

Canadian sport
history – sexual
orientation of athlete
– mark tewksbury
overcame ...



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Canada is internationally recognized for catering human rights to every individual, respecting cultural diversity and liberating everyone to live in peace and security. Recently Canada marked its pioneer ship in the area of human rights by acknowledging the legal rights of homosexuals and by attributing a legal status to same-sex marriages. However this liberal gesture of Canadian society waits yet to be approved by the Sports world. In recent years, there have been a number of fruitful initiatives and programs implemented by the Canadian sports leaders and policy makers in order to ensure healthy sports, fair play and ethical conduct within the Canadian sports system.

For that matter, most of the sports experiences have been encouragingly positive for participants, but in some cases, the experience is not safe and encouraging. Harassment, violence, bullying, coercion and homophobia are some of the issues which highly impede the so valuable contribution of sports to personal, social and community development.

Defining Homophobia Homophobia is the fear of, hatred for or prejudice towards homosexuals at times leading to violent displays and expressions of hostility. It can also mean ostracism, disfavor and extreme dislike for the homosexual behaviors and cultures. Homophobia is not restricted to any particular section of society. It can stem in people from all walks of life and homophobic beliefs lead to hostile acts at schools, workplaces, and clubs.

Concerns about homophobia in sports Homophobia doesn't leave any man or woman unaffected, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Fear, doubts and misunderstandings regarding sexual orientation often lead to harassment, pestering, violence, segregation and inferiority complexes. Such behaviors
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and feelings create insecure environment that impedes quality performance, adversely affects friendships, team morale, athletes and coaches alike. For example players' locker rooms have often been targeted for homophobic activities; female athletes are labeled as lesbians in order to undermine their performance, shake confidence and to create doubts about their performances.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual coaches often face downright discrimination and hostilities. The opposition to homophobia means to create a discrimination-free sports world, where all men and women are welcomed with open arms, where they are protected against all forms of hostilities and where they get a fair chance to exhibit their potential. Several studies have indicated that the gays and lesbians, who resolve to come out, avail benefits as less stress and anxiety, more social support and greater self-esteem.

Trepidation of being identified as gay Many theorists including Calvin Thomas have come up with the notion that the phenomenon of Homophobia can find its roots in one's fear of being branded as gay. They have pointed out that a person who exhibits homophobic thoughts, feelings and behaviors does so not only to convey their ideas about the class of homosexuals, but also to keep themselves distinguished from this class and its social standing.

In this way, by doing away from gay people, they tend to reaffirm and reassure their role as a heterosexual in a heteronormative culture, consequently preventing themselves from being called and treated as a homosexual. This explanation uncovers the idea that a person may pose fierce opposition and disagreement to the other simply in order to ensure their own identity as part of the majority and to gain social corroboration.

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The same concept is also perennial in the interpretations of racism and xenophobia. Some common findings and conclusions of some authors with regard to men's sports can be enumerated here.

- Gay athletes suffer the insurmountable terror by the idea of coming out of the closet or in other words reveal their sexual orientation because of the predictable consequences. rejection and alienation by their coaches and negative reactions on the part of teammates.
- In order to deny their homosexuality completely and to conform to the norms of society, some gays can become extremely rough and violent towards gays and lesbians. This behavior pattern is more likely to occur during their teenage years.
- Homophobia is an integral part of male sports, because being "one of the guys" implies being homophobic.
- Team sports provide the boys and adult men with the opportunity to engage in homosexual behavior without being treated and perceived as gay.

Self-concealment of One's Sexual Orientation: Being a part of a homophobic society, many GLB feel the pressure to conform normalcy, fear discrimination, revulsion and bias. Consequently many GLB tend to hide their sexual orientation and become secretive and isolated in their lives. They tend to suppress their feelings and emotions deep down inside causing unusual stress and miserable mood shifts.

Thus concealing homosexuality has evidently proved to have a devastating effect on one's physical and emotional health. The breaking up of this secrecy shell and uncovering one's homosexuality to family, friends and

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significant others is an extremely painful process that often leads to social rejection, familial isolation, alienation, self-hate, shame, dejection, severe anxiety, inferiority complex, lowered self-esteem, loss of friends, verbal and physical abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and other stress related patterns (e. g. troubled sex lives, problems in intimate relationships, homelessness and suicides).

Being Homosexual in Athletics: Being homosexual in athletics means being, deprived in a lot of unfortunate ways. Social rejection is one hand, but the athletes have to bear invariable professional sufferings. They lose scholarships and are subjected to all kinds of hostilities. Sometimes they are even made to abandon sports forcefully. The sufferer coaches and athletes are ordered to remain silent to save school image. Not only that, they are even detested by the teammates and peers. The coaches even lose jobs. Sports professionals, coaches and administrators are often denied the domestic partner benefits. These sports personalities fail to obtain endorsements and lose sponsorships. Similarly the girls are also discouraged from participating in athletics because they are afraid of being labeled as lesbians.

Mark Tewksbury: Born on February 7, 1968, Mark Tewksbury is a former Canadian swimmer. The premier back-stroker has commonwealth and championship successes on his credit but his crowning stroke is the gold medal won in the 100 meters backstroke at the 1992 Barcelona summer Olympics. Raised in Calgary, Alberta, Tewksbury began his swimming career at the age of eight and grew up to be the star swimmer of University of Calgary. In 1988, he attended his first Olympics in Seoul as a part of Canada's relay team and claimed the silver medal. Marking his position as

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one of the top backstrokers in the world for some years, Tewksbury was unbeatable on the surface; however as below-the-water swimmer he was never a competitive candidate.

Consequently with the growing importance of below-the-water swimming, his ranking began to fall. A national hero: At seventeen, he represented Canada at the 1985 Pan Pacific Championship; he ranked eighth in the 100 meter backstroke. He achieved gold in the same event at the next two Pan Pacific games in 1987 and 1989, and won silver in 1991. Moreover, he was a competitor in the three silver medal-winning medley relay teams (1987-1991) and gained yet another silver medal in the 200-meter backstroke in 1987. Success became his lot even at the Commonwealth games, winning him double gold in the backstroke and in both 1986 and 1990 medley relay events.

Tewksbury competed in the 1992 Olympics enlivening Canada's hopes once again. In the thrilling final race of the 100-meter backstroke, Tewksbury displayed a breathtaking performance by improving his own best time by over 1.2 seconds and edged out his opponent Jeff Rouse of United States by a close margin of six one-hundredths of a second to win the Gold medal thus setting a World record. Since the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, it was Canada's first gold medal at Barcelona games and the first Canadian gold in swimming, a lifetime achievement for Tewksbury. His record-setting win even brought him to the cover of Time magazine.

Tewksbury's bright athletic career further got embellished when he became Canada's Male Athlete of the year and also got inducted into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame, International Swimming Hall of Fame and the <https://assignbuster.com/canadian-sport-history-sexual-orientation-of-athlete-mark-tewksbury-overcame-homophobia-to-become-a-national-hero/>

Canadian Sports Hall of fame. Homosexuality Demons: Tewksbury had realized his sexual orientation while he was in grade school but he found himself confused, diffident and lonely, simply unable to run anywhere for help. In his book, " Inside Out", he reflects upon all those years and says, " I felt vulnerable and freakish, like I was the only person in the world with this affliction."

Due to his feelings of isolation and estrangement, he became a lonesome individual in junior high school. One day he found his locker all wrecked up and were also the homophobic slurs written on his notebooks. Agonized and severely depressed he ran home and kept waiting for his parents to return home from work. He shared with them the whole disturbing episode at school, however was still not ready to recognize the fact of being gay. His parents discussed the whole matter with the school principal, who evaded the issue of homophobia while suggested that Tewksbury should transfer to a different school. And so he did, but there also he had to confront more or less the same episodes as soon as the students came to learn the reasons fro his transfer. Again he had to face bullying and bedevilment.

Tewksbury recalls this phase as " the beginning of my double life", which means glory and contentment in swimming while trying to evade cruel remarks of homophobic demons at school. During this traumatic phase of life, Tewksbury often suffered suicidal pangs of mood. As he says, he " really considered ending it all". On various occasions he grabbed a knife and locked himself in the bathroom. He states, " I would never actually hurt myself, but the depths of my self-loathing and desperation in wanting to be something different than what I was pushed me dangerously close." He could

only find serenity in his swimming and his family, but he was still afraid to disclose his “ awful secret” to his loved ones. As a teenager he tried to make utmost efforts to appear straight oriented, dated a few girls, but could not keep up the pretexts for too long.

At times he attempted to make a pass at another male, but could not go to the extent of establishing any intimate relationship. Going Public: He made an appearance on television as a spokesperson for the Canadian Cattleman’s Association in the lead-up to the Olympics. His photos, handsome and bare-chested were all over the country on Bugle Boy jeans ads. But as the rumors of his homosexuality began to surface, his endorsement deals got endangered. In 1994, he fled to Australia to avoid everyone and everything, to have some time and strength to discover and come to terms with his identity. After two years returning to Canada in 1998, he declared his homosexuality publicly. It was a declaration that aroused mixed reactions.

Media hype, newspaper headlines, accusations of using this declaration as a career boost tactic, a let-it-be response from some who felt it was old news. He said “ I’m not just gay, I’m a screaming’ queen, so if we’re going to use a label, let’s get it straight! I always knew. My first sexual fantasies were about men. And then we went through the ‘playing with Barbies in the bathtub’ stage. And there was the whole drag queen side.” It was not an easy task to grow up gay in Calgary which is described by Tewksbury as “ not the most diverse of cities in the country”. “ The voice inside my head for years was focused only on the things about me that I hate because I’ve been coming from a place of fear, of half-truths. When I was growing up, I used to stand in front of mirrors and think about killing myself because I was gay and that’s

still the number one motivation behind teen suicide. That little part of me remained locked up for 30 years”.

Looking back now, Tewksbury finds those painful experiences fundamental for his emotional growth. That first most difficult and painful step down a long path carried him from feelings of shame and disgust to self-realization and then on to pride and fortitude to work for GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer) rights. In 2006 Toronto Pride Festival, Tewksbury was one of the very few Canadians honored for having demonstrated an ardent and impassioned commitment to queer life. His successful appearance won him a remunerative contract that gave him the financial resources so needed to provide for the expenses of training for 1992 Olympics. A role model: Mark Tewksbury’s competitive career as an Olympic swimmer came to an end in 1993. But after that he came out to the public about his sexual orientation, a rare act by athletes. But gaining from his own experiences he went on to become a convincing spokesperson for the gay and lesbian rights. He also got involved in different sports activities such as the promotion of First World Out games, which were held in Montreal in 2006.

For Tewksbury, there is no looking back. He is always seen as being comfortable and content with his sexual orientation. He has no complaints. Audaciously enough, he can speak publicly and is even a coveted conference speaker. He became a role model in the fight against Homophobia and also achieved the 2007 Fight against Homophobia award for his honest efforts. Mark was a champion in the pool, but even in life outside the pool, he has grown to become a sought-after communicator and a champion of

humanitarian causes. Out game Olympics are a means to smash the obstacles in sports.

According to Tewksbury athletes are still hesitant to come out, because they expect a negative reaction from teammates and coaches. “ It's a conservative environment. It tends to be run by a relatively small group of people, mostly men. A little bit of that old boys club mentality. It's not very open to changing.” Tewksbury hopes that out games will serve a dual purpose of promoting gay and lesbian athletics as well as they will bridge the gap between homosexuals and mainstream sports.