LGBT Sports History Timeline
Selected Events

By Pat Griffin, Founding Director
Changing the Game

- **1920-25** – Bill Tilden is United States Tennis Champion and dominated tennis in that era. He is arrested on morals charges in the 1940’s and shunned by the tennis world as a result.

- **1932-1956** – Babe Didrikson Zaharias is considered by many to be the greatest female athlete of the 20th Century. She wins Olympic gold medals in track & field in 1932, competes in softball, basketball, baseball, tennis and is a founder of the LPGA which she dominates in the 1950’s. Babe is vilified early in her career for her “masculine” appearance and, though she marries a male professional wrestler, her female companion, Betty Dodds, is at her side when she dies of cancer in 1956.

- **1936** – United States runner Helen Stephens wins an Olympic gold medal for the 100-meter sprint beating Polish runner Stella Walsh. Her gender identity is challenged because of her appearance and athletic performance but tests reveal that she is a female.

- **1972** – Title IX passed- “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”


- **1975** – Dave Kopay, a retired NFL player, comes out and in 1977 writes *The Dave Kopay Story* about his experience in the NFL.

- **1975** – Horse racing’s John Damien sues over dismissal for being gay.


- **1976** – Winter Olympics-John Curry, English figure skater, comes out, becomes first openly gay athlete to win Olympic gold.

- **1977** – Rene Richards, a trans woman tennis player, wins a lawsuit against the United States Tennis Association because she is barred from competing as a woman in the 1976 US Open.
• 1979 – Betty Hicks, a founder of and player on the LPGA, writes a positive article, a first, about lesbians in golf in Christopher Street magazine.

• 1980 – Rene Portland hired as women’s basketball coach at Penn State University by Athletic Director and football coach, Joe Paterno.


• 1982 – New Agenda for Women in Sport Conference – leaders decline to use the word “lesbian” in action proposals emerging from the conference.

• 1982 – Tom Waddell, a 6th place finisher in the 1968 Olympic decathlon, founds first Gay Games in San Francisco. United States Olympic Committee (IOC) successfully sues to prevent the games being called “Gay Olympics” in 1987.

• 1982 – Canadian volleyball coach Betty Baxter is fired for being lesbian.

• 1982 – Pam Parsons scandal at University of South Carolina – covered by Sports Illustrated in their annual swim suit issue. Parsons had a relationship with a player, but lied under oath about it. She was sentenced to jail time for perjury.

• 1984 – Trans tennis player, Renee Richards’ memoir Second Serve is published.

• 1985 – Former University of Pittsburgh football player Ed Gallagher survives suicide attempt, dedicates life to battling homophobia.

• 1985 – Chicago Sun Times article about lesbians in sport – Penn State Women’s basketball coach Rene Portland quoted, “I will not have it (lesbianism) on my teams.”

• 1986 – Intersex hurdler Maria Jose Martinez-Patino kicked off Spanish track team, stripped of medals.

• 1986 – Second Gay Games in San Francisco

• 1981-89 – Rivalry between Martina and Chris Evert – Martina can’t get endorsements despite her success on the tennis court. Hana Mandlikova calls her a “man.”

• 1987 – Jerry Smith, Washington Redskins (1965-77) dies of AIDS. Smith never came out, but Dave Kopay writes in his book that Jerry Smith was his first love.

• 1987 – National Enquirer sensationalized cover story about predatory lesbians on the women’s professional tennis tour.

• 1988 – Dave Pallone, a gay National League umpire. According to Pallone, the owners wanted him fired because he is gay.
• 1988 – Justin Fasteau, top British football (soccer) player reveals he is gay. First team sport athlete to come out while still an active player. He commits suicide later that year.

• 1989 – Bob Paris, who won the Mr. America and Mr. Universe titles in 1983, reveals himself as a gay man.

• 1990 – Third Gay Games in Vancouver, BC - Largest sporting event in the world that year.

• 1991 – Philadelphia Enquirer article about Rene Portland’s anti-lesbian policy – Marks shift in media coverage: Homophobia is the problem and Portland’s policy is wrong.

• 1991 – Martina Navratilova is sued for “galimony” by ex-lover Judy Nelson.

• 1991 – ‘Magic’ Johnson publicly announces he has HIV.

• 1992 - Roy Simmons, NFL player from 1979-83, reveals he is gay.


• 1993 – CBC airs ‘The Last Closet’ special.

• 1993 – Savoy Howe becomes first out lesbian in women’s boxing.

• 1993 – Glenn Burke, former outfielder with the LA Dodgers and Oakland A’s, who ended his baseball career in 1979, comes out publicly.

• 1994 – Fourth Gay Games in New York City was the largest athletic competition in history with 11,000 participants.

• 1994 – Greg Louganis, Olympic gold medal diving champion comes out at the Gay Games in New York City.

• 1994 – Missy Giove, an openly lesbian mountain biker, wins her first world championship.

• 1995 – Ian Roberts, one of Australia’s most popular rugby players, comes out. He is the first major Australian athlete to come out.

• 1995 – CBS golf commentator Ben Wright is fired for making on-air negative comments about lesbian golfers and the physiological limitations women golfers have because of their breasts
• **1996** – Muffin Spencer Devlin, an 18 year veteran on the LPGA tour, comes out as a lesbian in Sports Illustrated and The Advocate.

• **1996** – High school runner for cross-country coach Eric Anderson is attacked by school football player, launching Anderson’s advocacy work.

• **1996** – Rudy Galindo, the national figure skating champion reveals that he is gay.

• **1996** – David Pichler and Patrick Jeffrey, two openly gay divers, compete in the Atlanta Olympics.


• **1998** – Mike Muska, a gay man and former collegiate track and field coach, is named the athletic director at Oberlin College becoming the first openly gay male ever in that position.

• **1998** – ESPN airs ‘World of the Gay Athlete’ special.

• **1998** – Brian Orser, former world champion figure skater and Olympic silver medalist, comes out as a gay man in a palimony suit.

• **1998** – Gay Games V in Amsterdam

• **1998** – Former Canadian Olympic swimmer Mark Tewksbury comes out.

• **1998** – Pat Griffin’s *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* is published. The first book to explore homophobia in women’s sports

• **1998** – Out Thai kickboxer, Nong Toom, wins first competitive match.

• **1998** – LPGA Hall of Famer, Patty Sheehan, comes out as a lesbian in Golf World magazine

• **1999** - Amelie Mauresmo , a top ranked French tennis player, comes out as a lesbian and says being out about her female partner improves her game.

• **1999** – Former MLB player (1987-1995), Billy Bean reveals he is gay

• **1999** – Outsports.com publishes first web page devoted to sports news and information for gay sports fans and athletes- initiated by Cyd Zeigler and Jim Buzinski

• **1999** – The IOC ends mandatory gender testing

• **1999** – John Rocker spews homophobia to Sports Illustrated, is suspended by Major League Baseball.
• **2000** – Openly gay Robert Dover is elected captain of U.S. Olympic Equestrian Team (re-elected 5 times).

• **2000** – Openly gay figure skater Andrej Nepela is named Slovakia’s athlete of the century.

• **2000** – Openly gay high school football captain Corey Johnson gets national attention from ABC, New York Times.

• **2000** – IOC suspends mandatory gender testing for women athletes and institutes a “case by case” process when individual athletes’ gender is questioned.

• **2000** – Lesbian couple ejected from Dodgers Stadium for kissing during a game.

• **2000** – The Women’s Sports Foundation initiates The Project to Eliminate Homophobia in Sport. In 2005, it is renamed It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for LGBT Issues in Sport, with fund raising support from Martina Navratilova. It Takes A Team creates and disseminates education resources for addressing LGBT issues in sport

• **2001** – Out magazine editor Brendan Lemon says he has a boyfriend in Major League Baseball.

• **2001** – Bill Konisberg comes out at ESPN.

• **2001** – Gay rugger Mark Bingham killed in Sept. 11 attacks, becomes national hero.

• **2002** – The National Center for Lesbian Rights initiates the Homophobia in Sports Project to provide legal and advocacy support for athletes and coaches discriminated against on the basis of the sexual orientation or gender identity.

• **2002** – Gay Games VI in Sydney, Australia

• **2002** – New York Giant Jeremy Shockey tells Howard Stern he does not want a gay teammate.

• **2002** – New York Mets pitcher Mike Piazza holds press conference to announce he is not gay.

• **2002** – University of Florida starting catcher, Andrea Zimbardi, settles a suit against the school charging that she was dismissed from the team because she is a lesbian. The suit restores one year of eligibility and requires coaches at U of F to undergo training on LGB issues in sport.

• **2002** – Esera Tuaolo, ex-NFL player from 1991-99, comes out on HBO Real Sports.
• **2003** – University of Pennsylvania founds the first student-athlete group focused on eliminating homophobia in athletics, Penn Athletes Against Homophobia (PATH).

• **2003** – The Gay and Lesbian Athletic Foundation holds the first national conference on lesbian and gay issues in sport in Boston, MA.

• **2003** – The NCAA initiates “sexual orientation issues in sports” training available to member schools at no cost.

• **2004** – Terrell Owens implies Jeff Garcia is gay.

• **2004** – The International Olympic Committee announces the Stockholm Consensus, a policy that establishes criteria under which trans athletes can compete in the Olympic Games in their identified gender.

• **2004** – The Australian, British and European women’s golf associations rule that Mianne Bagger, a woman who transitioned genders, can compete in their events.

• **2004** – LPGA Hall of Famer, Rosie Jones, comes out as a lesbian in a letter to the New York Times and receives an endorsement from Olivia, a lesbian vacation and travel company.

• **2004** – ESPN hires openly gay reporter LZ Granderson.

• **2005** – The United States Golf Association adopts the IOC policy governing the participation of trans athletes in their events.

• **2005** – USA Track & Field adopts the IOC policy governing the participation of trans athletes in their events.

• **2005** – Sheryl Swoopes, Women’s National Basketball Association three time MVP and WNBA Champion, and Olympic Champion, comes out as a lesbian in ESPN.

• **2005** – A former Penn State women’s basketball player, Jennifer Harris, files a lawsuit against Penn State University and coach Rene Portland charging that she was dismissed from the team for her perceived sexual orientation. Harris is represented by the NCLR.

• **2005** – Martina Navratilova announces that she will be a spokesperson for Olivia, a lesbian travel and vacation company. Martina remarks that it is the first time she got an endorsement because she is a lesbian.

• **2006** – Gay Games VII in Chicago and the first Out Games in Montreal compete for participants.

• **2006** – First OutGames in Montreal

• **2006** – Amelie Mauresmo wins Wimbledon.
• 2006 – Keelin Godsey comes out as transgender. First openly transgender student athlete to compete in NCAA sports.

• 2006 – Indian runner Santhi Soundarajan was stripped of the Asian Games women’s 800 meters silver medal after failing a sex test.

• 2007 – John Amaechi, an ex-NBA player, comes out and promotes his book, Man in the Middle. He is the first ex-NBA player to come out.

• 2007 – Los Angeles Times sports columnist Mike Penner announces he is Christine Daniels.

• 2007 – Tim Hardaway tells Miami radio station “I hate gay people.” He is dismissed from all NBA duties and released as a coach in the CBA.

• 2007 – Penn State agrees to a confidential settlement of the lawsuit with ex-basketball player, Jennifer Harris. A month later, coach Rene Portland resigns.

• 2007 – NCAA Executive Director, Myles Brand, publicly states that discrimination based on sexual orientation in collegiate sport must be addressed.

• 2007 – Oregon State University Softball coach, Kirk Walker, comes out publicly as a gay man.

• 2007 – GLAAD initiates a Sports Media Project and hires the first director, Ted Rybka, to monitor media coverage of LGBT issues in sport

• 2007 – The NCAA and the National Center for Lesbian Rights co-sponsor the first national think tank on Negative Recruiting Based on Perceived Sexual Orientation.

• 2008 – The Washington Interscholastic Activities Association enacts the first state-wide policy enabling the participation of transgender athletes in high school sports according to their identified gender.

• 2008 – Eleven openly gay, lesbian and bisexual Olympians win a total of seven medals at the Beijing Games, including a gold medal in diving won by Australian Matthew Mitcham, the only openly gay man competing in the games.

• 2008 – Our Group, a national organization by LGBT student athletes, is formed.

• 2009 – Training Rules, a documentary about the Rene Portland “no drugs, no alcohol, no lesbians” era at Penn State is released.

• 2009 – Former college football captain Brian Sims tells his story to Outsports, launching his advocacy work and political career.
• **2009** – Caster Semenya, a South African gold medalist and world record holder in the women’s 800 meters, is subjected to gender verification tests to determine her eligibility to compete in women’s events.

• **2009** – Welsh professional rugby player Gareth Thomas comes out while still playing.

• **2009** – The National Center for Lesbian Rights and the Women’s Sports Foundation initiative, It Takes A Team! co-sponsor the first United States National Think Tank, Equal Opportunity for Transgender Student-Athletes

• **2009** – Women’s basketball coach Lori Sulpizio, who is lesbian, wins a lawsuit against Mesa Community College for being fired without just cause.

• **2009** – Sherri Murrell, women’s basketball coach at Portland State University becomes the first publicly out lesbian coach in NCAA Division 1 basketball.

• **2010** - The Women’s Sports Foundation eliminates funding for the It Takes A Team program due to budgetary constraints

• **2010**- GLAAD eliminates the Sports Media project due to financial constraints.

• **2010**- Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia includes the first Pride House: hospitality for LGBT athletes, friends and family.

• **2010**- NLCR and WSF issue think tank report: On the Team: Equal Opportunities for Transgender Student-Athletes including with policy recommendations for high school and college athletics.

• **2010**- Caster Semenya cleared by the IAAF to compete in women’s competition.

• **2010**- Kye Allums is the first openly transgender man to play for a college women’s basketball team. George Washington University, his coach and teammates all embrace Kye’s public announcement. The NCAA rules that Kye is allowed to play on the women’s team as long as he is not taking hormones.

• **2010**- Lana Lawson, a transgender woman golfer sues the LPGA for the right to compete in the World Long Drive Championship play. In response to the lawsuit, the LPGA amends its by-laws to eliminate the “female at birth” requirement for membership.

• **2011**- GLSEN launches “Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project focused on making K-12 athletics and physical education safe, respectful and accessible for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions.

• **2011**- Campus Pride launches the “Out to Play” project designed to address anti-LGBT slurs, bias and conduct in college sports and create a safer, more LGBT-friendly athletic community at colleges and universities across the country.
• 2011-Hudson Taylor’s Athlete Ally launches.

• 2011-Ben Cohen’s Stand Up Foundation launches.

• 2011-GLSEN teams with the NBA to create a Think B4 You Speak PSA video featuring NBA players, Grant Hill and Jared Dudley on anti-gay name-calling in sports.

• 2011-Sean Avery, pro ice hockey, Steve Nash, pro basketball, Charles Barkley, pro basketball, speak out for LGBT rights.

• 2011-It Gets Better video campaign films SF Giants, Cubs, Red Sox, Mariners, Minnesota Twins and others.

• 2011-Brazil volleyball team fined $30k for allowing homophobic chants to continue during a match.

• 2011-Olympic figure skater Johnny Weir officially comes out after years of speculation.

• 2011-Rick Welts, Phoenix Suns President comes out.

• 2011-Steve Buckley Boston Herald Sports Writer comes out.

• 2011-NCAA adopts transgender athlete inclusion policy and distributes to all member institutions.

• 2011-NBA, MLB, NHL, NFL adopt non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation.

• 2011-WNBA star, Simeone Augustus, comes out in article in Minneapolis newspaper.

• 2011-NBA fines Kobe Bryant $100k for using homophobic language toward an official. They later fine Joakim Noah $50k for using the same slur.

• 2012-Patrick Burke of the NHL launches You Can Play Project.

• 2012-Sports Illustrated writes in-depth article on transgender athletes.

• 2012-University of Indiana hires out NCAA women’s basketball coach Curt Miller.

• 2012-Olympic and World Cup Champion USA soccer player, Megan Rapinoe comes out as a lesbian.

• 2012-Former NFL football player, Wade Davis comes out in national media as gay.
• **2012-** Campus Pride releases the first-ever LGBT-Friendly "Top 10" List for college athletics in partnership with Compete Magazine.

• **2012-** First LGBT Sports Summit is hosted by Nike working to form a coalition of LGBT Sports leaders and organizations.

With contributions from:

- **Helen Carroll**, Sports Project Director, National Center for Lesbian Rights
- **Cyd Ziegler**, co-founder of Outsports.com