should be about competition, sportsmanship and personal achievement (Reel 1994).

Assuming that Reel feels that all sporting events should be about things other than sexuality, Donohoe proves that lesbians can compete and succeed but face disadvantages. The lack of sponsorships surely hurts more than Donohoe’s bank account. Without money and equipment from sponsors, she will use inferior equipment and endure less comfortable travel arrangements. Both of these could affect her performance.

Donohoe’s image most likely does not appeal to sponsors because most sponsors have believed it doesn’t appeal to audiences. Therefore, advertisers give more endorsements to women who fulfill social expectations of what a woman should be (Krane & Kauer 2007). If a woman fulfills these social expectations, she could be classified as hyperfeminine.

Hyperfemininity is defined as “an exaggerated attitudinal adherence to a stereotypic feminine gender role, particularly as it applies to heterosexual sexual relationships” (Murnen 1998). Hyperfemininity is believed to develop in patriarchal societies that reward women for being sexual objects. Murnen contends that women in North America live in this type of society. The rewards gained through sexual objectification do not come without hazards. Sexual objectification combined with sexual aggression toward women can result in women being considered a second-class group. Murnen also reports that hyperfeminine women are more likely to report alienation and have anxiety and high levels of sensitivity (Murnen 1998).

Some believe media are to blame for the rise of hyperfemininity in sports. In the 1990s, sports journalists “developed the draw of figure skating at the Winter Olympics

and women's gymnastics in the Summer Olympics" (Burstyn 1999). This draw has resulted in the creation of large groups of people following these "hyperfeminine sports" (Burstyn 1999). When the media shows women as hyperfeminine, it implies that the hyperfeminine look and hyperfeminine behavior is normal (Duncan 2006).

Another study showed that the media have increased its coverage of "sex-appropriate" sports. This behavior reinforces the ideals of feminine beauty and makes women see an association between this ideal and sports. The author cites figure skating and gymnastics as two sports that reinforce this association. As the two sports gained more media exposure, the ideals for a woman's body changed. In the 1950s, the ideal female body was curvaceous. In the 1990s, the ideal had transformed to a lean body (Burstyn 1999).

The pressure may also come from sources within the sport. A coach of a university volleyball team in British Columbia mandated that his female players grow their hair, wear it in a ponytail and have ribbons in it. Helen Jefferson Lenskyi wrote that the coach sent a clear message: the athletes must present themselves as heterosexuals. A hyperfeminine image is a way to accomplish this and market the sport (Lenskyi 1994).

"With the gains of the past two decades in terms of legislation and more liberal societal attitudes, there is somewhat less pressure on female athletes to present themselves as 'hyperfeminine' to assert their heterosexual identity in the face of homophobic innuendos" (Lenskyi 1994). It is possible for lesbians to adopt a hyperfeminine style to threaten conventional views of femininity (Lenskyi 1994).

An effeminate man could be as unappealing to advertisers as a masculine woman. "Advertising is a heterosexual world," Debbie Spander, a journalist for the *Sacramento*

Bee, said. Corporations will not sign athletes suspected of being homosexual or men with effeminate qualities to endorse its products. Daley Thompson, an Olympic decathlete, wore a T-shirt that made reference to Carl Lewis' being gay. Even though Lewis denied it and won six Olympic gold medals, he (Lewis) received no major endorsements in the United States (Spander 1991).

While some companies are concerned about how endorsements will affect product popularity, others are pursuing effective marketing to gays and lesbians in the United States. Companies pursue this market for the potential to tap into a \$514 billion market, according to Overlooked Opinions, a Chicago marketing research company. In addition to the money, research shows a high level of brand loyalty and recall among gay and lesbian athletes. Some marketing has been a direct result of the launch of the Gay Games in the early 1980s. At the 1994 Gay Games in New York, 92.3 percent of study participants said that they would be more likely to purchase the products advertised there (Pitts 1999).

Advertisers are seizing this opportunity. The amount of money being spent on gay and lesbian athletics for advertising is increasing. This is significant because “advertisements offer rare opportunities for understanding important trends associated with corporate logic and consumer tastes on the one hand, and the cultural politics of representation on the other” (Jones and Le Blanc 2005). According to studies conducted in the mid and late 1990s, advertisers began targeting gay consumers. They developed advertisements featuring gay and lesbian consumers. Some companies used gay media to advertise their products. A few companies used “definitive homosexual imagery” in advertising to general audiences (Jones and LeBlanc 2005).

Absolut Vodka and the German BLU publishing group have announced partnerships with Gay Games VIII in 2010. These companies also created a scholarship program that provides funds to LGBT athletes and artists from Eastern Europe (Anonymous 2009).

With gay sports becoming more popular, there has been considerable growth in the amount of sports, recreation and fitness equipment being purchased by gays and lesbians and gay and lesbian sports organizations in most major U.S. cities and in other countries (Vroman 1989, Pitts 1999). This growth also paralleled the popularity of the 1994 Gay Games, which had the second-most participants of any sporting event in the 1990s, behind only the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The 1994 Gay Games had nearly 11,000 participants, 7,000 workers, 40 countries represented, 31 sporting events, and one million spectators. This resulted in a multimillion-dollar impact on the economy. Gay Games I in 1982 had 1,300 participants. The 1986 and 1990 Gay Games had 3,600 and 7,200 participants, respectively. This increased success has led travel companies to advertise their travel packages for the Gay Games one year in advance (Pitts 1999).

To encourage self-discovery and because many gay and lesbian athletes had not found a haven in sports, Dr. Tom Waddell, an Olympic decathlete, organized the Gay Olympics in San Francisco in 1982. The event was designed to allow athletes, both homosexual and heterosexual, to compete in an open environment. Now known as the Gay Games due to a lawsuit heard by the Supreme Court and filed by the United States Olympic Committee that challenged the use of the word "Olympics," the quadrennial competition has become an international event (Bianco 1999).

The Gay Games have drawn attention from thousands of gay and lesbian athletes around the world, both amateur and professional. Olympian Greg Louganis participated in the Gay Games IV in 1994. Held in New York City, the Games had an environment that Louganis described as supportive and welcoming. “I could be myself and not worry about being judged,” Louganis wrote in his autobiography. “That was incredibly liberating” (Louganis 1995). Louganis felt so comfortable in the environment that he announced publicly that he was gay for the first time. “During my time in New York, I was welcomed as warmly as I’ve ever been, and for the first time, I was welcomed as an openly gay athlete. It was a thrill for me, and that experience made me realize how important it is for athletes to feel welcome for who they are” (Louganis 1995).

Gay Integration into Sports Today

In the preface of *The David Kopay Story*, Young writes that after knowing Kopay for months he refused to toss a football with the former NFL player “with a vehemence that amazed me.” This inspired reflection (Kopay 1988).

“I was forced to consider the possibility that I was repressing a far more competitive spirit than those who risked actual defeat on the playing fields. I don’t see that an arrogant male writer is any different in his macho poses than his counterpart in professional sports” (Kopay 1988).

After baseball was integrated, Martin Luther King Jr. walked up to Don Newcombe, a black pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and said, “You’ll never know what you and Jackie and Roy [Campanella] did to make it possible for me to do my job.” Just like with racial integration, it will take more than one heroic individual to change the country’s attitude about homosexual athletes in sport. Robinson had the support of his

organization, blacks and even some whites. For a similar change to occur, a gay athlete must have similar support (Dreier 2003).

That time may be coming. A 2001 poll by ESPN showed that only 17 percent of people would turn against an openly homosexual player on their favorite team. Sixty-three percent said it would make no difference, and 20 percent said they would become a bigger fan. Dreier predicted there would be an openly gay baseball player in the Major Leagues by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Dreier's prediction is off—the 2009 season has ended--but he notes that an openly gay player would have profound effects on society (Dreier 2003).

While progress seems to be creeping forward, new issues need to be addressed. In August 2009, the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) ruled that 18-year-old South African sprinter Caster Semenya, who won the 800-meter running event at the world championships by the wide margin of two seconds, would undergo a gender test. A spokesman for the IAAF said that it did not suspect that Semenya cheated (Buckheit 2009). In November 2009, Semenya reached an agreement with track and field's governing body to keep her gold medal and prize money. As of November 2009, it was unclear if Semenya would be allowed to compete again without undergoing surgery (Longman 2009).

Semenya's case has precedent. In 2006, Santhi Soundarajan, a middle-distance runner from India, was stripped of a silver medal earned in the Asia Games for failing a gender-verification test (Longman 2009). It is simply another area in sports that will need to be discussed and examined.

Research Questions and Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to examine public, player and administrator attitudes toward sexual orientation in adult recreational sports leagues in North Carolina. The articles will also look at the approaching 2010 Gay Games that serve as a public venue for gay athletes. Also considered will be the role of mass media coverage of sexual orientation in sports. The series will have three, perhaps four, stories. The following questions will be addressed:

- Why do sports remain seemingly segregated along sexual orientation lines?
- What needs to happen for there to be more integration?
- Do players on gay sports teams desire to play on integrated teams and leagues?
- What needs to be done to create a comfortable environment for gay and lesbian athletes and coaches?
- What are heterosexual players' and coaches' attitudes toward homosexual athletes?
- How have heterosexual players and coaches reacted when a teammates' homosexuality is revealed?

To complete the series of articles, observation and interviews will be the primary resources used. The interviews will be conducted in person, by phone and by email. To

ensure accuracy in the project, a digital voice recorder will be used when applicable. And interviews will be translated.

A majority of the subjects of the stories live or work in or around Research Triangle Park. Because this project considers the state of sexual orientation in sports with regard to the 2010 Gay Games, people connected with the marketing, event planning and founding of the Gay Games will be contacted via email and telephone.

Timeline

The article exploring a gay man's search for identity through rugby will be completed by the end of December. The overview article will be completed by March 1 and the remaining profile (if done) and sensitivity articles by mid-March. The final articles will be revised and completed by the beginning of April, when the story package will go to the entire committee. I will defend my thesis at the beginning of April and graduate in May.

Limitations

The perceptions and attitudes among gay athletes in the area to be included in the overview story might be difficult to pursue because of the sensitivity of the issue and the silence that the literature says exists in sport. Should access be granted, coaches and other administrators will likely dismiss any notions of there being homophobia at their institutions. But if former athletes could be contacted using the LGBT Center and a contact with Tim Crothers, author of *The Man Watching*, they can provide another perspective to the story. Additionally, the coaches and administrators may be willing to

discuss their experiences at other institutions. Being able to interview people thoroughly depends on building a trusting relationship and establishing myself as a credible journalist.

The Gay Games will be held in summer, putting extra pressure to reach those organizers who are planning an event outside the United States. The event will also take place after the deadline for the project, so any stories on the Games will have to appear outside the bounds of this project in order to meet the August graduation deadline of the University.

Article Summaries

The thesis has three articles, each exploring a different aspect of homosexuality and sport. The story about the Gay Games could be published in a magazine like *Newsweek* or in a newspaper like the *Independent Weekly*. The story about Arthur Brand could be published in OutSports.com, a Web site dedicated to covering gay and lesbians in sports. The story about media coverage of gays and lesbians in sports could be published in the LGBT section of the AEJMC Newsletter.

- The first article is a 4,000-word story about the Gay Games, an international sports competition. Having occurred every four years since 1982, the Gay Games will take place this summer in Cologne. Because it is a large event, the Gay Games have many supporters and many detractors. Historically, the Gay Games has been the site where prominent athletes have come out. Many prominent athletes are expected to participate in this summer's games.
- The second article is a 4,500-word feature on Arthur Brand. The story is about a gay man who shunned sports for 30 years before joining the Carolina Kodiaks, a gay rugby team. As part of this team, Brand discovers

his identity. A sidebar is included that provides the reader some information about rugby.

- The third article is a 2,400-word article on the coverage of gays and lesbians in sport. The idea was to write a story that provided guidelines and ideas to consider for journalists, especially those reporting on LGBT issues. Many journalists lack training on how to cover these issues. But because the LGBT community makes up a significant portion of the population, it is necessary to strive to get this balance in reporting.

CHAPTER ONE

Isolated to Mainstream: Gay Games Gaining Exposure

In 2007, Jeff Enochs traveled with his rugby team, the Charlotte Royals, to Virginia for what he thought would be a match like any of his others in the past three years.

But when the Royals took the field, most opposing team members remained on the sidelines. They boycotted the game, because the Royals are predominantly gay.

When the teams met the next season, the opposing side sent its women's team and a message: Gay men aren't tough enough to compete with straight men. The Royals had faced such rebukes before. Enoch said many straight teams refused to schedule matches with them.

Such face-offs on the rugby fields of North Carolina and Virginia mirror similar scenes locally, nationally and internationally. Each year, more openly gay athletes and teams participate in organized sports. As they do, there is a clash of understanding. And it has nothing to do with sexual orientation.

Some players on other teams fear contracting HIV. But HIV has never been found in sweat, and according to the Center for Disease Control's Web site, a "very low risk of

transmission” exists in sports with direct body contact and bleeding. But the nature of rugby has straight players nervous.

“I don’t think I’ve played a single game in the last six years that hasn’t had at least one bloody nose,” Enochs said.

Since most leagues stop play when a player is bleeding, the risk drops. Enochs said it may be more than a health issue because players on straight teams who fear HIV also ignore the possibility of getting HIV from another straight player.

“The majority of straight rugby teams don’t appreciate a gay rugby team at all,” Enochs said. “They think we’re pansies and don’t deserve to be playing [in their league].”

Even though the Royals feel isolated in the sporting world, the number of organized gay sporting leagues and tournaments is increasing rapidly. In the early 1980s, gay and lesbian athletics organizations formed at a rate of three per year in Southern California. In 1982-86, the rate increased to 4.4 organizations per year in California. By the 1990s, similar growth could be seen in the rest of the United States and in Western Europe and Australia.

Rugby in particular has become a hot sport for gay athletes. In 1995, London claimed the first gay rugby team. Three years later, the United States had two teams: the Washington, D.C., Renegades and the San Francisco Fog. Gay rugby teams formed rapidly after Sept. 11, 2001. One of the four men credited with overtaking terrorists on United Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania was Mark Bingham, a member of the Fog who actively tried bringing rugby to the gay community.

A record 32 teams competed in Ireland in the 2008 Bingham Cup, created in Bingham’s memory. More than 30 teams are expected to attend the 2010 event. The

international tournament isn't unique for its specific inclusion of gay and lesbian teams. It isn't even the largest gay and lesbian athletic event. The 2009 World Outgames featured 5,518 athletes from 92 countries. The Gay Games, the biggest of them all, drew more than 11,000 athletes from more than 40 nations in 2006.

Finding Their Footing

If the Royals can raise enough money this year, they will go to the Bingham Cup, which is sponsored by the International Gay Rugby Association and Board (IGRAB). But the seven-year-old team, which has two straight players on a roster of men aged 20-40, has had difficulty finding sponsors. Most teams have bars, restaurants and alcohol distributors as sponsors, but the Royals have only Sidelines, which advertises as Charlotte's alternative sports bar.

"We're on our own," Enochs said. "Beer vendors will sponsor almost anything under the sun, but it seems like they don't want anything to do with us. A lot of the local businesses and restaurants are no different. It's like pulling teeth to get sponsors."

Without the help of sponsors, the Royals trek up and down the stairs of Bank of America Stadium, hocking beer at Carolina Panthers games and hoping to collect enough tips to cover the team's expenses. Attending the Bingham Cup is about more than athletic competition.

"Right now we're just one, single gay team in this big city of Charlotte," Enochs said. "If we go to the Bingham Cup, I have the gay team from St. Louis, from Houston, from San Francisco, from New York, from Ireland, from Sydney. All of a sudden, you're not just one single team that's struggling. It's like a huge family coming together."

After their experiences in Virginia, Enochs and his teammates would enjoy that opportunity. If the Royals cannot raise enough money to go to the Bingham Cup, which will be held in Minneapolis this year, Enochs and Brian Helms, Enochs' partner and teammate, plan to attend the June tournament as spectators.

"Even if we don't play, I feel this longing to be there and to be a part of something as huge as the Bingham Cup," Helms said.

Even bigger are the Gay Games, started in 1982 on the foundation of three principles: participation, inclusion and personal best. The response has been overwhelming. The 1994 Gay Games in New York City drew 11,000 participants and 7,000 volunteers, the second-largest sporting event of the 1990s.

"I would definitely support the Gay Games in any way I could if it was close enough to where I could attend," Helms said. "If rugby is [in Cleveland for the 2014 Gay Games], I would definitely support and want to watch the rugby."

The Gay Games and Its Impact

Tom Waddell, an Olympic decathlete in 1968, started the Gay Games, a quadrennial event that rotates host cities, just as the Olympics do. The focus is to encourage people of all sexual orientations to participate and to combine an international sporting competition with a cultural event.

Other than athletic events, the Gay Games have an arts festival that displays the talents of local artists and musicians. Chicago, the site of Gay Games VII in 2006, had parties and social events scheduled each night of the 10-day event. Additionally, the games featured comedy and family events along with church and worship services.

But the athletics and the supportive environment are the main draw. In Vancouver, all but one of the triathletes had crossed the finish line at Gay Games III, recalled Darl Schaaff, a member of the board of directors of the Federation of Gay Games. No one could see the remaining participant—a woman who had never done the swim, bike and run of a triathlon before. She was so far behind that many spectators assumed the last athlete had finished. Then an announcement over the public address system told the crowd otherwise.

“Not one person left,” Schaaff said. “At the end, when we saw her coming, literally all of the runners ran out and escorted her over the finish line. It’s that kind of amazing thing that happens. The support and camaraderie is life-changing for a lot of people.”

Schaaff said that outside of the inclusive environment established by the Gay Games, many gay and lesbian athletes don’t give maximum effort in sports. Gay and lesbians fear the extra attention they get from succeeding in sport will out them and subsequently expose them to ridicule.

As a former state and national champion in martial arts who now runs a jujitsu school, Schaaff joked that he didn’t hold back because he could beat up anyone who gave him a hard time. Even though he pushed himself, he still felt isolated as a gay athlete.

“I thought I was the only gay person in the world in my sport,” Schaaff said. “When I came to the Gay Games, there were a couple hundred other people. We became instant friends because we shared the same story about discrimination. The power of finding other people who are like you—who celebrate their sport and their lives—is remarkable.”

The feeling that Schaaff described drew many of the more than 11,000 participants in each of the past four Gay Games. This summer, Gay Games VIII will take place in Cologne, the self-proclaimed gay capital of Germany, which hosts an annual Pride festival that nearly 1 million people attend. More than 5,000 athletes from 49 countries had registered for the games by the end of January. According to estimates from the Federation of Gay Games, the event will draw 10,000 to 14,000 athletes.

To call the Gay Games a sporting event is like calling an iPad a computer. There's much more to it, participants say. Tens of thousands of people attend the games as observers and take part in something bigger than wins and losses.

"I actually think the better name for the event would be the Equality Games," Schaaff said. "By bringing together diverse groups, we actually practice human rights more than anything else."

Even though the Cleveland Gay Games are four years away, the governments of Ohio and Cleveland have used the upcoming games as an impetus to change laws and create tolerance.

Cleveland passed a citywide domestic-partnership registry, which opened May 7, 2009. According to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, this registry could prompt employers, hospitals and other organizations to give domestic partners similar privileges to those of married couples. In September 2009, the State House of Ohio passed an employment nondiscrimination act that protects gay and transgendered people.

Changes in legislation alone may not affect people's attitudes towards gays and lesbians. But by having so many gays and lesbians in one place, people may become more tolerant, Schaaff said. The contact theory, developed in psychology and sociology,

supports Schaaff's assertion. The theory says when the majority has direct contact with a minority group, they're more likely to be tolerant of that group.

Officials expect 50,000 gay and lesbian competitors and observers to visit Cleveland for the 2014 Gay Games.

"The people of Cleveland can really relate to sports," Schaaff said. "In 2014, one out of the 10 people here will be part of the Gay Games."

Cleveland's population is about 450,000 people. Many of them are likely sports fans because the city hosts three professional sports teams—the Browns in football, Cavaliers in basketball and Indians in baseball.

The influx of people means local businesses can expect an uptick in sales. The same was true for Chicago in 2006. The Web site of the Chicago Gay Games reported that the games brought in at least \$50 million and that 40,000 more people than expected came.

In 2006, the games ended a 16-year financial skid, breaking even in Chicago. Making money, though, isn't as important as the Gay Games' mission: to bring change.

"Cleveland will see a lot of people adding to the community through their investment of funds," Schaaff said. "We never leave the city the same."

By any measure, the Gay Games have been a success, drawing thousands of people. But the publicity garnered by the games has drawn some spectators who don't share Schaaff's enthusiasm.

Opposition and Sensitivity

Mike Readinger of Cleveland, Ohio, stood alongside 12,000 others outside Soldier Field in Chicago for the opening ceremony of the 2006 Gay Games. He anxiously waited more than five hours for the gates to open under the July sun.

Finally the line of participants, organized by geographic location, moved toward the field. Readinger walked with his teammates from Ohio past protesters. Among them, children, too young to be aware of the message, held signs that read: “Fags go to hell.”

He kept walking. Roars came from the stadium. Readinger’s heart beat quicker. Then, the announcer’s voice over the stadium’s PA system welcomed Readinger’s team. As Readinger ran onto the field with his teammates, the crowd of 32,000 cheered like he was a member of the Chicago Bears.

“It’s the greatest experience I have ever had in my entire life,” Readinger said. “It was amazing, the high point of the whole week.”

Thousands of other gay and lesbian athletes and tight security allowed Readinger—now the president of the Cleveland Synergy Foundation, which bid to bring the Gay Games to Cleveland—to feel comfortable, ignore the protesters and soak in the moment, he said. But protesting has become as much a part of the Gay Games as athletics, at least in the United States.

Gay Games officials in Cologne said that little opposition has sprung up. The 2009 Outgames in Copenhagen had only a few problems, said Marie Kampmann, a staff member in the marketing and advertising department for the Gay Games in Cologne.

“I think Europe in general is a more tolerant place for minorities,” said Kampmann, who competed in tennis at the 2009 Outgames. “There seems to be a lot of hate in America, all of which is started by the church and the very religious people.”

Even though Readinger said that Cleveland has received extraordinary community support, he noted that the games are still four years away and that the opposition may grow more vocal as the Gay Games near. In preparation, Schaaff said his group plans to spend time in the city beforehand.

“We do a lot of sensitivity training,” Schaaff said. “We work a lot with the police and other sorts of volunteers that might be involved.”

Standard operating procedure for Gay Games athletes and participants is to ignore the protesters, Schaaff said. If a protester were to hit an athlete, Schaaff and other people on his training staff recommend finding a police officer to handle the situation. Schaaff and his staff ask athletes to use commonsense. They must remember that the First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, and that the athletes must resort to legal alternatives.

“We’re able to create perimeters that are far enough away that you still see the people with the signs,” Schaaff said. “The Fred Phelps-es of the world, who only get an erection when screaming faggot, get their chance to protest.” Phelps founded Westboro Baptist Church, which is widely known for its antigay protests and claims that natural disasters and terrorist attacks are God’s punishments for being tolerant of gays and lesbians.

Much of the opposition comes before the Gay Games start. Some Chicago area residents protested when the games proposed using Crystal Lake as the site for its rowing competition. The *Chicago Tribune* quoted some residents as saying that the games were “contrary and detrimental” to traditional family values and that the athletes engage in “behavior that is unethical and may be illegal.”

With a board member unable to participate because he was on vacation, an initial vote by the Crystal Lake Park District rejected 2-2 the request to have rowing events on Crystal Lake. The board cited concerns that the event would promote “the homosexual lifestyle.”

“They were very surprised to have that pushback from the community and the civic leaders there,” Readinger said.

Six days later and with the vacationing member back, the committee voted 3-2 in favor.

While some community members protested, some groups saw the games as an opportunity to save the athletes. Pastor Michael Allen of the Uptown Baptist Church wrote an open letter to pastors of two other local churches urging movement to save the sinners.

“Chicagoland is about to receive tens of thousands of desperately-needy gays and lesbians who—like all straights who willfully reject the Lord Jesus Christ—are facing a harsh, lonely, agonizing, horrific eternity without Him,” Allen wrote in an open letter to the Christian leaders of Illinois. “And so far as I can tell, we orthodox Christian pastors and leaders have done virtually nothing to prepare.”

Within five weeks of the letter, Allen enlisted more than a dozen other churches to serve water at the Gay Games. Each bottle had John 3:16 (“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life”) and “Jesus loves you, and we do, too” written on the label.

“They wanted to know why we were so loving and gentle,” Allen said. “Our purpose was to show that one can live the Bible and still love the homosexual in their sin. That was the goal of the campaign.”

Allen called the campaign a success because it allowed for dialogue between the Gay Games participant and his volunteers, who had to be trained before they could attend the events. Allen said this conversation separated his group from other evangelicals who shout and condemn. Several people began attending Allen’s church, and one man, who attended the Gay Games as a spectator, became a Christian and died of AIDS only months later, Allen recalled.

Sponsors and Brand Loyalty

Other opponents focus not on the athletes but on the corporate sponsors. The protesters in Chicago, however, didn’t scare off all sponsors to the 2010 Gay Games. Large companies, including Absolut Vodka, signed up to sponsor this summer’s games in Cologne. But more sponsors are needed.

“It’s been extremely difficult to find sponsors,” Kampmann said. “But this has nothing to do with it being a gay event. The whole world is in financial crisis, and sponsors are hard to find in general.”

In the United States, sponsors may be scarce because of vocal opposition. The American Family Association (AFA) and the Illinois Family Institute initiated boycotts and wrote letters to executives of Kraft and Walgreens, which donated money to the 2006 Gay Games.

“Corporate America is careful not to offend or cause customers or potential customers any reason to turn away from their product,” said Ed Vitagliano, news editor

of the AFA Journal. “When they start sponsoring things like the Gay Games, this is still a contentious cultural issue. Why would a company like Kraft take sides?”

Both sides said the simple answer to Vitagliano’s question is money. Studies show that gay and lesbian athletes have high brand loyalty and advertising recall. At the 1994 Gay Games in New York, 92.3 percent of study participants said they would more likely buy the products advertised there.

“If I am engaged in something like the Gay Games and see that you are a sponsor of that event, I’ll remember that and tend to choose the corporate sponsor of an event I hold dear to my heart,” Readinger said.

Vitagliano said a company supporting an event like the Gay Games or same-sex marriage runs the risk of insulting people. When Ford gave money to groups promoting same-sex marriage, AFA and other groups boycotted. Once Ford found that making such a donation hurt financially, it backed off, Vitagliano said.

“If Christians, for example, don’t say anything, then companies will assume there is no downside,” Vitagliano said.

But appealing to a diverse audience is critical for Kraft’s success, said Ana Paula Cruz, a media relations staff member in Kraft offices in Northfield, Ill. Kraft, which has 11 brands with annual revenues greater than \$1 billion, shows its commitment by supporting initiatives that celebrate diversity, she said:

“Kraft Foods has long been committed to diversity and inclusion. It’s the foundation of our strategy to build a high-performing culture. It is clear to us that different perspectives enable us to see first-hand how we can better meet consumer needs.”

Randy Sharp, AFA director of special projects, wrote in an article for Agape Press, a Christian news source, that the Walgreens sponsorship may come from a desire to supply a demand created by sexual encounters at the Gay Games.

“No doubt large numbers of gays will become exposed to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases,” Sharp wrote. “Walgreens must be salivating at the prospect of new customers this will create. And how better to become the official ‘drug dealer’ of the Gay Games, than to donate \$100,000 and become the top sponsor for incredible exposure?”

Expanded Media Coverage

While corporations may face scrutiny for supporting the Gay Games, many athletes at the games escape it. The event exposes gay or lesbian professional athletes who remained closeted for fear of backlash, the loss of sponsorships or of being fired from their jobs. The games especially are a safe place for retired high-profile athletes, and this summer in Cologne will be no different.

Two notable athletes attending this year’s event will be Bruce Hayes, a gold-medalist swimmer at the 1984 Olympics, and Michelle Ferris, who has won two Olympic silver medals in cycling. A dozen other world-class athletes will join them.

“One more is a big surprise, so we’re not telling anyone,” Schaaff said. “All I can tell you is that he has more than 130,000 hits on his Facebook page. He’s pretty well-known. It’s a cool deal.”

Popular athletes have long used the Gay Games as a venue for coming out publicly. The most high-profile athlete to do so is diver Greg Louganis, who came out publicly at the 1994 Gay Games in New York.

“I was welcomed as warmly as I’ve ever been,” Louganis wrote in his autobiography. “And for the first time, I was welcomed as an openly gay athlete. It was a thrill for me, and that experience made me realize how important it is for athletes to feel welcome for who they are.”

Former NFL players David Kopay and Esera Tuaolo have participated in various roles. Kopay presented the athletes’ oath at the beginning of the 1994 event, served as a judge in the physique competition, and later earned the Hero Award for coming out publicly and fighting homophobia. Tuaolo gave the keynote address in 2006, sang the national anthem and participated in flag football and volleyball.

Despite high-profile talent, the Gay Games and other gay and lesbian events tend to go uncovered by the media. Yet the market is large. UCLA’s Williams Institute completed a recent study that shows that 4 percent of the population self-identifies as gay or lesbian. That’s 12 million of 300 million Americans and a significant market.

“I know of gay events and issues going on every day,” says Shawn Long, the administrative coordinator at Equality North Carolina and an amateur rugby player on a predominantly gay team. “Certainly less than 4 percent of mainstream news items have any LGBT content.”

The *Orlando Weekly* reported in 2003 that 10 percent of a television newscast is devoted to sports. Almost none of that covers gay and lesbian sporting events. The United States lags behind other nations in covering gay and lesbian athletes because it’s a repressive society compared with much of the world, Schaaff said.

“When we did Gay Games in Amsterdam, the Opening Ceremonies were televised across the entire country,” Schaaff said. “In Sydney, 100,000 people came to watch.”

In 2014, the Gay Games return to the United States and may have a larger media following. Schaaff has met with ESPN in Bristol, Conn., to discuss coverage. Bravo and other networks have contacted the Federation of Gay Games about media rights to the event.

“They’re coming around,” Schaaff said. “I think by 2014 we’ll see a whole lot more press.”

By 2014, the Charlotte Royals and other gay and lesbian athletes and teams may no longer have to fight the perception that they cannot compete with straight players. Schaaff said 2010 will be the first year that the Gay Games have official judges and timing systems for many competitions. That addition means that an athlete who breaks a world record at the Gay Games will be recognized as the official record holder, as if the record had been broken at the Olympics. If history is any indication, the Winter Olympics in Vancouver won’t be the only event in 2010 that sees records broken.

“Since 1990, I don’t think there has been a year where there hasn’t been a running or swimming record broken (at the Gay Games),” Schaaff said. “People will figure out what the person does in their own life privately is irrelevant to making them a great athlete.”

CHAPTER TWO

Lost Then Found: A Journey of Self-discovery in Rugby

Only Arthur Brand was left to defend the goal line.

Brand—known by everyone as A.R.—tracked the smaller, faster opponent who cradled a rugby ball and darted down the sideline. The noises of the game faded to nothing. A.R. was *in* the game. He wasn't going to let anyone by him. A.R. charged forward and unleashed a primal roar that extended beyond the field. Just as he went to make the tackle, his opponent quickly changed direction. A.R. grasped nothing but air. The opponent scored.

When A.R. was a child, sports made him feel excluded. He wasn't physically fit. He preferred to read or do about anything else but play sports. In fact, the jock mentality in his high school and college isolated him. But as an adult, A.R. found a sports refuge with the Carolina Kodiaks, one of two North Carolina rugby teams that encourages participation among men of any sexual orientation. By joining the Kodiaks, A.R. discovered his personal identity through team-bonding and an unexpected love of sports.

But it was a rocky road.

In 1973 when A.R. was born, consulting books of baby names wasn't necessary in his family. He became Arthur Reginald Brand IV. But assuming the paternal name created some confusion. His family wanted him named for his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, but they also wanted him to have a unique identity. Brand I was "Arthur"; Brand II "Reg"; and Brand III "Art." Who would Brand IV be? For as long as IV can remember, friends and family have called him A.R.

"Once in a while, I think, 'Oh, geez. Do I like being known by just letters?'" A.R. asked. "Sometimes I think I should just adopt something else."

Changing his name could separate him from a distinguished paternal lineage, but for A.R. more was at stake than his name: his identity.

Little did A.R. know that his search for identity would be completed through sports and as an adult. In fall 2003 the Kodiaks rugby team organized. A.R. joined in 2004, a foray into the unknown, because he knew other people joining the team. He was 30, an age when most players retire or think about it. Rugby players enjoy short careers because the hits are as hard as those in football. But instead of pads as in football, muscle and bone absorb the blows. A.R. hadn't logged many athletic miles on his body, but he has a thick body designed to put big hits on others and take punishing contact—a body seemingly built to play rugby. Although he no longer plays, he still looks like a rugby player (a "rugger" in the game's parlance). Adding to the rugger look, his dark brown hair and a beard speckled with gray frame a square jaw.

His looks—that's about all he had when he started.

One Saturday six years ago, a spring sun shined on Brand and his new teammates. They stood on a grassy plot at Duke University that served as a makeshift rugby field. It was their first practice of the season.

Unsure what to expect, Brand stood in a row with his teammates. The coach explained the first drill, a slow-motion simulation of a tackle. The drill taught the new players and reminded the experienced ones how to tackle safely and effectively.

“We go cheek...to...cheek,” the coach said as he lowered his head to the backside of the waist of his human tackling dummy. Brand and his teammates chuckled.

Brand stepped forward to take his turn. His mind raced with everything the coach had taught in the brief tutorial. Keep your head up. Stay low. Drive with your legs. Cheek to cheek.

This would be the first physical contact he had with another man on a playing field. As he lowered his head and brought his partner to the ground, he felt more than his body touching another man’s. He felt something he never imagined he would feel on a sports field.

He felt *normal*.

As a child, A.R. lived with his mother and his father on eastern Long Island near a small marina. It may as well have been an island. Their house was isolated by distance. No other kids were around. His mother realized that A.R. needed more than adults in his life so she put him into nursery school “just so he could have companionship,” his mother, Diane Brand said. “Even then, our community was such that he didn’t see children.”

A.R. had another reason to feel lonely. His mother and father divorced before his 10th birthday. His mother remarried when A.R. was 11. Soon, the family moved from East Hampton, N.Y., to Due West, S.C. The move was as difficult as the names of the cities suggest. A.R. faced the culture shock of being a Yankee in a rural, Southern town. His loner personality, combined with the culture of Due West, made meeting people even more difficult.

“[South Carolina] was unaccepting of people who were different in any way from the typical hometown person,” A.R.’s mother said. “That wasn’t real healthy for him.”

The divorce didn’t help things either. A.R. describes his stepfather, Andy, as a “guy’s guy,” quiet with a passion for sports. That’s one of the reasons it took so long for A.R. to become close to him. Shortly after the divorce, Andy, a former football player, attempted to bond with his stepson in a stereotypically American way. He grabbed a football and tossed it with A.R. The experience seemed to last for hours but really was only 15 minutes. It didn’t make A.R. feel closer to his stepfather.

“It was pretty close to the epitome of that kind of jock spirit, that kind of world that I hated,” A.R. said. “Bless him for trying, though. In movies, it’s always the football team that’s beating up on the nerds.”

That’s how he felt. Like a nerd. Others saw him that way, too. He substituted playing for reading a book, any book. It didn’t matter if it was science, fiction, science fiction, history, religion or even a cookbook.

As a child, A.R. would participate in athletics only when it was required during gym class. He would be the last one picked for whatever sport the gym teacher chose for the day. When he did play, he would prefer to be doing something else.

“Being athletic, being physical in any way was always imposed on me,” A.R. said. “It was always somebody expecting me to do something that just totally wasn’t my thing.”

Being so far behind his classmates athletically, he felt alienated, furthering his resentment of sports. In fifth grade, A.R. and his gym class had to run cross-country track. The class ran along a trail as the teacher looked on. A.R. can’t remember how long the trail was, but he knows it couldn’t have been more than a mile, maybe even a half-mile.

“That was such a major athletic challenge for me,” A.R. said. “It was like being in the Olympics. I was so unfit that I would get cramps. I couldn’t breathe.”

Unlike many others who would relish feeling like they were in the Olympics, A.R. saw the event as torture.

A.R. chose to stand outside of sports and never looked in until he started rugby. If sports didn’t want him, then he didn’t want sports.

When A.R. throws things, he uses the two-handed lateral found in rugby, not an overhand motion like a quarterback. It’s a natural motion that was drilled into him during three seasons playing the game. When beginning to play rugby, such moves didn’t come as naturally as his tosses do today.

A.R. had to learn two things: the techniques and how to learn the techniques. Most people find rugby hard to understand. Television stations in the United States rarely broadcast the game. The physical nature of rugby doesn’t lend itself to being a core part of physical education programs.

Unlike most guys joining the team, however, A.R. was unfamiliar with all types of sports—meaning how games are played, how technique affects play, and how rules influence technique and play. Sports were foreign, and the plays and strategies didn't make any sense. So when the leaders of the Kodiaks explained the game, A.R. was slower to pick up the techniques and rules than most of his teammates.

Later, after he gained some understanding of how difficult learning the game could be, A.R. welcomed newcomers and attempted to teach the unfamiliar game, even as he was learning the game in his first season.

“It would surprise me how fast they would pick up on stuff,” A.R. said. “I think it had to do with having more experience playing sports.”

After four years in South Carolina and just as A.R. was to start high school, the family moved to Wake Forest, N.C., an area with a population about 60 percent greater than Due West's in 1990.

A.R. went to William G. Enloe High School, a magnet school in Raleigh, as part of the class of 1991. The school placed less emphasis on physical activity than his previous schools.

“He really changed,” his mother said. “He got some close friends in high school. I really think this is a good community for him.”

Even with close friends, A.R. felt isolated. He felt different and wouldn't admit it. To anyone.

While most teenagers agonized over pimples before dates, A.R. avoided dating all together. Well, sort of. He sees now that some girls might have thought they were out on

a date with him. Back then, he assumed he was hanging out with a friend. Around this time, he had his first homosexual feelings. He pushed them away and convinced himself that he could live his life without romance. He never tried being straight.

“It wasn’t even worth trying to pretend,” A.R. said. “I’m very uncomfortable being dishonest. I think I’m a poor liar.”

To others, anyway.

He convinced himself that his crushes on men had nothing to do with being gay. Then came Jeremy. Jeremy had sandy hair and was more physically mature than his peers. He was relaxed and confident, two qualities A.R. still finds attractive. Over two school years, A.R. and Jeremy hung out in the same group of friends, but Jeremy was interested in girls. That didn’t stop A.R. from thinking, pining and fantasizing about Jeremy.

“It was almost obsession,” A.R. said. “I wasted a lot of [emotional] energy. I feel like that was the worst of it.”

Going to college could have given A.R. a respite from Jeremy, but they both went to North Carolina State University, where A.R.’s frustration grew.

The 1980s were not only a time of uncertainty for A.R. but for the entire gay community. AIDS was a mystery. People knew little about how it spread and even less about how to treat it. In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control reported that estimates placed the HIV rate among those who had male-to-male sexual encounters in the 1980s around 50 percent in certain urban areas. Forty-eight percent of the 1 million people living with HIV in the United States contracted it via male-to-male sexual encounters,

leading to the label of HIV/AIDS as the gay man's disease. A.R. knew that long before he knew he was gay.

In fall 1992, he started college at N.C. State and was ready for the freedom that came with it. He explored aspects of himself that he had denied before. At this point his physical needs began to outweigh his fears.

A.R. said he formed his political identity before he had a romantic or physical experience with another man. He joined the Gay Student Union, which allowed him to find a group of kindred people. This decision alleviated his fears and allowed him to come out sexually, at least to his peers. He didn't tell his parents immediately. But for the first time, he had romantic and physical relationships. By accepting his homosexuality, A.R. could move past Jeremy.

"I started to see that there were other possibilities that could be a lot less frustrating," A.R. said. "I said, 'Oh, fine. The hell with him.'"

Coming out also allowed A.R. to see that his fears had been largely unfounded. He has never been the victim of violence. He didn't contract AIDS or STDs like he thought he would if he acted on his desires. Living in fear and denying himself proved to be time lost. A.R. knew some people wouldn't like him because of his sexuality, but he saw that as minor.

A.R. didn't even face much discrimination in the form of epithets. He recalled two times when someone shouted something at him. Both happened while he was still at N.C. State. As he left his apartment and walked along Hillsborough Street to campus, someone drove by and yelled:

"Homo!"

A.R.'s heart beat quicker. His stomach knotted. He had become accustomed to certain words. "Queer" is used by LGBT organizations and is a gay pride word. For similar reasons, "gay" is not powerful as a slur. But he had never confronted "homo." It hit him hard at first, but the reaction soon lessened.

"It was not a major trauma," A.R. said. "But just the fact that it surprised me and caught me off-guard, I didn't like it."

The second instance also involved someone yelling at him. Again A.R. was walking down Hillsborough Street when he heard a whistle and catcalls. Not again, he thought. Then he saw the culprits, a group of his gay friends. This time, he smiled.

Nearly 15 years later, Hillsborough Street is a retreat for A.R. On a warm Saturday last September, A.R. sat next to Shawn Long, a friend and former teammate on the Kodiaks who serves as the team's treasurer. The two shared a booth at Two Guys, an Italian restaurant on Hillsborough Street that they both frequented as students.

Despite their close relationship, Long and A.R. are different. Long is bald, wears glasses and has a lean body shaped by his training as a runner. Long has a master's degree in linguistics and works for a gay and lesbian organization.

Perhaps it's his personality, his degree, sensitivity or a combination, but Long is quick to correct people when they use politically incorrect terms when speaking about a person's or team's sexual orientation. He's not being rude. He looks for the intention behind what is being said. If the intention is good, he wants to educate people because some words have connotative meanings. Long explains that "homosexual" is used by

opposition groups. He said “gay” is appropriate in most instances. A.R. sat quietly, eating his salad.

When Long finishes, A.R. matter-of-factly mentions that the use of certain words has never bothered him if the speaker’s intention is benign. Confronted with an appropriate-usage exam of gay and lesbian terms, he doubts he could pass.

A.R.’s laidback personality extends beyond word usage. He has been at his current job as an assistant in the N.C. State library system for seven years. He enjoys it for what it is: a reliable paycheck that affords him a modest, satisfying lifestyle. He knows it’s temporary. In fact, it’s a bit unfulfilling. He would like to go back to school to get a master’s degree but won’t start a program until he knows exactly what he wants to do. A few years ago, he thought he wanted a job in emergency medical services. He volunteered for six months in Cary, N.C., to see if it would bring out new qualities in himself. But he eventually stopped because the job was too stressful. He discovered he didn’t like the stress that comes with being responsible for whether a person lives or dies.

Cary had few gory emergencies. A.R.’s emergency-services team generally responded to elderly people with breathing issues. But he recalled one memorable incident: An elderly woman with congestive heart failure. Fluid gathered in her lungs. She tried to cough it up. Without medical assistance, she would likely die. A.R. worked feverishly to help the more experienced workers try to save her. And they did.

“Afterwards, I was like ‘Holy crap. That was rough,’” A.R. recalled. “Even when it did get a little bit heroic, it wasn’t what I was looking for.”

A.R. mustered his courage at age 20 to come out to his friends. The next step was telling his mother, Diane, and stepfather, Andy. It was time.

A.R. drove 35 minutes from Raleigh to his parents' house in Wake Forest. They weren't expecting him. From the moment he arrived, A.R.'s mother could tell something was bothering her only child. But she didn't press him. A.R. left with his secret intact. Five minutes later, he walked back through the door.

"Did you forget something?" his mother asked.

A.R. sat down.

"Mom. Dad. I have something to tell you."

His parents looked at him expectantly.

"I'm gay."

He knew his parents were liberal. His mother had gay friends. But would having a gay son be different from having gay friends?

A.R.'s mother wrapped her arms around her son.

"Oh, honey! Of course. We know that."

A.R. was relieved.

At the time, A.R. was impressed with the way he handled the situation.

"Once you've decided not to do it—then turning around and going ahead back to do it is that much harder," he said.

He can't remember why he left in the first place, but guesses that fear motivated him. The fear left after he came out, but soon it was replaced with something else.

"I can't find the word for it," A.R. said. "It's a little bit less than regret."

He would feel that way for weeks. His mother and stepfather accepted him, but his mother worried for his safety. She had good reason to do so. A.R. came out in 1993, in the wake of several high-profile hate crimes against gay men. According to a 1991 New York Times report, a spokesman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said harassment against gays and lesbians increased by 42 percent from 1989 to 1990 in a sample of six cities. In 1989, North Carolina led the nation with 1,204 attacks on gays and lesbians, according to the North Carolina Council of Churches.

A.R.'s mother didn't know that the most danger he would face would come from his time on the rugby field.

In 2006, the Philadelphia Gryphons, another gay rugby team, became the first out-of-state team to play the Kodiaks in Durham, N.C. The 400-mile trip didn't fatigue the Gryphons, who warmed up with a choreographed pregame routine.

"Who wants the ball?" the Gryphons coach yelled as his players warmed up.

"I want the ball," the team responded in unison.

The psychological tactic worked. The chants intimidated the Kodiaks. Well, almost all the Kodiaks.

"It was cute," A.R. recalled. "I was like, 'That's nice. That's a cute idea. That's good for you all. That's cool.' But it got kind of old."

Before the match started, the captain of the Gryphons took on the coach's role of asking who wants the ball. He did it once. Twice. Three times. By the fourth time the captain sounded off, A.R. had his own question.

“Who wants a beer?” A.R. yelled while walking backwards across the field to his team’s half.

“I want a beer,” several of the Gryphons responded, but not as one.

As the Gryphons replied, A.R. continued walking backward. He lost his balance and fell flat on his back. He burst out laughing. Players on both sides and the handful of spectators joined him.

“Not being the most athletic or talented, sometimes I felt almost like a mascot,” A.R. said. “I’m okay with that.”

A.R. contends that his biggest contribution to the Kodiaks didn’t come from his play on the field but his actions off it.

Adult amateur teams rely on fundraising and sponsorships to buy uniforms, cover travel expenses and pay for officials. The Kodiaks were no exception, and A.R. relished the fundraising opportunities. The Kodiaks arranged many of these events at bars, where A.R. sold shots of liquor.

Once, he participated in a jockstrap auction that turned out to be more innocent and less revealing than the name suggests. In conjunction with and based on an idea by the Charlotte Royals (the only other rugby team in North Carolina that openly encourages men of all sexualities to participate), A.R. decided he would play along. People would bid on jockstraps modeled by A.R. and other athletes. He changed in a backroom after the winning bidder—someone A.R. describes as an older, unattractive man who appeared to be in failing health—got A.R.’s jockstrap.

“Even that really was just kind of silly,” A.R. said. “An article of clothing was given to a stranger for God only knows what kind of purposes. But it helped the team raise money. Nobody got hurt.”

Events like those, he said, helped him feel more comfortable interacting with strangers.

“It was an excuse of having a persona, sort of,” A.R. said. “If I go out to a bar now and meet somebody, there’s a 50-50 chance that they’ll go ‘Oh, you’re that rugby guy.’”

Becoming “that rugby guy” had little to do with his age. A couple of years before he started playing rugby, he could do nothing more than glance and smile at an attractive co-worker. At the time, both he and Howard Michael worked at the American Airlines call center and had little interaction beyond glances. Then Michael was fired over a violation of the attendance policy that A.R. calls “draconian.”

As Michael walked through the parking lot, he saw A.R.’s car and left a note on the windshield asking him out. A.R. accepted. Michael said that A.R. was more open outside the office. The date led to an eight-and-a-half year relationship.

After six of those years, A.R. decided to try rugby. A.R.’s decision surprised Michael.

“A.R. didn’t even know how to ride a bike when I met him,” Michael said. “I could understand maybe a baseball team or a bowling league, something to start out that’s simple.”

Michael feared for A.R.’s safety after watching some of the games and seeing ambulances come to the field to pick up injured players. It didn’t help that the partners of

rugby players were often referred to as “widows” because of the brutality of the game. Despite Michael’s fears, he supported A.R. by attending matches. He witnessed A.R.’s transformation.

“There was growth as far as being more self assured, being more capable of making decisions,” Michael said.

Michael wasn’t the only one to notice the change. A.R.’s teammates saw him grow from his first timid practice to being a leader on the field. He barked orders to teammates and developed strategy on the field. A.R.’s transition to a leadership role showed his comfort.

“Gay rugby certainly has a quality of brotherhood, a fraternity in the broadest sense of the word,” said Ian Lekus, who started with the Kodiaks a week after A.R. “You’re a rugger. I think being welcomed into that...made him feel like one of the guys.”

Despite having not played for three years, A.R. feels his inner-rugger pulling him to the field. Discussing his rugby past has stoked the athletic fire that only kindled six years ago.

“I do feel a little bit more at home being physical now,” A.R. said. “Lately, I haven’t been exercising and doing as much...It’s harder without a team.”

That’s part of the reason A.R. wants to re-enter the world of rugby. The Kodiaks have gone on hiatus because they couldn’t fill out the roster. But A.R. isn’t looking for a comfort zone among his peers; he found one on the field. He loves rugby and is considering making the 30-minute drive to Durham this spring to take part in the

Wednesday evening practices and Saturday games of a predominantly heterosexual team, the Eno River Rugby Club.

“If I hadn’t started with the Kodiaks, I probably wouldn’t be going for any rugby team [now],” A.R. said.

A.R. carries himself with more confidence after his stint with athletics. Rugby doesn’t define him, though. It’s something that allowed him to find himself and learn that not all unknowns are daunting.

“I still feel I’m not totally sports-oriented,” A.R. said. “At least I’m not terrified and hating them on principle.”

Sidebar

Fun in the scrum: Gay rugby teams growing in popularity

Introduced to the United States in the 1880s, rugby declined in popularity after the 1924 Olympics. Rugby started a comeback in the 1980s. More than 80,000 rugby players call the United States home.

Rugby looks like a hybrid of soccer and American football. Two teams put 15 men on a 100- by 70-meter field and try to advance the ball. They can kick the ball forward or pitch it backwards. If a player is tackled while holding the ball, his team forfeits possession. A team scores five points when it advances the ball to the other team’s goal area, known as a try. After a try, the team gets two additional points for kicking the ball through the uprights. Three points are awarded if a player kicks the ball through the uprights during the match.

Rugby has all the contact of football without the pads. While football stops after each tackle, rugby has 40-minute halves with action interrupted only as the teams retreat to the appropriate sides of the field after scores.

“It’s not a running club,” said Ian Lekus, a former rugby player on the Carolina Kodiaks. “That’s not to diminish other sports. But that kind of aggression of physicality is pretty intense.”

Stereotypes make it seem unlikely that rugby would attract gay men, but the number of gay teams has steadily increased since the 1990s. In 2002, eight teams went to San Francisco to participate in the Bingham Cup, an international rugby tournament that rotates venues. The biennial tournament celebrates the life of gay rugby player Mark Bingham, a passenger on United Airlines Flight 93 when it crashed in a Pennsylvania field on Sept. 11, 2001. By 2008, the tournament had expanded to 32 teams.

Arthur Brand and Shawn Long, teammates on a gay rugby team called the Carolina Kodiaks, developed a theory that explains why rugby is so popular among gay men.

“It’s so hyper-masculine that it starts to become gay a little bit again,” Brand said. “It’s just because you’re forced to be so close physically that just to play the game you cultivate a kind of comfort and intimacy.”

Nowhere is this intimacy seen more clearly than the scrum. The scrum is used to determine possession after a minor infraction on the field. Three teammates stand in a row with arms wrapped around their neighbor’s waist. Two of the four people in the second of the three rows wrap an arm around their neighbor’s waist and wedge their heads between the spaces between the hips of the players in the first row. The men

wedged in between hips reach up and grab the waistband of the front row to keep the men close together. Like with a phalanx, the tighter the team is, the stronger they become.

“It’s easier for me to perform and help the team in situations where we’re literally together,” Brand said.

CHAPTER THREE

No Consensus: Covering Gay and Lesbian Issues in Sports

Unlike black athletes of 60 years ago, gay and lesbian athletes today don't face an official ban preventing them from participating in sports. But they often stay in the closet because they fear intolerance. And media coverage has done little to bring them into the open.

"The reason that [gay and lesbian issues are] not ahead of the curve is that homosexuality eats at the core of American sports," said Cyd Zeigler, co-founder of OutSports.com in Los Angeles. "To have big, macho, statue-like men who take the gridiron and fight it out and have sex with other men undermines the way the public sees sports and athletes."

What the public sees is largely what the media show. Shawn Long, an administrative coordinator at an LGBT organization in Raleigh called Equality N.C., said little coverage goes to gay and lesbian issues, and what there is can be offensive.

In December 2009, the British Broadcasting Corp. posed this question to readers of its "Have Your Say" Web site: "Should homosexuals face execution?"

“I found that mere question chilling,” Long recalls. “It implies that it’s worth debating whether to murder LGBT folks.”

The proposed anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda inspired the BBC’s question. If passed, the bill would punish people who engage in homosexual acts with life in prison or death. Pressure from readers and the BBC Pride Board, a group of gay and lesbian BBC staff members, convinced the news organization to change the question to “Should Uganda debate gay execution?”

The BBC is a media organization generally recognized for good coverage, Long said. But the former copy editor at *The (Raleigh) News & Observer* said that Fox News often references gays and lesbians as having a “sexual preference.” The 2009 Associated Press Stylebook and the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) agree that journalists should avoid the term “sexual preference” and references to a gay or alternative “lifestyle.”

On the NLGJA Web site, the stated goal is to “provide thought-provoking resources to [its] colleagues as they cover one of the most diverse communities in America.” The NLGJA admits that not all journalists, regardless of sexuality, will agree with the organization’s guidelines for coverage and language use.

For Long, the representation of gays and lesbians is more important than the language.

“Every time a gay-pride festival is reported on, the main focus is always on a more flamboyant or ‘out-er’ figure,” Long said. “I worry that these images present a

skewed image of the gay community. It's rare for me to see a picture of two dads and their kid, like me and my family.”

This skewed coverage sexualizes the LGBT community, even though sexuality, as with heterosexuals, is not one defining characteristic of gays and lesbians, Long noted. Media portrayals that sexualize gays and lesbians create stereotypes.

These portrayals can confuse gays and lesbians if their lives don't fit the stereotype, said Perry Deane Young, co-author of “The David Kopay Story,” a biography of the first National Football League player to come out publicly. These stereotypes can be especially difficult for athletes.

“The conflict with gay athletes is that they look so butch and macho, and they see the stereotype of the effeminate sissy,” said Young, who lives in Chapel Hill, N.C. “The conflict is twice as hard for them. A lot of gays who are effeminate from an early age are more liberated because they don't have to deal with the conflict of looking butch.”

It's not only the mainstream media that reinforce stereotypes about gays and lesbians, said OutSports.com co-founder Cyd Zeigler.

“Most gay and lesbian publications have bought into the stereotype that the broader culture has for gays and lesbians, and they promote those stereotypes,” Zeigler said.

When a gay publication doesn't cover sports, it reinforces the idea that gay men cannot excel in athletics, Zeigler said. After seeing that the mainstream media and gay publications didn't cover gay and lesbian sports, Zeigler and his partner developed

OutSports in 2000 because they saw the United States becoming more tolerant of the LGBT community.

“We figured these topics would become more and more important as gay people gained acceptance and gay athletes came out of the closet,” Zeigler said. “Our goal was to fill the void that was there. Just talking about sports and showing gay people not singing and dancing but wielding a stick and checking each other naturally undermines the stereotype that gay people can’t play sports.”

Zeigler’s publication rebels against traditional journalism in more ways than covering something that receives little media attention. In direct violation of the 2009 Associated Press Stylebook that said, “Include sexual orientation only when it is pertinent to a story,” OutSports brings attention to sexuality even though it may not be that relevant.

For example, OutSports ran a caption on its home page to preview an interview with figure skater Johnny Weir: “The Olympic figure skater talks about his sport. But you can’t escape an interview with OutSports without answering some questions about sexual orientation.”

Zeigler said that gay and lesbian athletes would gain acceptance if the media addressed the issue. When doing a profile of an athlete or coach, a journalist should speak with the subject’s partner.

“[The media] ask Tom Brady and Peyton Manning about their wives,” Zeigler said. “By avoiding asking questions about gay athletes, it makes the issue more taboo. If

everyone in the sports press made a habit of asking ‘Do you have a partner?’ or ‘Are you gay?,’ the issue would go away. ”

Zeigler said such questions would make people feel comfortable with the topic. But the NLGJA suggests that journalists use commonsense in addressing these issues.

“If the story has to do with gay and lesbian issues or if your senator is being blackmailed to pass legislation in fear of being outed, then it’s obviously news,” Bao Ong, a journalist for *The New York Times*, wrote in an article for the NLGJA Web site. “When you’re interviewing a city council member about how she voted on funding a new housing program, does it matter if she's a lesbian?”

Ong wrote about two exceptions to the NLGJA’s guideline. When covering the LGBT community, the journalist might want to identify someone as straight to clarify the situation to the reader. In feature stories, it’s appropriate to write about the subject’s sexuality and partners and children.

“Some may make the argument that [sexual orientation] is nobody’s business and what is important is about what happens on the field of play,” said Karen Bailis, a senior news editor at *Newsday* who served on the NLGJA board. “But if a reporter is delving into personal life, you want the reader to know the athlete as a whole person. It’s important to do that, but not to expose the athlete.”

Bailis also noted that question wording makes a difference. A reporter should not ask a male about his wife or a female about her husband, she said. By asking the question “Do you have a spouse?,” a reporter can make gays and lesbians more comfortable.

For the most part, mainstream media generally follow the NLGJA's advice and rarely mention sexual orientation in their stories. Michael Persinger, executive sports editor at *The Charlotte Observer* since 2001, said his newspaper follows Associated Press guidelines and recalls few occasions when his newspaper addressed sexuality in a story.

This strategy is used because few newsworthy stories result from a person's sexuality. Persinger noted that *The Charlotte Observer* deals specifically with terminology when a story does involve a person's sexual orientation.

"Many people prefer the terms 'gay' for males and 'lesbian' for females," Persinger said. "Some prefer that we not use the term 'homosexual,' but it's usually difficult to avoid that term."

The AP Stylebook notes that "homosexual" can be used in clinical contexts or in terms of same-sex sexual activity. The NLGJA suggests using "homosexual" only when "heterosexual" would be used in a similar construction.

"'Homosexual' is a clinical term," said Long, who has a master's degree from the linguistics program at North Carolina State University. "Using it makes being gay a medical condition, as opposed to a variation in sexuality, and dehumanizes people who are gay."

More than labels, the process of dehumanization may be more powerful when stereotypes impose limits. Thirty-three years ago, Chapel Hill author Young co-authored David Kopay's biography. Young said the book shocked people. Few people, even in the gay community, had considered that a football player could be gay.

“I can remember telling my closest friends that I was doing a book with a gay pro football player,” Young said. “Instantly, their impulsive reaction was to laugh because it’s playing around with two stereotypes: the macho sports figure and the nelly gay person.”

Appealing to the public is one reason that large media corporations focus little coverage on gay and lesbian issues, Zeigler said. A 2005 *Sports Illustrated* poll showed that 14 percent of people believed that gays and lesbians should be banned from sports. Instead of reporting on gay and lesbian issues and potentially losing readers, sports journalists prefer to promote sports, Zeigler said.

“Sports journalists aren’t journalists, for the most part,” Zeigler said. “They are sports fans who have a voice and an audience. They don’t want to rock the boat. They don’t even ask the question.”

Media outlets have little reason to rock the boat if the most important thing is appealing to readers. Zeigler said this aspect is especially true industry giants that already control a significant portion of sports readership and viewership. ESPN.com draws more than 20 million unique visitors to its Web site each month. More than 21 million people read *Sports Illustrated* each week. OutSports.com draws only 300,000 unique visitors each month.

“What does ESPN have to gain from pushing any of these leagues on any social issue whatsoever?” Zeigler asks. “They have partnerships and alliances with these leagues. There’s not even corporate pressure to pursue these stories. There’s probably corporate pressure to not pursue these stories.”

Margaret Holt, standards editor at the *Chicago Tribune*, said her publication gets pressure from local gay and lesbian journalists to cover more gay and lesbian issues, not just about sports. In response to the pressure, the *Chicago Tribune* arranges for editors of each of its sections to meet and discuss guidelines with the gay and lesbian journalists' organization. Additionally, editors met with the NLGJA in 2005 when it held its national conference in Chicago.

Holt added that the *Chicago Tribune* often has meetings with community members about a variety of topics, including one last year with the gay and lesbian community.

"Our guests told us that they hoped that we would include them in the mix for general coverage," Holt recalled. "They hoped to see gay and lesbian issues become more mainstream and natural."

Bailis noted that one reason that newspapers fail to cover gay and lesbian issues is because of staff homogeny. To combat this lack of coverage, a newsroom needs to be comfortable for people with different backgrounds so they feel free to speak up about issues they see. But it goes further than that.

"It's been my experience that sports departments in particular consist of white males, many of whom are over the age of 50," Bailis of *Newsday* said. "There's a discomfort with or pushing aside of anything gay and lesbian because it's not in their realm, and they don't want it to be. You can't always depend on the token gay in the newsroom to stand up and say something."

Bailis added that many people believe that gay and lesbian issues do not belong in mainstream coverage because they affect only a small percentage of the population.

“There’s still a certain discomfort about it and misunderstanding of how the issues fit into people’s everyday lives,” Bailis said. “Reporters just don’t think about it as they are trying to find a diverse group of people to present in a particular story. We always strive for racial diversity. Why not sexual-orientation diversity?”

Sexuality in sports needs to be addressed, Zeigler said. A few years ago Zeigler called each of the 32 NFL teams and found that only one offered benefits to same-sex partners of players. The San Francisco 49ers, were required to provide such benefits as part of a city mandate. Zeigler said that even though wives of NFL players get benefits, the NFL Players’ Association has never fought for the partners of gay athletes. The NFLPA didn’t respond to an interview request for this article.

“One of the ways media could be having an effect is not pushing people out of the closet but making the atmosphere more welcoming when they do,” Zeigler, 36, said.

Young—whose work has appeared in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and a number of other periodicals—said it may not be the media’s job to pursue these stories.

“I don’t know that it’s the role of the press to pressure,” Young said. “When change does happen or when someone speaks out, it’s something the press should focus on. I think it’s for gay activists to apply the pressure. If athletes choose to come out, then you go with it.”

Young said coming-out stories, including “The David Kopay Story,” are outdated because it seems that everyone knows someone who is gay. Kopay’s story stayed on the New York Times Bestseller list for nine weeks, and Kopay received more than 30,000 letters from readers telling their own stories.

That’s the way Young said it should be. People should tell their own stories on their own timeline. Young disagrees with Zeigler that reporters should incorporate questions about sexuality as part of their routine.

“I’m old enough to think that sexuality is a private issue,” Young, 69, said. “That is unless you’re a politician or somebody crusading against gays. It’s the hypocrisy that makes it news. Not that they’re secretly gay.”

Reflection

“No journalist would cover a professional tennis match without getting an education in backhands, foot faults, player rankings and grand slams. But some reporters step into the world of LGBT people without taking the time to know what they're reporting about.”

Randy Dotinga – National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association
(NLGJA)

I blamed my clammy palms on the North Carolina weather that mid-September evening. After a quick scan of Five Guys, an Italian restaurant on Hillsborough Street in Raleigh, I spotted my interviewees sitting on the same side of a booth.

I introduced myself to Shawn Long and Arthur Brand, two members of a gay rugby team called the Carolina Kodiaks, and sat across from them.

Two weeks earlier, I contacted Long about meeting to discuss a profile I wanted to write about a Kodiaks player as part of my master's thesis. They asked about my project. I spoke slowly. My mind combed each word before it came out.

They nodded. I relaxed. Then it happened.

“Excuse me,” Long interrupted.

“The word ‘homosexual’ is used by opposition groups,” Long said with the patience of a teacher. “‘Gay’ and ‘lesbian’ are pride words. It would be better if you used those.”

Luck. It can be a reporter's best friend or worst enemy. This time it was the former. I dodged a bullet by speaking with two people who looked beyond spoken words spoken to their intention.

"I was not offended by your usage of 'homosexual,'" Long told me later. "You seemed like a nice guy, and I didn't feel you were trying to be pejorative or judgmental."

If Long was tired or unwilling to look for the intention of my statements, I could have lost his trust and, subsequently, my story.

I was the journalist Randy Dotinga described, and I should have known it before Long gave me the vocabulary lesson. My sweaty palms were the first sign of not being prepared. But after the tutorial with Long, I conducted dozens of interviews over the next six months and felt comfortable digging for information with my sources. Developing greater ease with sources proved to be a valuable lesson learned from my thesis.

Based on conversations I had with several news organizations representatives, I wasn't the only journalist ignorant of the intricacies of covering gay and lesbian issues. Journalists receive little sensitivity training on LGBT issues from their employers, possibly because, as Karen Bailis of *Newsday* said, many editors and sports journalists come from similar backgrounds.

"It's been my experience that sports departments in particular consist of white males, many of whom are over the age of 50," Bailis said. "There's a discomfort with or pushing aside of anything gay and lesbian because it's not in their realm, and they don't want it to be."

The Associated Press Stylebook provides only a brief guide on word usage. Even though the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association has an extensive word-

usage guide on its Web site, many journalists don't know it exists or may be content following the AP Stylebook. Journalists who do know might not use it because their editors don't push them to.

Perhaps a lack of comfort or fear of offending readers is why the media are fumbling a tremendous opportunity. Some media groups are covering gay and lesbian issues more. For example, the *Chicago Tribune* meets with gay and lesbian organizations to discuss coverage. Reporters at *The Charlotte Observer* engage in roundtable training sessions, but few of those sessions involve coverage of the LGBT community. If newspapers don't report the issues and events of the LGBT community, progress may not be made.

I also learned that many people, including gay and lesbian athletes and sports editors whom I interviewed, didn't know the Gay Games existed. This isn't to say that the Gay Games should be covered in sports sections. For the most part, the Gay Games feature athletes with a skill level on par with athletes in adult recreational leagues that don't receive coverage. But by not covering the Gay Games, media groups miss an opportunity to cover an international cultural event involving more than 10,000 people that has the ingredients of a popular story. The Gay Games bring money to the local economy, break stereotypes and draw protest.

Many of my sources who dedicate themselves to work involving gay and lesbian issues suggested that the media pay more attention to events and issues of the LGBT community. Perry Deane Young, co-author of "The David Kopay Story," broke this trend. Young has dedicated himself to writing as much as he has dedicated himself to being an advocate for gay rights. He said that often the media provide the right coverage.

Initially this point of view surprised me. But after some thought, I agree that the media cover LGBT issues in professional sports properly—another lesson. Gay and lesbian players should come out on their own timeline, not on a reporter's agenda. Until players are openly gay, player unions, like that of the National Football League, won't fight for same-sex partner benefits. The media must wait to pounce on this story, and it's likely they will when the time comes.

If the media cover LGBT issues and sporting events more, that coverage will likely create a more tolerant and accepting environment. And with more of this type of coverage, a professional athlete could feel comfortable enough to come out. If a high-profile professional athlete comes out, stereotypes would shatter and perhaps gays and lesbians would become more comfortable in other parts of society.

For further stories, I would suggest coverage of lesbian athletes. Research shows that lesbians have different experiences from gays in sports. Initially, I attempted to contact lesbian athletes, but they were less responsive to requests to be part of my project. A lack of responsiveness most likely had to do with an aberration in the sample I contacted. A piece similar to the profile on Brand could be done about a lesbian athlete to give a different perspective to the obstacles gay and lesbian athletes encounter.

For my series, mostly for the reasons of convenience and availability, I didn't focus on professional athletes. Based on my experiences with this project, I'm happy I focused on recreational athletes. I produced stories featuring ordinary people whom readers can relate to. But that leaves open another reporting area: gay professional athletes. How many are on the field today? Awareness by teammates? Managers and the front office? Acceptance if they come out?

Overall, this topic helped me approach sensitive issues more fairly and accurately. It taught me to display viewpoints that conflicted with my own. I stepped out of my comfort zone, an experience that will help me as a journalist. I also learned how to break a large issue into a manageable project.

Works Cited in the Introduction and Literature Review

- Anderson, E. (2002). Openly Gay Athletes: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Homophobic Environment. *Gender & Society*, 16(6), 860-877.
- Anonymous, (1991, October 8). Readers Respond to Homophobia in Sports. *USA Today*, pp. 8C.
- Anonymous, (2009, April 16). MLB Sees Rise in Black Players. *Washington Post*, pp. D7.
- Anonymous, (2009, July 22). Companies help fund Gay Games. *Windy City Times*, 24(42), pp. 22.
- Anonymous, (2009, August 6). Summary: Hawaii football coach deserved reprimand for making offensive statements during press conference. *Idaho Press-Tribune*, pp. 6.
- Bianco, D. (1999). *Gay Essentials: Facts for Your Queer Brain*. New York: Alyson Books.
- Brewer, J. (2002, May 23). Sports Struggle With Gay Question - Homophobia Runs Deep In Team Sports, Often Compelling Athletes To Declare Sexual Orientation. *The Orlando Sentinel*, pp. D1.
- Buckheit, M. (2009, August 28). Caster Semenya is being treated unfairly. *ESPN: Page 2*, Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=buckheit/090828>
- Burstyn, V. (1999). *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cahn, S.K. (1994). *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*. New York: The Free Press.

- Caudwell, J. (2000). Football in the UK: Women, Tomboys, Butches and Lesbians. *Sport, Leisure Identities and Gendered Spaces*, 97-106.
- Crothers, T. (2006). *The Man Watching*. Ann Arbor, MI: Sports Media Group.
- Curry, T.J. (1991). Fraternal Bonding in the Locker Room: A Profeminist Analysis of Talk about Competition and Women. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8(2), 119-135.
- Dodd, M. (2007, May 1). Is Jackie Robinson's legacy fading after six decades?. *USA Today*, Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/sports/baseball/2007-04-12-robinson-1a-legacy_N.htm
- Dreier, P. (2003, September 15). Is Baseball Ready for a Gay Jackie Robinson?. *In These Times*, 27(9), 19-20.
- Duncan, M.C. (2006). *Gender Warriors in Sport: Women and the Media*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Eitzen, D. (2003). *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Feasey, R. (2008). *Masculinity and Popular Television*. Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press.
- Figel, B. (1986, June 16). NU's Single has a cautious view. *Chicago Sun-Times*, pp. 119.
- Figel, B. (1986, June 16). Lesbians in world of athletics. *Chicago Sun-Times*, pp. 119.
- Goldiner, D. (2005, April 13). Gays In Sports Poll Teems With Debate. *New York Daily News*, pp. 14.
- Griffin, P. (1992). Changing the Game: Homophobia, Sexism, and Lesbians in Sport. *Quest*, 44(2), 251-265.
- Grossman, R. (2006, July 16). Of gay love, athletes and Greek warriors. *Chicago Tribune*, pp. 1.
- Janssens, J., & Elling A. (2007). It's the sport that counts: On Homosexual Participation in Sports in the Netherlands. *Sexual Orientation Discrimination*: 253-266.
- Jones, R. & LeBlanc, R. (2005). *Sport, culture and advertising : Identities, commodities and the politics of representation (S.J. Jackson & D.L. Andrews, Ed.)*. London: Routledge.

- Kendall, G. (2009, June 1). Too foxy for Roxy? She's No. 9 in the world but she can't get a sponsor because she's gay. (surfer Amee Donohoe). *Curve*, 19(5), 34-36.
- Kopay, D., & Young, P.D. (1988). *The David Kopay Story*. New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc.
- Krane, V., & Kauer K.J. (2007). Out On The Ball Fields: Lesbians In Sport. *Out in Psychology: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Perspectives*, 273-283.
- Leicester, J. (2009, August 28). Soccer tarnished by could-shoulder to homosexuals. *North Adams Transcript*.
- Lenskyi, H.J. (1994). Sexuality and femininity in sport contexts: issues and alternatives. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 18(356), 356-376.
- Longman, J. (2009, November 20). South African Runner's Sex-Verification Result Won't Be Public. *The New York Times*, pp. B10.
- Louganis, G., & Marcus, E. (1995). *Breaking the surface*. New York City: Random House.
- Meisel, B. (1993, August 1). Pros Keep Homosexuality Secretive. *The New York Daily News*, pp.1E.
- Messner, M.A. (2005). The Meaning of Success: The Athletic Experience and the Development of Male Identity. *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 299-309.
- Murnen, S.K. (Ed.). (1998). *The Hyperfemininity scale*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Oskamp, S. (2000). *Reducing prejudice and discrimination*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Overby, L.M. , & Barth, J. (2002). Contact, community context, and public attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. *Polity*, 34(4), 433-456.
- Padecky, B. (2001, May 23). Sports Closet Full, But No One Is Coming Out. *Press Democrat*, pp. C1.
- Pitts, B.G. (1999). Sports Tourism and Niche Markets: Identification and Analysis of the Growing Lesbian and Gay Sports Tourism Industry. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 5(1), 31-50.
- Pringle, R. (2009). Defamiliarizing Heavy Contact Sports: A Critical Examination of Rugby, Discipline, and Pleasure. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(2), 211-234.

- Pronger, B. (1992). *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Pronger, B. (1999). Outta My Endzone: Sport and the Territorial Anus. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23, 373.
- Pronger, B. (1990). *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Reel, B. (1994, June 17). Sports Aren't Camp, They're competition. *Newsday*, pp. A63.
- Richmond, B (Producer). (2009, October 1). *Go Dragons!* [Television Broadcast]. New York: Viacom.
- Spander, D. (1991, September 1). Losing the Ad Battle: Gays (and Others) Find Tough Going. *Sacramento Bee*, pp. D14.
- Trujillo, N. (1991). Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8, 290-308.
- Vecsey, G. (2009, August 30). A Rare Kicker, but Simply a Player. *The New York Times*, pp. 10.
- Vromen, G. (1989, January 15). Gay Pride Comes to the Soccer Field. *The San Francisco Chronicle*, pp. 7.
- Young, P. (2009, September 18). Personal Interview.

Interviews and Other Sources

Interviews

- Allen, Michael. Pastor of Uptown Baptist Church in Chicago, Member Illinois Family Institute. Telephone interview. 2010, Feb. 9.
- Bailis, Karen. Senior News Editor of *Newsday*. Telephone interview. 2010, March 4.
- Brand, A.R. Player of North Carolina Kodiaks Rugby Football Club. In-person, telephone and email interviews. Sept. 2009 – Dec. 2009.
- Brand, Diane. Mother of A.R. Brand. Phone interview. 2009, Oct. 11.
- Cruz, Ana Paula. Corporate External Communications of Kraft. E-mail interview. 2010, Jan. 28.
- Enochs, Jeff. President, player of Charlotte Royals Rugby Football Club. Telephone interview. 2010, Feb. 3.
- Helms, Brian. Secretary, player of Charlotte Royals Rugby Football Club. Telephone interview. 2010, Feb. 8.
- Holt, Margaret C. Standards Editor of *Chicago Tribune*. E-mail interview. 2010, Feb. 7.
- Kampmann, Marie. Board member of European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation, Staff member of the Cologne Gay Games. E-mail interviews. 2010, Jan – Feb.
- Lekus, Ian. Member of North Carolina Kodiaks Rugby Football Club. Phone and email interviews. 2009, Oct.
- Long, Shawn. Secretary, player of North Carolina Kodiaks Rugby Football Club. In-person and email interviews. Sept. 2009 – Jan. 2010.
- Michael, Howard. Former partner of A.R. Brand. Phone interview. 2009, Oct. 25.

Persinger, Michael. Executive Sports Editor of *The Charlotte Observer*. E-mail interviews. 2010, Jan. – Feb.

Readinger, Mike. Chairperson of the Cleveland Synergy Foundation Board of Directors. Phone interview. 2010, Jan. 28.

Schaaff, Darl. Delegate to Federation of Gay Games, Co-president of International Association of Gay and Lesbian Martial Artists. Telephone interview. 2010, Feb. 3.

Vitagliano, Ed. Member of the American Family Association, Editor of the *AFA Journal*. Phone interview. 2010, Feb. 10.

Young, Perry Deane. Co-author “The David Kopay Story,” Gay Rights Activist. In-person interviews. Sept. 2009 – Feb. 2010.

Zeigler, Cyd. Co-creator OutSports.com. Telephone interview. 2010, Feb. 17.