



**Tanja Walther**

# **KICK IT OUT**

**Homophobia  
in Football**

**Rudi Aussauer, manager, Schalke 04 (2004):**

“I have never seen a homosexual player in the League. [...] But I’m sure there are some, although I can’t imagine it.”

**De Wolf, Feyenoord player:**

“I would never take a shower with gays.”

**Arne Friedrich, German national player (2004):**

“There are more and more people who are gay. Definitely players in the Football League as well.”

**Gerd Müller, former German national player and record scorer (1975):**

“Women belong in the kitchen, not on the pitch.”

**Peter Jansson, Swedish football and handball player (2003):**

“I am one of the hidden ones who don’t exist, who is not allowed to enjoy sports under the same conditions as everyone else.”

**Frank Rost, German goalie (2002):**

“... besides, I take my shower with my ass to the wall.”

**Otto Baric, coach of the Croatian national team (2004):**

“Homosexuality is abnormal. I would never call homosexuals into my team.”

**Paul Breitner, former German national player (1981):**

“I find women kicking the ball to be utterly unaesthetic. Women’s football is distasteful.”

**Tanju Colak, Turkish record scorer (2005):**

“In all these years, I have never met a single gay player. And if I met one, I would instantly recognise him.”

**Rudi Gutendorf, German coach (1982):**

“A woman can be so wonderful in bed, but on the pitch she will always look terrible to me.”

**Corny Littman, president, FC St. Pauli (2004):**

“I would not encourage any professional player to come out. The social pressure would be unbearable.”

**John Blankenstein, referee observer, UEFA (2004):**

“Everybody is against referees anyway, so it doesn’t matter if he is gay on top of that. A referee doesn’t have any fans.”

**Uli Hoeness, manager, FC Bayern Munich (2004):**

“It’s too bad, however, if he insists on a double room.”

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## 1. kick off – INTRODUCTION

Sport is of tremendous importance throughout Europe. The number of people interested in sport increases every year. Sport is a growing economic and recreational factor. Sports clubs, associations, and organisations are important and influential institutions in society. As a result of this importance, sport also has a social and political function.

More often than not, however, traditional structures with their various orientations, interests, and needs keep sport from fulfilling its social and political function. In most cases, sports clubs and associations are very reluctant to comment on current problems such as peace, drugs, or violence, for example.

While sport cannot and should not be a repair shop for fixing grievances produced by society, the persons in charge in sports organisations cannot and must not turn their backs on current problems.

Football is the most popular team sport in Europe. The rising number of spectators in professional football demonstrates the high level of acceptance the game continues to enjoy. Football is marketed and successfully sold as an “event.” As a mass phenomenon, football is not a reflection of society, but rather a place where cultural notions influential in society are being produced or reinforced. Thus, football is part of society. This is why football can be an important instrument for reaching people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 59% of all European citizens believe that sport provides an opportunity for counteracting all forms of discrimination (European Commission Sport Barometer, 2003).



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All members of the football community must be strengthened time and again in their awareness of problems such as racism and discrimination. In order to tap the full potential of the football game, however, *all* forms of discrimination need to be counteracted. While racism is frequently on the agenda, discrimination and abuse based on sexual orientation, homophobia, and sexism are mostly neglected, although they are recurring problems in football as well. Homophobia and sexism may not be separated from each other, since lesbian women repeatedly become victims of both massive homophobic and sexist abuse.

Sport is an integral element in the daily lives of many gays and lesbians as well. They may be athletes themselves or devoted fans. Based on their sexual orientation, however, they are sometimes excluded, discriminated against, or forced

to conceal an important part of their identities to avoid discrimination. As a result, homosexuals may not always practice or enjoy sport as much as they would like to.

This paper is divided into four parts. It begins with an explanation of the connections between sex, gender categories of “femininity” and “masculinity,” and homophobia, exploring some of the mechanisms facilitating homophobia in football. The second part aims to demonstrate where homophobia, sexism, and discrimination may be found in football. It will become evident that gay men face different problems and forms of discrimination on the pitch as well as on the terraces than do lesbian women. The third part provides a number of suggestions and examples on what should be done to arrive at a situation in which players, fans, and all others involved in football no longer experience any discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The last chapter gives a short portrait of the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF). The EGLSF is an umbrella organisation for gay and lesbian issues in sport. It aims to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and to support the integration and emancipation of lesbians and gays in sports.

## **2. you run like a girl – GENDER and HOMOPHOBIA**

Football is a reservation, a refuge, and a protective space for outdated notions of masculinity (see MARSCHNICK, 2003). Football is the last place where “true masculinity” may be lived and expressed both on and off the field. Female players, fans, board members, and journalists, in contrast, are rare exceptions. The common division of the game into football and women’s football illustrates the idea that it is the men who play “real” or “true” football, very much the way Boris Becker once commented on Steffi Graf in an interview about tennis: “She plays women’s tennis; I play tennis” (quoted in PALZKILL, 1990).

People’s ideas about femininity and masculinity are profoundly influenced by collective notions established and transmitted in society over centuries. According to traditional gender roles, masculinity still represents attributes such as activity, courage, intellect, assertiveness, etc. Femininity, on the contrary, stands for restraint, weakness, emotions, and empathy, for example. These two categories reduce the diversity of possible human characteristics and forms of behaviour to a restricted, gender-bound repertoire.

In sport, the boundaries of femininity and masculinity are extremely narrow. Women in sports, however, do experience the possibility of expressing aspects of their personalities usually defined as male. They even *have to* demonstrate supposedly male qualities in order to be successful as athletes. For women, the main problem rather results from having to choose between their identities as women and as athletes. Women may be athletes and thereby transgress the boundaries of femininity and masculinity. For men, transgressing these gender boundaries is not as easy and frequently results in allegations of homosexuality. Men failing to conform to traditional gender roles experience much harsher sanctions from society than women because they break a much more deeply entrenched taboo.

The world of football is a special part of the world of sport. Football is a sphere of male culture, male bonding, and male power. Only “real” men play football, a game in which any display of “female” qualities will be considered a weakness. Female qualities are unwelcome; they are disrespected and excluded. “I consider both violence and sexism to be core characteristics of male-dominated football. The maleness of football is established by excluding women and gays, which results in sexism and homophobia” (SÜLZE 2005, 48). Bad players are called “girls” or “faggots,” for example. Along the same lines, football-playing women are “viragos” or “lesbians”, with lesbian in this case meaning unattractive and “male.”

In spite of this resistance to change in established gender boundaries, SÜLZE has identified a number of new trends: For the leftist men’s and gay movements, rejecting masculinity is no longer synonymous with rejecting football, for example. According to an Emnid poll, more and more women watch important matches of the national team on television, which suggests that an interest in football is no longer exclusively a male prerogative. For marketing reasons, football is about to be turned into a family event which is supposed to attract a financially potent audience. As a consequence, more and more women are being targeted and become more visible as football spectators.

Despite these developments, however, the world of football continues to be persistently male. Misogyny, sexism, and homophobia remain ingredients of football. They can be found in fan chants, on posters and photos, in calls to female players and cheerleaders to get naked, and, of course, in the oft-repeated and beloved wisdom that women are constitutionally incapable of understanding the offside rule. In addition, a number of football greats have publicly declared that the kitchen is the place where women belong. SELMER explains that women frequently downplay the sexism they encounter in order to justify their presence in the football stadium. Furthermore, sexist slogans sometimes go unnoticed because everybody’s attention is focused on the match.

It is not individual women who are being rejected but female concepts per se: Everything looking female or sexy does not fit into football. Women feeling comfortable in the male world of football do so precisely because they do not encounter any “chicks” there and because they may act openly and straightforwardly. Individual women get accepted into this male world if they are “true” fans and feel enthusiastic about football. They do not have to conform to any gender stereotype and may behave as they like on the terraces. As “true” fans, they are not subject to the constraints of supposedly female social behaviour. “They manage to create a free space for themselves where they are not primarily defined by their sex” (SÜLZE 2005, 48). However, this gender strategy only works in an overwhelmingly male world whose order cannot be disturbed, let alone destroyed by the presence of a few individual women.

Homosexuality is such a taboo in men’s football that you might think the first gay player would cause the football universe to come tumbling down. This seems strange considering the fact that the game regularly features various manifestations of homoeroticism such as players and fans kissing, embracing, and comforting each other both on the field and on the terraces. These forms of body contact, however, are not perceived as homoeroticism. On the contrary, players and fans may show all sorts of behaviour in the football stadium without being considered un-male. In this

context, SÜLZE talks about what she calls the masculinization forces of football which allow men to wear girl's laces, earrings, and even women's underwear (David Beckham) and still come across as indisputably male, for example.

People in Western and Central European countries live in societies that supposedly do not care who lives or sleeps with whom. Statistically, 5 to 10 percent of the population are homo- or bisexual. Looking at society at large, a lot has changed for lesbians and gays during the past few decades: Their public visibility has increased; many Western European countries have granted them more rights; they are featured in prime time television shows; many work for the army or the police; there are more and more celebrity coming-outs in politics, culture, and the arts.

It is only in the realm of all-connecting, all-integrating, and never-discriminating sport where homosexuals are neither found nor welcome. Sport in general and football in particular seem absolutely resistant to progress in this respect. With impressive clarity, the world of football thus shows that it is one of the most conservative realms of our society. Working-class sport has been dominated by males and their points of view for so many decades that different life-styles do not have a place. Heterosexual men seem enormously scared of any contact with gay men, which is especially detrimental because football with its tackling, shadowing, and holding techniques is one of the sports involving most body contact. After scoring a goal, all players are fond of hugging and embracing each other, but only as long as no player enjoys touching another man in private as well. Everything unfamiliar provokes fears and anxieties; and everything unfamiliar is met with particular aggressiveness and intolerance.



EuroGames Zurich 2000

The amount of ignorance in all of this is quite frightening. Many only know a handful of invectives for gays at best. They know next to nothing about lesbians and entertain only stereotypical notions of homosexual life-styles. Stereotypes are omnipresent and function as mechanisms of exclusion for gays and lesbians. Stereotypical images and homophobia are widespread on all levels of sport, among players, coaches, referees, clubs, associations, and fans.

Traditionally, heterosexuality has been regarded as a biological fact and the natural way of life. Homophobia in its various expressions and forms of social behaviour is intended to stabilize the system of heterosexuality by stigmatizing all other life-styles and forms of sexuality as unnatural or pathological. FASTING defines homophobia

as “an irrational fear and intolerance of homosexuality, gays, and lesbians – even of forms of behaviour outside of expected gender roles.”

Homosexuality in sport is seen somewhat differently with regard to different disciplines. Gay figure skaters are tolerated more easily than gay footballers, for example. And whereas female football players are bound to be lesbian by definition, female track and field athletes are not. In spite of these differences, however, homosexual athletes may experience discrimination in all sports. It often begins with feeling uncomfortable in clubs and associations because gays and lesbians are not visible in this milieu either as athletes or as supporters. Most discrimination takes the form of verbal abuse. Rather than insulting gays and lesbians personally, people more frequently make general comments such as “Are you gay or what?” when somebody’s actions fail to succeed.

However, there are more extreme instances of discrimination as well such as physical violence and exclusion from clubs after homosexuals have decided to come out. Many people still think homosexuality is contagious, so they won’t take a shower with a lesbian or gay person and do not want their children to do sports with them.

For all of these reasons, only very few dare to come out and make their sexual orientation public. But they do exist, those lesbian, gay, and bisexual top athletes such as Martina Navratilova, Greg Louganis, Amelie Maurismo, Judith Arndt, or Mark Tewksbury. Lesbians and gays can also be found in amateur sport, but merely 3% of them openly display their sexual preferences, and 64% come out only with their closest friends in their clubs (see CALMBACH 2001).

Football is the sport of the masses and dominated by heterosexual and monosexual masculinity. It is closely identified with the image of the strong man. Gays and women do not fit into this picture. While there already are numerous anti-racist campaigns and initiatives on many levels, many are unaware of the fact that there are other forms of discrimination besides racism and right-wing extremism, i.e. homophobia and sexism.

“In contrast to other forms of discrimination such as sexism, racism and right-wing extremism are usually noticed by fans and sometimes seen as a problem, but sometimes also belittled as a ‘normal’ part of football culture” (SCHWENZER 2005, 60).

When the opposing team or the referee is called “gay,” most people do not even notice any abuse. Homophobia and sexism are often understood as being part of the cultural logic of football. Racist, sexist, or homophobic forms of behaviour are intended to provoke, insult, or humiliate the opponents and their fans and as such become legitimate strategies for winning the match.

Some slogans, chants, and invectives have become so integral to enjoying football that their meaning is no longer questioned. The microcosm of the football stadium frequently allows and tolerates what would elsewhere constitute a criminal offence, at least in Germany. Calling a player a “fucking Jew” is part of the football spectacle. As an anonymous part of the mass, you may say what you would never say anywhere else because it cannot or must not be said.

As a result of persistent negation, homosexuality becomes a taboo. The scope of this negation becomes apparent when comparing articles from the German press over the past ten years. For example, newspaper articles on the first gay-lesbian world football championships in 1995 in Berlin (*Berliner Zeitung*, *die tageszeitung*, *Tagesspiegel*, *Berliner Kurier*) or reviews of the gay German football movie “Men Like Us” in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Express* read almost exactly the same. They all agree that football is the people’s sport and above all a male sport, in which gays don’t exist! Gays can’t throw, can’t run, and can’t tackle, except maybe for a bit of gymnastics.

The silence of fans, players, coaches, clubs, and associations or the negation and invisibility of homosexuality in sport are serious expressions of homophobia. The exclusion of homosexuality may save gays and lesbians from direct discrimination, but only as long as they remain silent about their homosexuality. It is the so-called prisoner’s dilemma: Homosexuals are only discriminated against when they come out, but they do not come out for fear of discrimination. According to a 2001 Swiss study by CALMBACH, only 3% of the surveyed coaches and officials in amateur sports notice any homophobia in their clubs; 22% believe that there are gays and lesbians in their club; 83% say that homosexuality was never on the club agenda.

In spite of these results, homosexuality and homophobia are almost absent in European sports research. As BAKS and MALECEK had to find out in a study on behalf of the EGLSF, not a single study on homosexuality and homophobia in sports can be traced in Southern and Eastern Europe. Most existing studies focus on regional sports or include only one or very few disciplines. There is some research from Belgium (DE VOS 2000), Germany (PAPAGEOIRGIU/ BOEGE 1997, PALZKILL 1990, PFISTER 1999), Great Britain (KING/THOMSON), the Netherlands (HEKMA 1994, SCHUYF/STOEPLER 1997), Norway (KOLNES 1995, FASTING 2003), and Switzerland (CALMBACH et al. 2001).

Because of the public silence on homosexuality and homophobia and its invisibility, the dominance of both heterosexuality and collective ideas on femininity and masculinity remain essentially intact. As a consequence, it is almost impossible for athletes to come out. Young homosexuals suppress their identities and hardly participate in any sport for fear of discovery. This is also true of European countries in which official policies aim to strengthen the rights of gays and lesbians. In these countries, there may be more public attention on homophobia, but problems do exist just the same. It is probably safe to say that the situation in countries with a less supportive political background is similar, if not even more disconcerting.

### **3. can’t even shoot straight – FOOTBALL & HOMOPHOBIA**

#### **3.1. it’s a men’s world – MEN’S FOOTBALL**

In many publications, homosexuality is referred to as the last major taboo in football, especially in professional football. Officially, there are no gay players in Europe. Football supposedly is a gay-free zone. The idea behind this is that there can’t be

any gays in football because gays can't play football. Gays may be ballet dancers, but surely not footballers.

No player knows a gay player or has ever heard of one in professional football. Repeatedly, there are rumours and speculations. Names are circulated but not made public. Even players who simply say they don't mind gays are suspected of being gay themselves. Because of these social pressures, homosexuality continues to be an extremely sensitive issue.

A good example is the debate triggered by Tan Sagtürk in Turkey in early 2005. The renowned ballet dancer and actor caused many people's blood to boil by claiming that "there are more gay footballers than gay ballet dancers. I know, because I have friends" (SCHÄCHTER 2005). The discussion quickly found its way into the press. Former and current national players emphasized time and again that there aren't any gays in Turkish football. The double standards involved in this debate are exemplified by Tanju Colak, the record scorer of the Turkish League, who vehemently denied the existence of homosexuals in football. As a married man, however, he had an affair with an actress. Even though according to Islamic doctrine, adultery is as much a sin as homosexuality, Colak's popularity was not a bit affected by his *affaire d'amour*.

In the world of football, people will stand no nonsense when homosexuality is concerned. Caustic commentary, such as the following by SIMPSON, is not welcome: "Within the sacred walls of the football ground, men can kiss and hug and blub over one another in a way which would, outside those walls, require a minimum of ten pints – because, naturally, it's the game they all love, not one another" (SIMPSON 1999, 31).

No form of body contact in football, either between players or among fans, is perceived in a sexual way. Hugging, embracing, and piling on top of one another all belong to football culture. The



EuroGames Munich 2004

presence of a gay player would cast doubts on the innocent hugging, jumping, and rolling around on the grass. Many think that homosexuals tend to infuse the game with eroticism and desire. Furthermore, team members are often scared of getting infected when sharing showers or tackling another player.

There are two approaches for explaining the non-existence of gays in football:

A huge number of football enthusiasts is convinced that there are 5 to 10% gays both in football and in society. If this estimate were correct, it should not be a

problem to fill at least one or two teams in each of Europe's professional football leagues with gay players.

These players often lead desperate and absurd double lives between the constraints of the macho football sport and their own needs and desires. Every time they are active in the gay scene, for example, they have to fear discovery, publicity, and a forced coming-out.

"In order to conform to the norms and ideals of the heterosexual athlete, athletes create complex double identities, setting up a family with wife and children while simultaneously seeking anonymous outlets for their sexuality in the gay scene. It takes enormous efforts in psychological repression to combine all this and still be able to function and to tolerate all the self-hatred and self-denial," EGGELING explains (HAGEL et al. 2005).

The second approach for explaining the absence of gays in football starts out by claiming that gays are sorted out at an early stage by the very character and structures of football. According to this explanation, the system keeps them from moving up to the professional leagues because they are not compatible enough. The football system, with its intolerance of different sexual orientations, sorts them out. Gays are unable to stand the pressure and the abuse. There are sport systems capable of enabling or accepting homosexuality, but football definitely is not one of them.

No matter which theory corresponds to the facts, football has in-built structures that render homosexuality invisible. There is a hostile attitude toward gays, which is reinforced by earlier coming-outs:

The only coming-out by a professional footballer happened in 1990. Justin Fashanu, an English player, sold his story to the *Sun*. Severely handicapped by an injury, he was forced to take a back seat as a professional player and tried to make some money this way. He killed himself in 1998. Whether this suicide was provoked by discrimination on the basis of his homosexuality or whether Fashanu wanted to cover up a criminal offence could not be ascertained after his death.

In an effort to curb discrimination and to demonstrate to the public that gay footballers do exist, former British sports minister Tony Banks unsuccessfully tried to encourage gay professional footballers to come out.

In Germany, Heinz Bonn, who was a promising talent at Hamburger SV in the seventies, kept concealing his homosexuality. After several injuries, his comeback failed in 1973. Alcohol became his sole consolation after the end of his career and the remedy against his fears of discovery. Bonn was killed in 1991 by a gay hustler.

It does not come as a surprise, then, that there aren't any gays in football officially. Homophobia is prominent not only in the major leagues of men's football, but in amateur sports as well. Even on the grass-roots level, the atmosphere is characterised by "true masculinity" and heterosexuality. Only as long as players remain silent on their homosexuality (homosexuality being a private matter anyways, in contrast to sex with women) and as long as being gay does not become a topic of discussion, gays may have a place in amateur sports clubs. As a result, gays do not

experience discrimination directly, but rather by way of homophobic slogans directed at the referee or the opposing team. As soon as they come out, gays do not feel comfortable any more, start keeping a low profile, or switch to clubs for homosexuals (see chapter 3.3).

Just as in professional football, homophobia in amateur sports is expressed by silence and invisibility in an atmosphere of intolerance and fear of everything strange.

### 3.2 kick it like the girls – WOMEN’S FOOTBALL

Women’s football deals less restrictively with homosexuality. It is an open secret that many female footballers are lesbian, even in the upper leagues and the national teams. Being lesbian is tolerated more easily by society than being gay. It certainly is alright for two girls to walk the streets holding hands, for example. There even has been a growing tolerance of girls interested in football and actively playing. Female homosexuality as such, however, is a different thing. Lesbian women are frequently perceived as athletes only, not as individuals with complex personalities. They are not accepted as lesbians, but only as athletes (PFISTER 1999).

Football and women have always had a tough time together. Women discovered the game as early as in the 1920s. From the very beginning, however, it was men who stood in their way, arguing that an aggressive and physical game such as football was incompatible with female tenderness. Oft-cited arguments against football-playing women came from the psychologist BUYTENDIJK (1953), for example: “Football is essentially a demonstration of masculinity as we understand it, based on our traditional views. [...] Having women play football has never been successful, in contrast to netball, hockey, tennis, and so forth. Kicking seems to be specifically male; whether being kicked is therefore female, remains to be seen. Not-kicking, that much can be said, is definitely female!” Playing football is seen as part of “male socialisation”; girls and women, in contrast, do not belong on the sports ground. In Germany, women’s football even was illegal up until 1970.



EuroGames Copenhagen 2003

Girls and women often love football for precisely the reasons that are put forth to keep them from playing. On the football grounds, they may escape traditional gender roles and stereotypes by acting forcefully, courageously, or dominantly, and by letting off steam. As a result, they cease to be “real women” in the eyes of many people. Female footballers are active in a male sport, which even is the national sport of most European countries. For their achievements and athleticism in a rather

pugnacious game, they are taunted as viragoes and lesbians. Interestingly, the situation in the United States is different: Football is regarded as a sport for women and gays, whereas “real” men play American Football.

It is in Europe, however, where female athletes experience most discrimination in football (HEKMA 1994, PFISTER 1999, FECHTIG 1995, SCRATON et al. 1999). For girls and women, sport provides an opportunity for spending time with female friends without constantly talking about boys and men. Lesbians feel comfortable and more at home in the world of sports and football than gays do. Since there are more lesbians active in sports and often also pretty straightforward about their being lesbian, they experience discrimination more frequently than gays do. In addition, lesbians suffer discrimination because they are women. Sexism comes in various forms, from sexualised insults and pick-up attempts to all-out denials of women’s skills and abilities. Hard on the heels of sexism is homophobia because, after all, women practising a men’s sport, looking muscular, and moving with force and energy cannot really be “genuine women.” Female footballers are viragoes, or in another word, lesbians.

SCHWENZER suspects that women react to these manifold instances of sexist and homophobic discrimination either by taking them calmly and ironically or by not even registering them as acts of abuse. To many women, they have simply become inseparable from football culture. Discrimination is impossible to ignore, however, when an entire women’s football team is forcefully dissolved, as was the case in Switzerland in 1994. The team was dissolved because the board members of FC Wettswill-Bonstetten were concerned about the players supposedly “acting out >abnormal dispositions< (lesbian)” (*Tagesanzeiger*, 2/4/1994).

Associations, clubs, and coaches do not want any lesbian players in their teams. There are tacit agreements not to disclose players’ sexual orientations. Lesbian footballers are strongly encouraged to keep their sexual preferences private. Clubs and associations pay close attention to their teams’ public image, which they aim to keep as “clean” as possible in order not to provide any reason for complaints from sponsors or worried parents. “Many fathers tell me they would never send their daughter to play football,” says Gero Bisanz, former coach of the German national women’s football team (FECHTIG 1995). Many people still fear that homosexuality may be contagious or that playing football results in becoming lesbian. Parents do not allow their girls to play football because of their suspicions that the clubs are full of homosexuals. There frequently are rumours of girls having sex in the shower, which are typically worded along these lines: “Some players were saying they had heard from other players who said they had witnessed some girls doing something.” Vague suggestions quickly turn into facts that incite wild sexual fantasies which mostly tell us more about the fears and desires of the critics than about the footballers.

There are no data available on the number of lesbian players in the upper leagues. Just as in men’s football, no player has publicly come out yet. This is despite the fact that the negative consequences for individual players are likely to be quite small if only all lesbian footballers were straightforward about their homosexuality. No club or association, after all, could do without so many players.

The latest commercial developments in women's football receive ambivalent reactions from a female point of view. On the one hand, there is more public attention on women's football and the teams' budgets are higher. On the other hand, this rise in popularity corresponds directly with increased requirements concerning the appearance of the players, who are often expected to look more feminine by wearing shorter pants, fitted shirts, long hair, and so forth. Women conforming to traditional lesbian stereotypes still do not quite fit in. In addition, women's football will never attract the same amount of media attention as men's football, recent



EuroGames Utrecht 2005

trends notwithstanding. Unfortunately, public interest tends to fade very quickly even after popular events such as European or world championships and numerous victories by individual national teams. Women in football lack a forum. The public does not care whether they are lesbian or not. Some players openly live as lesbians, but nobody talks to them about their homosexuality.

In contrast, the high numbers of lesbian footballers in gay-lesbian events such as EuroGames, Gay Games, or the Gay-Lesbian Football World Championship are impressive. The number of women kicking the ball regularly is three or four times higher than that of the men. This is particularly surprising considering the fact that women are generally under-represented in sport, especially in football.

"The future of women's football is female," FIFA president Blatter predicted in 1995. Without a doubt, the future of football is female to a certain extent as well. Just to what extent exactly depends on the commitment and enthusiasm of football fans. Whether and to which extent the future of football will also be lesbian remains to be seen and depends on the transformation of football into a space where women may dare to be straightforward about their being lesbian.

### 3.3 you don't have to play it straight – CLUBS & ASSOCIATIONS

The absence of minorities in football boards and committees is as striking as the under-representation of women in sport and especially in football – its clubs, associations, and commissions. Considering the growing numbers of football-playing youngsters, women, and foreigners, it is about time to ask the question why these developments do not find adequate expression in football clubs and organisations, including, most importantly, leadership positions. Football continues to be a heterosexual men's world, on the field and elsewhere.

Exceptions to this rule receive a lot of media attention. In Hamburg, for example, Corny Littmann, a mainstay of the local gay scene, was elected president of FC St.

Pauli. When he took office, the press was convinced that St. Pauli does not need a fag president. Littman did such a good job, however, that their criticism was quickly silenced.

Back in the nineties, Littmann had made the headlines by claiming on *Schmidt Show*, his well-known theatre and television production, that he had been in bed with a handful of *Bundesliga* players. The German Football Federation (DFB) immediately stepped in to keep him from mentioning names. Nowadays, Littmann himself strongly discourages footballers from coming out because the pressure from fans and team members would surely be unbearable.

A coming-out in professional football is still not to be recommended, since homosexuality continues to be a taboo in clubs, as illustrated by a recent report by a British radio journalist. In November 2005, WILLIAMS tried to get answers from all twenty Premier League clubs on the following questions: Why are there no openly gay professional players? Could an openly gay footballer fit comfortably into the dressing-room culture? Is this something football needs to address? No one was prepared to answer any of Williams's questions. He even happened to receive an e-mail by mistake, which was presumably not meant for him, including the phrase "should we touch this or palm off with a 'can't comment?'" In contrast, Williams's question concerning safety conditions in football arenas for the upcoming season received replies from all clubs!

Clubs usually decline to enter the discussion with the argument that gay players do not or cannot exist. They think there is no target group for campaigns on homosexuality. According to the clubs, there would either have to be grass-roots initiatives coming from fans and club members or major incidents requiring intervention if anything is to be changed about the situation.

Football clubs have organised many big and costly campaigns in favour of fair play and against xenophobia, racism, and violence – campaigns that were both important and necessary. However, there has not been a single campaign promoting tolerance of same-sex relationships and fighting homophobia. This is disheartening, since it would be so important to include these topics in comprehensive anti-discrimination efforts.

Any anti-discrimination project has to start by acknowledging the fact that homosexuality exists and that it exists in football as well. There are many different ways for clubs to actively counteract homophobia. Coaches and counsellors, for example, are in a privileged position for teaching the importance of social justice, fairness, and diversity to their teams. Before coaches and counsellors may be entrusted with this important job, however, they need to receive some training in anti-discrimination themselves. Only if prejudice and stereotyping can be reduced, commentaries such as the following by former Mönchengladbach coach Bernd Kraus in a TV show will eventually become obsolete: "In the rough business of football, a tender homosexual would not be able to cope" (*Liebe Sünde*, VOX, 10/2/1994). Likewise, we would hopefully no longer hear Nick Dürst, coach of a Swiss men's team, enlightening a Swiss television audience on the difference between women's and men's football the way he did in 1994: "It's very simple: like lesbian and not lesbian" (*Weltwoche*, 14/4/1994).

In order to raise the visibility of homosexuality, special anti-discrimination provisions should be added to stadium regulations and club statutes. So far, many clubs have only included unspecific anti-discrimination provisions. While these do contain anti-racist statements, anti-sexist passages declaring that nobody may be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation or their sex are still missing. In Germany, anti-sexist provisions can only be found in the stadium regulations of Werder Bremen, MSV Duisburg, and FC St. Pauli. Putting something down in writing is not sufficient, however. Players and fans need to be informed about it. These provisions need to be firmly embedded in active PR efforts such as panel discussions or cooperation with gay-lesbian clubs. In addition, anti-sexist statements should make their way into daily club activities by continuously educating young people in particular on homosexuality. Clubs need to realise and publicly accept their social responsibility. This is the only way of stimulating the press to finally uncover homophobia in football. Investigating the sexual orientation of individual players is not interesting for journalists who write exclusively on football. Today, a public coming-out is only exciting if it includes sensation and scandal. But as soon as homosexuality belongs to sport as much as heterosexuality, the tabloids will cease to be interested in it as well.

Football associations have an even greater responsibility than clubs. On the European level, UEFA (*Union des associations européennes de football*) has recognised homophobia as a recurrent problem in football. In passing its ten point action plan against racism in football, UEFA has also committed itself to fighting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. For the first time ever UEFA named the problem at the “Unite Against Racism” conference in Barcelona in January 2006. On the national level, however, only the English Football Association actively supports anti-sexist efforts (see chapter 4). Along with football clubs, associations should therefore expand their anti-discrimination provisions by including anti-sexist statements. Disseminating these statements by way of initiating public campaigns that draw some sizable media attention, including them in the training of coaches and referees, and participating in gay-lesbian sport events should be a self-evident further step.

It would be ideal if the topic of homosexuality were bypassed because homosexuals are fully accepted on all levels of sport. Unfortunately, however, it is bypassed because nobody wants to pick up such a hot issue. This clearly is a reason for concern. Before homosexuality may become a regular and uncontroversial element of sport, it first needs to be put on the agenda. As long as clubs and associations do not start discussing homosexuality, the gay-lesbian sports clubs founded in the eighties will continue to be the only ones fighting homophobia in sport. In these “homo clubs,” (sport) policy objectives and the fight



“Show football the pink card!”  
FARE action week 2003

for recognition and tolerance of queer life-styles play a major role in addition to the athletic component. Football belongs to the clubs' activities just as all other sports.

Having experienced various forms of discrimination, homosexuals have been seeking clubs in which they may be openly gay or lesbian. Many lesbians and gays have started their sports career in "hetero clubs." More often than not, however, they had to conceal an essential part of their identity in these clubs and therefore felt increasingly uncomfortable. Across Europe, there are gay-lesbian clubs in which gays, lesbians, bi- and transsexuals as well as some heterosexuals do sports together and simultaneously fight discrimination.

In order to advance the integration and emancipation of lesbians and gays in sport, the European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) was founded in 1989. This European umbrella organisation joins the forces of gay-lesbian clubs in their commitment to fight discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in sport and provides a platform for exchanging information among European sports groups. Ever since their inception in 1992, the EuroGames with approximately 3,000 to 5,000 participants have been one of the federation's most important instruments for advancing its goals. This sport event is made up of tournaments in various disciplines. All European athletes are welcome to participate regardless of their sexual orientation, even though the primary context of the championships is homosexual.

Similar events drawing people from all over the world are the Outgames and the Gay Games. The Gay Games, for example, first took place in Europe in 1998, when approximately 15,000 athletes from 30 disciplines and 88 countries met in Amsterdam. The football tournament boasted 86 teams from 14 different countries. There even is a gay-lesbian football association: the International Gay and Lesbian Football Association (ILGFA), founded in 1995, which organises the ILGFA Championships, i.e. the gay-lesbian football world cup. At all of these events, the athletic competitions are just as important as the overall atmosphere, which is characterised by multicultural feelings and the Olympic spirit of communality, in which participating itself is what counts.

This atmosphere cannot be spoiled by negative incidents surrounding the games. They are worth mentioning, however, in order to illustrate the importance of anti-discrimination efforts. At the 1995 EuroGames in Frankfurt, for example, the German Football Federation discouraged its female national football players from participating in the Games because it could otherwise not guarantee their nomination for international matches any more.

During the first gay-lesbian football world championship in Berlin in 1995, local authorities and associations were not very cooperative. The fact that the organisers received a small amount of funding from Berlin's sports senator provoked vehement criticism from the regional sports federation. The Berlin Football Association was unable to send some of their referees because with the gay-lesbian clubs not being members, the referees would not have had any insurance.

In order to prevent such things from happening again and to raise the visibility of homophobia in football, the EGLSF has been cooperating with the Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) network. Joining forces, EGLSF and FARE aim to

accomplish the implementation of the European Human Rights Charta in sports. In article 21, the Charta states that any form of discrimination on the basis of sex [...] or sexual orientation is illegal. Football as Europe's most popular sport must be open to all. Sport is a key factor when it comes to social integration. The European Union has committed itself to fighting homophobia. This commitment also applies to sport and football. As umbrella organisations in football, national and international associations have to make sure their members pick up topics like sexual orientation and homophobia. Campaigns initiated and supported by national and international associations may function as models helping to overcome invisibility and silence.

### 3.4 queer as folk – FANS

Football is the most popular sport in Europe. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, students were the first to become interested in this new game from England. In England, the mother country itself, the football boom already started during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the rest of Europe had to wait for the workers of the 1920s to help football become a game of the masses. During and after World War II, football was an ideal pastime and a welcome diversion. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a decline in football enthusiasm, while the 1970s saw the beginnings of fan club culture. The 1980s were characterised by unruly and destructive fans, the hooligans. Since the 1990s, the number of spectators has been constantly on the rise. Today, it is no longer just the working-class that goes to the stadium to watch a football match. The game has become respectable and trendy and is increasingly featured in the arts and in high-brow culture.

With regard to the fan community, it is of particular importance that clubs and associations assume a leadership role when it comes to homophobia in football. The fan world is as much a male world as the football field itself, even though women have been enthusiastic supporters ever since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Very much the way female players are told they simply cannot *play* football, female fans are told they simply cannot *understand* football. Some people even think there is an unbridgeable "ontological difference" between women and football (MARSCHIK 2003). This idea is often applied to gay fans as well: Gays supposedly do not have a clue about football rules and do not care so much about the game, but first and foremost about the players' bodies.

The world of football has hardly changed for the past 50 years, and neither has the behaviour of football fans. Many football supporters, male and female, still reject homosexuality or remain ignorant about it. This does not mean, however, that homosexuality does not have a place on the terraces, since "gay" has become a synonym for everything fans dislike: poor players, players of the opposing team, referees, fans of the opposing team, and so forth. In the 1970s, it was very popular in Germany to call all players gay if they did not perform well, including football icons such as Sepp Maier when he let a ball pass or Franz Beckenbauer when he lost the ball. Nowadays, the term "gay" is one of the rudest cuss-words in football, and fans use it rather "creatively." During the 1996 England vs. Germany semi-finale of the European championships, for example, fans kept bawling out German words to a popular Beatles tune: "Paul Gascoigne is homosexual, homosexual." This is

particularly surprising because Gascoigne is the exact opposite of the common gay stereotype.

“It is interesting to see that fans of both sexes perceive and judge different forms of discrimination rather differently. Whereas they usually do notice racism, which some see as a problem while others choose to belittle its significance, they usually do notice homophobia as well, but question it much less frequently. To a much larger extent than

racism, homophobia for many fans is simply an integral and inseparable part of football culture”

(SCHWENZER 2005, 66). In other words, calling a player or a fan of the opposing team gay does not constitute an act of discrimination, let alone homophobia in the eyes of



FARE action week 2004

many fans. Gay fans coming out in their fan group are frequently ridiculed and left alone by their peers.

A growing number of gay-lesbian fan clubs has been founded since the late 1990s. Their aim is to show that homosexuality and football are not mutual opposites. Besides providing security for its members, these groups strive for a better public image and increased visibility and respect. However, not every football club welcomes a gay-lesbian fan club with open arms. The *Rainbow Borussen* of the German *Bundesliga* club Borussia Dortmund had to encounter the various forms that discrimination of homosexuals may take: To begin with, they were not recognised as an official fan club. Then Borussia Dortmund refused to publicise the fact that they were a homosexual fan club and later deprived them of their merchandising rights. But in spite of all difficulties and obstacles, fans have been more courageous than players and keep coming out. In England The Gay Football Supporters Network (GFSN) is meeting regularly. In Germany, more and more rainbow flags with club logos are on display on the terraces. Today there are gay-lesbian fan clubs in Berlin (Hertha Junxx), Dortmund (Rainbow Borussen), Dresden (Dynamo Junxx), Hamburg (Queerpass St. Pauli), Karlsruhe (Wildpark-Junxx Karlsruhe), and Stuttgart (Stuttgarter Junxx). The rainbow club flags always fly during home games. However, the gay-lesbian fan clubs are a little more reluctant about going on the road, and either stay at home or go without the rainbow flags because they cannot be sure of the reactions the flags may provoke.

*The Guardian* recently noted that more and more gays and lesbians take an interest in football outside the stadium as well. Football is increasingly popular with the entire gay-lesbian scene. International matches are even successfully televised in gay-lesbian English pubs as well. This is a new development for gays, since being gay and enjoying football has been incompatible for a long time. In a few instances, gays even celebrate so-called football dress code parties.

These new trends are small first steps towards putting homosexuality on the agenda of football fans. It is still unusual for fan groups to include homophobia in their anti-discrimination efforts like the Alliance of Active Football Fans (BAFF) did in 2003 with the campaign “Show football the pink card”. Since 2003/04, EGLSF in cooperation with FARE has been trying to encourage fans to behave more consciously in terms of homophobia on the terraces.

#### 4. football is going homo? – FUTURE

Homophobia in football is expressed by invisibility and silence. Discrimination happens first and foremost by ignoring homosexuality. Silence in connection with homosexuality is not only characteristic of football, however. In the entire world of sport, clubs and associations with few exceptions choose to ignore homophobia and discrimination of gays and lesbians on all levels, for the simple reason that homosexuals supposedly do not exist in sport.

Football is not a reflection of society, as is often suggested, because too many groups of the population are under-represented: women, homosexuals, and foreigners.



EuroGames Copenhagen 2003

However, football occupies a prominent position in society, since it is the most popular sport in all European countries and continues to mesmerise the masses. Clubs and associations therefore have to assume a leadership role and shift the atmosphere on and off the field towards a more positive direction.

There is not a single player in the European professional leagues who is openly gay.

Gays and lesbians in lower leagues do not dare to come out either. There are homophobic calls and anti-homosexual slogans and chants in all stadiums across Europe. There is no place for homosexuals in an atmosphere like this. Young professional players in particular increasingly become pop artists who feel as much at home on television as on the football grounds. David Beckham may flaunt his metrosexual dispositions and enjoy the androgynous play with gender roles. He

loves playing with heterosexual and homosexual attitudes, presenting them as fashion issues, and even had his picture taken for a gay magazine. There are a lot of footballers who could be marketed that way without actually being gay. Football is no longer a niche business, but part of fashion culture. Football has managed to turn everything into money so far, so why not use homosexual appeal as a marketing strategy?

All of this adds up to a very ambivalent picture. On the one hand, the football microcosm continues to be the same exclusively male world it used to be at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, football has become pop culture, allowing players to play around with fashion and androgyny. A comprehensive climate of liberalisation, however, has not yet emerged. It seems as if a single coming-out could fundamentally shatter the male football universe. Homosexuality continues to be regarded as a taboo and a provocation. Young people are less and less prepared to deal with homosexuality. Among male youngsters in particular, homophobia is more widespread today than it was a few years ago.

Possibly only a star footballer may risk a coming-out without having to fear severe sanctions. A coming-out by an active or former top player would be a sign of football's arrival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The structures of football with its various organisations and individuals, however, do not seem to have reached that point yet. But coming-outs are not the only way of liberalising football and freeing it from its taboos. While we keep waiting for a coming-out, a lot of work can be done. By transforming established structures of male bonding into a new form of solidarity, a new atmosphere may be created both on the pitch and on the terraces, in which the decision for diverse life-styles is entirely up to the individual, who will not be left alone with possible unpleasant consequences, however. In order to reach that point, everybody involved in football first needs to recognise that lesbian and gay players exist and that not all players in a team have to be heterosexual. Even if there aren't any homosexuals in the team, they may still be among those who provide for the team's medical needs, report about the game, or maintain the football grounds. It needs to become clear in this context that homosexuality is as normal as heterosexuality. Sexuality is an orientation, not a choice.

The power and influence of football need to be mobilised to create public awareness of issues such as homosexuality, gender, homophobia, and sexism. As a first step, it needs to be illustrated that you don't have to belong to a discriminated group in order to be affected by racism, sexism, or homophobia. Any white heterosexual male Central European may experience these forms of abuse when people next to him yell slogans or commit acts of violence. Existing anti-racist projects and campaigns may provide a good starting point for creating an awareness of homophobia. We need to begin by pointing out homophobic behaviour each time it occurs and demonstrate that it exists on many levels and in various forms. Those already active in anti-racist projects need to be made aware of homophobia as much as everybody else, since the issue is not necessarily already part of their work.

Projects involving anti-racism and women's issues are accepted by society and receive considerably more support than projects against homophobia. This is why existing structures such as FARE should be used in anti-homophobic activities. By networking and forming alliances such as the one by FARE and EGLSF, the importance of the issue may become more tangible. Commitment and support from

all clubs and associations is indispensable if anti-discrimination campaigns are to have maximum impact. Support from UEFA may create the necessary degree of international visibility and influence to transmit a clear and unequivocal message: The (European) world of football is against homophobia!

Future anti-discrimination projects and campaigns may be based on the “5 Point Plan for Fighting Sexism and Homophobia” passed during the FARE Networking Conference in Bratislava in April 2005:

- 1. Putting sexism and homophobia on the agenda – naming the problem**  
Sexism and homophobia are forms of discrimination that exist on all levels of football.
- 2. Taking over responsibility**  
Sexism and homophobia are forms of discrimination affecting everybody in football, not just homosexuals and women.
- 3. Focusing on our daily work**  
The focus on women’s football results in increased identification and respect. The existence of homosexual role models may contribute to freeing football from its taboos. A safe and trustful environment needs to be created to this end.
- 4. Emphasising positive examples**  
Presenting the diversity of football, e.g. by reporting on women’s football, gay-lesbian tournaments, etc on websites and in publications.
- 5. Reporting on sexism and homophobia**  
Naming and publicising sexism and homophobia.



EuroGames Utrecht 2005

In addition, the English Football Association’s recent anti-racist “Football For All” activities may serve as a model for all other European associations in the fight against homophobia. Among the key concepts of this strategy are visibility (e.g. through good practices, conferences, roundtables, PR campaigns), participation (e.g. by creating grass-roots organisations and support committees), training and managers, referees), rules raising the visibility of reviewing football and monitoring (e.g. by set



EuroGames Utrecht 2005

The activities of the English demonstrate the organisations taking anti-campaigns seriously. Only take the lead, regional and support them. Only responsibility may actively campaigns. Everybody responsibility: players, associations. Responsibility must no longer be pushed back and forth between individual organisations alternately claiming they are not in charge. Determined

Football Association importance of umbrella discrimination projects and if national associations associations will follow suit those who take on create and influence involved in football shares fans, clubs, and

action is the order of the day. With the help of EGLSF, FARE, UEFA and the English FA, guidelines should be developed to provide orientation in anti-discrimination activities for all European national football associations. In addition, further research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of homophobia in sport and in football. As pointed out above, only very few studies on homophobia and homosexuality in football exist so far.

Planning and implementing anti-discrimination concepts presents a great challenge. It will take years until first successful results will emerge. This is why it is so important to start now. Everybody can contribute to reducing discrimination and homophobia in football by using a language that does not automatically suggest that all players and coaches have the same sexual orientation, for example, or by treating everybody fairly and respectfully, regardless of their sex or their sexual orientation.

Lesbians and gays themselves will continue to work hard on raising their visibility in sport and in football, e.g. in huge international events such as the EuroGames, Gay Games, Outgames, or the IGLFA Championships as well as in smaller, regional tournaments. These events provide countless opportunities for demonstrating respect for lesbians and gays, either by actively participating, by publicising the events in articles for the journals of clubs and associations, by announcing them on websites, by providing funding, or by forming partnerships with participating teams and clubs including joint media appearances.

Many want sport and football to remain “clean”, i.e. to remain apolitical and to keep out of everything. That is impossible, however, because sport and football are political per se. They influence the way humans communicate and interact with one another. This power must be employed to start a conversation, to learn from each other, and to support each other. Fighting discrimination means more than making a public statement on current topics or problems such as drugs or violence. Fighting discrimination means offering specific help or working actively with youngsters, fans, players, coaches, etc, by setting a positive course. For many Europeans, football is the greatest minor affair in the world and an avenue for experiencing adventure and forgetting about unemployment or bleak perspectives. This is the responsibility football, with all its clubs and associations, has to face.

“Sport, and football in particular, has an important role to play in the lives of people. Sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can. It speaks to people in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where there was once only despair. It breaks down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all kinds of discrimination, [...] spreading hope to the world” (Nelson Mandela quoted in EuroGames Munich e.V. 2004).

## **5. The European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF)**

The European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) was founded in 1989 in The Hague, The Netherlands. The EGLSF was founded by sport groups from The Hague (The Netherlands), Berlin, Frankfurt and Bonn (Germany), Zurich (Switzerland), Brussels (Belgium) and Paris (France). The EGLSF is an umbrella

organisation of gay and lesbian sport groups in Europe. By the time of the Annual Meeting of the EGLSF in March 2006, the EGLSF will have more than 100 member groups from 15 European countries. The EGLSF has local and national member organisations in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The EGLSF represents about 40,000 gay and lesbian athletes in Europe.

As a non-governmental umbrella organisation, the EGLSF circulates information on gay and lesbian sports in Europe. The information is spread via a newsletter, mailing lists and two very popular websites [www.gaysport.info](http://www.gaysport.info) and [www.eglsf.info](http://www.eglsf.info). The website contains information on the EGLSF and its members, the tournament calendar and further interesting news and addresses on gay and lesbian sports and a place to find friends to do sports with.

The EGLSF is the licence holder of EuroGames. EuroGames are the European Gay and Lesbian Multi-sports Championships. EuroGames include two days of sports and culture with an opening and a closing event. In years when there are no Gay Games (from 2006 onwards also Outgames), a member of the EGLSF hosts the EuroGames. The EuroGames were first held in The Hague in 1992.



EuroGames Munich 2004

**EuroGames history:**

1992	The Hague	The Netherlands	300 participants
1993	The Hague	The Netherlands	540 participants
1995	Frankfurt	Germany	2,000 participants
1996	Berlin	Germany	3,400 participants
1997	Paris	France	2,000 participants
2000	Zurich	Switzerland	4,300 participants
2001	Hanover	Germany	1,600 participants
2003	Copenhagen	Denmark	2,200 participants
2004	Munich	Germany	5,000 participants
2005	Utrecht	The Netherlands	3,000 participants

Since 2001 the EuroGames were divided into the so called smaller and bigger EuroGames. At the smaller EuroGames the number of participants is limited. In 2001 they were hosted in Hanover for the first time. Munich did host EuroGames IX in 2004, so called big EuroGames with 27 disciplines and 5,000 athletes. Everything about EuroGames can be found at [www.eurogames.info](http://www.eurogames.info).

EGLSF is also a Pan European advocate of gay and lesbian athletes. Since 2001 EGLSF has been given participative status by the Council of Europe. EGLSF monitors the situation of gays and lesbians in sport in Europe. Since 2002 EGLSF has been participating in an anti-discrimination program by the European Union, in which EGLSF is working together with other anti-discrimination organisations in

sports, mainly football. The goal is to improve the situation of gays and lesbians in the regular sport.

So far it has been a story of success: Through lobby work by EGLSF, supported by people like Tony Banks, former UK sports minister, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed an official recommendation on 'Lesbians and gays in sport' (No. 1635/2003), where it

"[...] calls on European sports organisations to:

- i. make homophobic chanting and other homophobic abuse an offence against their constitutions, as is already the case for xenophobic and racist chanting and other abuse;
- ii. call upon UEFA to adapt its Ten Point Plan for Professional Football Clubs so as to include action against homophobia;
- iii. adopt or adapt practical guidelines for professional sports clubs to help them fight against all discrimination, including racism, xenophobia, gender discrimination and homophobia; launch active campaigns against homophobia in sport; and widen existing campaigns against xenophobia in sport to include homophobia."

Similar calls are made to the member states, the media and the Committee of Ministers.



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Football is the most popular team sport in Europe. The rising number of spectators in professional football demonstrates the high level of acceptance the game continues to enjoy. Football is marketed and successfully sold as an “event.” As a mass phenomenon, football is not a reflection of society, but rather a place where cultural notions influential in society are being produced or reinforced. Thus, football is part of society. This is why football can be an important instrument for reaching people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 59% of all European citizens believe that sport provides an opportunity for counteracting all forms of discrimination (European Commission Sport Barometer, 2003).

All members of the football community must be strengthened time and again in their awareness of problems such as racism and discrimination. In order to tap the full potential of the football game, however, *all* forms of discrimination need to be counteracted. While racism is frequently on the agenda, discrimination and abuse based on sexual orientation, homophobia, and sexism are mostly neglected, although they are recurring problems in football as well. Homophobia and sexism may not be separated from each other, since lesbian women repeatedly become victims of both massive homophobic and sexist abuse.

Sport is an integral element in the daily lives of many gays and lesbians as well. They may be athletes themselves or devoted fans. Based on their sexual orientation, however, they are sometimes excluded, discriminated against, or forced to conceal an important part of their identities to avoid discrimination. As a result, homosexuals may not always practice or enjoy sport as much as they would like to.

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