

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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IT TAKES A TEAM!

Making sports safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender athletes and coaches

Transcript

Jaime L. Bailey (IWFL Pro Football Player): Playing sports is—it's a drive for me. It's something that excites me. Makes me very happy and I am a very competitive person. So, you know, playing sports is a big part of my life.

Andrew Holder (college swimmer and rower): I got a lot out of competing with other people. I really love to win. I was a big time competitor.

Dan Bozzuto (high school track co-captain): When I run track I feel happy. I'm relaxed. I find the running soothing. It's almost therapeutic. I love being with the guys on the team. I mean, we all get along really great. We are all friends off the track as well as on the track.

Lauren Ruffin (college basketball player): Playing sports makes me feel, honestly, invincible. Like I love the way that my body feels when I'm playing. I love it when everything is going well. I love that my mind's clear. I love that my body is just, like a machine. I love that feeling.

Don McPherson (former NFL quarterback): We're here to address the question: How can we make sure that people in athletics are evaluated not based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, but on their individual character and accomplishments.

Zina Garrison (tennis champion): Acknowledging that discrimination exists is the first step in fighting it. This video illustrates the challenges lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender athletes of all race backgrounds face.

Don McPherson: The first segment of the video helps us to understand more about how different athletes deal with coming out, and how the responses of their teammates and coaches make this experience negative or positive.

Susan Mullaney (former college volleyball player): I couldn't walk across campus without usually young men shouting from rooms you know "dyke," "faggot," "queer." I mean, every single day.

Andrew Holder: The language was absolutely homophobic. In fact, I can't think of a day that I went to swimming practice and didn't hear something, "Fag this, faggot

that. Gay this.” The words are used so often that it doesn’t mean homosexual anymore, it means degraded or bad.

Corey Johnson (high school football co-captain): I said, “Guys, I have something very important I want to tell you. We’ve been friends for a long time. We’ve played football for a long time. I don’t want any of that to change. I’m coming out as a gay student.

Andrew Holder: It never even crossed my mind to come out in high school. It was very clear that it just wasn’t a safe place to do that. People at my high school were regularly beaten up on suspicion of being gay. I don’t know of a single out high school student while I was there.

Masconomet Teammate 1: Everybody, everybody just took a guess and everybody was just like, “Whoa.”

Masconomet Teammate 2: It was such a shock, because like, he was the last person in the world you’d ever expect to be gay.

Masconomet Teammate 3: And everyone’s jaws dropped. And their eyes were bulging.

Chris Romito (Masconomet teammate): Like, all right, do I look at him or do I look down? Like and I want to be respectful and like, should I look too long? Like am I looking too long? Like I was just scared. Like, at first.

Jaime L. Bailey: Everything changed with my teammates. I saw them on mandatory occasions and that was it. I didn’t go to the movies with them. I didn’t go to dinner with them. Any kind of party or anything that they had I wasn’t invited to. It was a big loss for me to lose, you know, my second family. And that’s what, when you spend that much time with a group of women, they become your family. And I lost all of them because I was a lesbian and then because I came out.

Corey Johnson: I said, “I didn’t come on to you last year in the locker room. I’m not gonna do it this year. I didn’t touch you last year in the locker room. I’m not gonna do it this year.” And I said, “Who says you guys are cute enough anyway?”

Jim Whalen (Masconomet teammate): And as soon as he opened it up to questions I sorta raised my hand and I said, “Don’t worry about it.” And like, “We’re friends more than, like, your teammates.” So, it was cool.

Joe Bavaro (Masconomet teammate): Cory is like a nice kid, you know, so, and he’s a great football player so it don’t matter.

Thomas Bennett (Masconomet teammate): I wasn’t, like, that close with Cory but I respect him for coming out and doing what he did.

Lauren Ruffin: If an athlete doesn't feel tolerated--like it's a tolerant environment, they definitely aren't able to perform. I mean, a lot of, you know, student athletes you know you gotta worry about school, you gotta worry about your sport. So, when people, I mean, a lot of us work. I mean and the fact that you can't do that in a comfortable environment is—I mean it definitely affect your performance. You can't perform under that kind of pressure.

Jaime L. Bailey: From the coach's standpoint they did not give me any type of support, they didn't stop any of the disrespect that I received from the players when, you know, all they had to do was, you know, call a team meeting, discuss it, put it out on the table, and clear it up. That would have been fine with me and but it didn't happen.

Dan Bozzuto: When I was closeted, I felt like I wasn't in the real world because I was living the life of lies. I would like almost sit in the corner of the locker room and be like, "I would lose all of this if they knew the real me."

Nicole LaViolette (professional bicyclist): I have to say to myself: "Okay, am I gonna tell them what I did on the weekend? Am I going to tell them who I did it with? Or am I gonna..." So, and I'm not talking about sex here, I'm talking about whether I share if I went to a movie with my girlfriend.

Jaime L. Bailey: Pretending to be straight was something that I think I became pretty good at. Even had a boyfriend pretty much the three years that I was in college.

Nicole LaViolette: So, you know, when people say, "Don't talk about it," what they are saying to me is, "Don't talk about your life, period."

Jaime L. Bailey: It's not good at all for anybody to hide who they really are by worrying about what other people are going to think about them.

Dan Bozzuto: Gay men today have a stereotype of being effeminate and not into sports. I can assure you that that's just not true.

Lauren Ruffin: I had a friend whose father and brother had never seen her play because they associate women's sports with lesbianism. And I think that to a certain extent a lot of straight women are afraid of being branded as a lesbian because they play a sport.

Nicole LaViolette: As long as there is a resistance to having women in, which is basically people saying "We don't want people who don't fit their straight, macho, male image of an athlete," as long as that still holds, then women, lesbians and gay men will never be accepted in sports. So that's the real challenge. It's not only when one about homophobia but I think it's really about gender as well.

Jaime L. Bailey: My being a lesbian athlete and being a woman of color pretty much go hand in hand. They are who I am. I don't see myself just as a lesbian or just

as a woman of color. It's just the two things come together and make things make me who I am.

Lauren Ruffin: People see me as a black woman before they see that, before they know, that I'm gay.

Dan Bozzuto: My high school is not a diverse place. There are not a lot of people of color. As a white male I fit in very well there and do not have to face those prejudices or discriminations.

Lauren Ruffin: Because I don't feel safe in the first place there's less of a chance of a black athlete coming out as opposed to a white athlete who doesn't have to deal with the racism.

Don McPherson: The time has come to create teams where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender athletes can be open about who they are and can continue to participate in athletics.

Zina Garrison: The new generation of lesbian, gays, bisexuals, and transgender athletes are less willing to keep who they are a secret. Athletes and coaches of all sexual orientation and gender identities are assuming leadership to make sports safe and welcoming.

Dan Bozzuto: Slowly but surely, I come out to more and more people on the team on an individual basis and they all accepted it and they were all fine with it. And by the time I got to the last few people on the team they were like, "Is that it, Buzz? Do you have something else to tell us? You sound like you have something serious to talk about?" They were just so accepting. It didn't even occur to them that that could be a problem.

Andrew Holder: I had allies and that was a tremendous help. They were excited about who I was. They were excited that there was a gay teammate who was willing to be out of the closet.

Susan Mullaney: Lauren was struggling with her homophobia in a very, you know, different way because you're straight. So she had to deal with, "Wow, my very best friend is gay." She really went out of her way to identify--If she could go and speak to certain people on the team and say, "Hey that's not okay and this is why." She was really good at having dialogue around that topic by being very upfront with people and saying, "I just won't stand for that on my team."

Lauren Ruffin: I had a lot of support. You know, I had my coach. My coach has been a huge support system for me. I have, you know, friends. And their parents have also been supportive and that is really good I mean it was really cool after my father tells me that he can't support me to have someone else who doesn't even know me to tell me, you know, "I think you're a great kid and I'm going to help you out for a while."

Lauren Perrotti (former college basketball player): There was a confrontation I had when I was a senior with a captain of a male athletic team at Eastern and there was slurs said to myself and my friends. Things like “dyke” and everything under the sun for a long period of time out in a public place but on campus and I went to Coach Miller and I said, “What am I going to do about this? I’m just so angry.” And he totally supported me. He was on the phone making phone calls. “This is what’s going to happen. This is the procedure.” As well as his wife and another one of my professors, Dr. Brown Miller. And they were both at the hearing with me, backing me up.

Bob Miller (former ECSU basketball coach): Lately I’ve had a chance just to review the players over the period of years that I’ve been coaching. And I guess personally it shows my homophobia and that I was surprised that the lesbian athletes I’ve been privileged to coach have been exceptional people. And they carried the load that was difficult and still managed to be outstanding students, outstanding people and outstanding athletes.

Andrew Holder: Coaches need to take a little time to educate themselves. And it doesn’t have to be formal through diversity training or anything like that.

Mike Cerullo (assistant football coach): It just made me realize a lot of ways I was coaching or things I was saying, you know, were wrong. “You’re playing like a fag,” you know, “Pick it up.” And I don’t think you realize what that does to a young person if they happen to be gay.

Andrew Holder: In his or her own mind the coach would find out that it’s okay to be around gay people and that gay and lesbian athletes aren’t going to spell the end of a sports team.

Lauren Ruffin: I think it’s really important if you’re on a team to talk to your teammates just like you’d talk about anyone else.

Jaime L. Bailey: I wasn’t looking for anyone to come and give me a hug and say, “Oh Jamie it’s okay.” That’s not what I was looking for. What I was looking for was for nothing to change.

Lauren Ruffin: If someone on your team is making you uncomfortable because they’re gay or you think they might be gay, talk to them about it and make yourself understanding just like you would with anything else.

Andrew Holder: I just wanted it again to be no big deal. I wanted to let them find out or tell them directly, and then immediately pick back up with whatever we were doing.

Dan Bozzuto: One of the main reasons I decided to come out as an athlete was because I wanted to be an inspiration to other people. I knew a lot of people who were in athletics who were in very similar situations as me and did not probably have

the strength that I did to come out and announce it to everybody the way I did. And I wanted to tell them that perhaps things can get better.

Andrew Holder: It's best to be absolutely honest and to be as open about yourself as you can possibly be. Mentally it's just too much work to carve people up into compartments and I personally have been so much healthier after letting everyone know.

Jaime L. Bailey: Advice I would give to another gay or lesbian athlete was, would be to make yourself happy. You can't make anybody else happy without making yourself happy first. So as soon as you do that, you're on the right road.

Dan Bozzuto: If heterosexual people were willing to talk about homosexuality in an enlightened way and have intelligent discussions about it, and stop using the derogatory comments, I think that would be the best way they could help the gay athletes.

Martina Navratilova (tennis champion): So I would just try to educate. I would say, "Look, this one is a little different from you. It doesn't mean that you're better. Or they're better. It doesn't mean anything else it just means that they're different and you deal with it. And this is a team sport, so let's work together. If that person sinks a three-pointer with two seconds to go when we're down by two, I don't think you're gonna care whether she's Jewish or black or gay or anything or Southern or whatever. You just wanna make sure that she makes the shot or that's all. That's the ballgame. Nothing else matters.

Don McPherson: We hope this video has identified ways that you can help make athletics a respectful place for everyone to enjoy the challenges and excitement that sports participation has to offer. Remember, it takes a team-

Don McPherson and Zina Garisson in unison: - your team!

Zina Garisson: - to make athletics a safe place for all.

Ann Richardson (Corey Johnson's mother): The team rallied around him. They said, Corey: "You're our friend, you're our teammate, and we stand behind you." And I cried. Everything that I hoped for was happening that my son could just be himself, go to school, play football and just live his life, you know.

Claudia L. Woody (Vice President, IBM Global): IBM is a proud sponsor of the project to eliminate homophobia in sport. As a company, IBM embraces gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered employees. Because we're committed to creating high-performance teams of extraordinary individuals as diverse as the customers we serve. Sports provides an excellent training ground for business leaders. And it's important that parents and educators understand that they need to prepare all students to excel in today's workplace. When students and employees feel safe to be themselves they are more productive and more successful. IBM is pleased to be a part of this effort to

promote inclusion, development, and respect of all people in sports, in business, and in life.

SPEAK OUTS

Martina Navratilova: It Takes A Team is a great promotional tool for programs and colleges to build a safe environment for all athletes either gay or straight.

Jeannette Lee (billiards champion): I felt like it's important that no matter what, no matter where you are, you should be respectful to the people around you. But when you know that there's a subject that, for example, having gay or lesbians on your team where they're not being treated fairly. I think it's important to deal with that issue. Don't pretend it's not there. And again, know what you are talking about.

Martina Navratilova: Anytime you are operating in a shroud of secrecy or shame or you're just trying to--you're not free within yourself whether it's your religion or sexuality or anything, obviously you're not operating 100%.

Karin Korb (U.S. Paralympic Tennis Team): I think it is inherently so important to teach teammates who happen to be gay or happen to be lesbians with respect because they're your teammates. That would be A. I don't necessarily care what someone's gender affiliation is, what they're religion is, what they're color is, what they're hair color is. Are you my teammate? Are you on the court with me? Are we playing together? To me, that's the most important thing. And if I am not respecting you as a human being, then what is that all about?

Martina Navratilova: I think it's important for everybody to be treated with respect. Gay, lesbian, straight, whatever. In between. You know, basically we need to be treated as people. And, me being gay, I don't want to be singled out as a gay player or a gay person or anything. I'm a tennis player. So I long for the world where sexuality will not matter. One day it won't matter. But at the moment it still does.

Jeannette Lee: A lot of people like to either accept it, don't accept it, say it's none of my business. I think it is your business. If these people are on your team and in your group, you need to know what issues are going on even if you're not part of it. Maybe you're not one of the people that are giving Jackie a hard time. Maybe it's someone else. But if they're all on your team, there's an issue there, and even though it shouldn't have to do with sports, teammates' teamwork is the basis of sport. And if you don't have that then you need get involved and go, "Okay, what's going on here? And what are the issues and we need to find a way to resolve it. And a lot of it starts with knowledge. It starts with awareness."

Karin Korb: To value people who happen to be different—I'm different. I'm in a chair. I happen to have a mobility impairment. I know what it feels like to be disrespected because of something that's either your choosing or not. The color of your skin, the way you act, the way you dress. The partners that you choose. Is it fair? Absolutely not. Should it be respected? Yeah. Why? Because you happen to be human.

Martina Navratilova: If you look at some lawsuits that are happening right now. Prior sexuality is being questioned. It just shouldn't be a concern one way or the other. But it is now. So we need to deal with it and we need to make sure that gay athletes are treated with the same respect and consideration as straight athletes.

Jeannette Lee: And a lot of times people either hate or they have problems with things they really have never really made the effort to know what it's about. And again, a lot of times they don't because what they're worried it's a contagious or they're worried that you know their issues might affect them. And just have confidence. And if you come from a place of love, and if the people involved know that the purpose of this is to gain unity again, then you're gonna develop respect. You're gonna develop compassion. You're gonna develop security. And I think that especially in sport where you're gonna be around each other and you're gonna need each other, you're have to start there.

Karin Korb: Everyone wants to be treated with respect. Everyone wants to be liked. The bottom line is everybody wants to be loved. And when people aren't treated with kindness and an open heart, people become very closed. And when you're an athlete and you happen to be closed, you play tight, you're not executing, you're sad. You don't feel like you fit in. So when I'm part of a team, and I would hope that everyone thinks this same way, I want my teammate, I want Karen Korb to be the best player that she can be. So I'm going to lift that girl, or that young lady, or that woman up to the next level. And that's simply because I respect them. Whether they're gay or they're a lesbian, I don't care about that. I want them to be the best player that they can be. If that's being the best teammate they can be and I'm the best person I can be, then that makes a great team. And that's the most important thing.

Martina Navratilova: For gays and lesbians to feel again free and not vulnerable and safe the coaches and the administration need to be very supportive and stop any kind of derogatory comments from anywhere. I know that in schools kids that are—gay comments, negative comments, fag or queer or whatever you want to call, 93% of the time the teacher doesn't say anything. You know, it's okay to say those things. And the teachers have got to be educated better about what it does and the kind of shame it promotes and embarrassment. And obviously again when you're creating a negative environment it's not good for the team. And it's certainly not good for them as human beings.

Jeannette Lee: It's very important for coaches and athletes to deal with each other with respect especially in terms of if you know that there are gay and lesbians on your team and that there is any kind of an issue, which I personally don't think that that should be an issue in sport. But it is. I mean, that's the fact of the matter. And that mean that so now you need to get involved and find out what's going on, what the issues are. Bring it out into the open. Talk about it. Resolve these issues because you're not going to move forward as a team when there's a lot of conflict in the team and a lot of times that has to do with misunderstanding.

Martina Navratilova: So the coaches and the teachers need to be made aware that they have got to stop this kind of harassment, this kind of bad talk and support their athletes. And say this is none of your business and this doesn't matter and if it is your business then you still need to accept it because there's nothing wrong with it. Being gay or straight that's not a choice, that's how you are. And we need to recognize it and come up into the twenty-first century.

Karin Korb: We have a wonderful curriculum at The Women's Sports Foundation. You can check the website "ITAT" and it takes all of us to make a difference. It's not just one of us. One of us can do a lot. But all of us can do even more. And to be respectful of different inherently and to see the value of each and every person whether you're male or you're female is the key.

Martina Navratilova: To the gay girl I'd say accept yourself and to the straight girl say, I would say, accept your gay friends.

Karin Korb: The other day when I was talking to my mother I was telling her that I was doing some stuff for the Women's Sports Foundation. I always get really excited and I said "Yeah, I get to talk about homophobia in sport." And she looked at me and she said, "Karen, are you gay?" And you know I've known my mother for quite a few years so I said, "well what do you think?" And she looks at me and says, "Well I don't know." By the way that's my German accent. And so I said, "Well what's the point? Does it really matter?" And she said, "Well, Karen, what does having to be gay or *lesbisch*, because that's how you say lesbian in German, *lesbisch*, what does that have to do with being an athlete? What does that have to do with sport?" She was really dumbfounded that I was talking about something she goes, "Well what does that matter?" And I thought, "That's what we're talking about."

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