

Stonewall National Museum & Archives
LGBTQ Sports in the United States Timeline

Introduction

The United States has had a long-standing discomfort with the transgression of sexual and gender norms. Influenced by religious ideals, society viewed people who had same-sex desires and engaged in same-sex practices to be immoral and sinful. As such, the US has long enacted laws to control and condemn those who betray sexual and gender norms. Since the nation's earliest days, federal, state and local laws punished those who betrayed sexual and gender norms, often as a capital offense.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, commerce and industry flourished, causing people to move from rural communities to more developed urban areas. As a result of these social transformations, same-sex practices increased, as did organized efforts to suppress them. Accordingly, our examination of LGBTQ history in the United States begins after the Civil War and the growth of industrialization and urbanization. Despite insistent homophobia and transphobia in politics, culture, and society over the past 170 years, LGBTQ people have remained resilient, creative, and dedicated to the fight for rights and visibility. Rather than a comprehensive overview, this timeline is intended to provide a snapshot of significant moments in LGBTQ history so as to encourage further engagement and exploration.

Check out other LGBTQ timeline selections that specifically explore visual art, theater and dance, literature, film and television, music, AIDS, and more in this series.



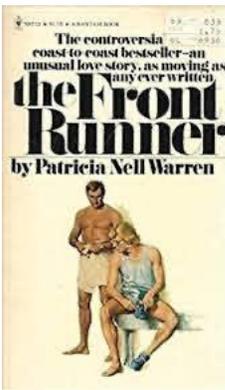
1920 Bill Tilden became the first American to win Wimbledon. [More](#)



1932 Babe Didrikson Zaharias won two gold medals in track and field at the Summer Olympics. Thereafter she focused on golf, winning ten Ladies Professional Golf Association championships. [More](#)



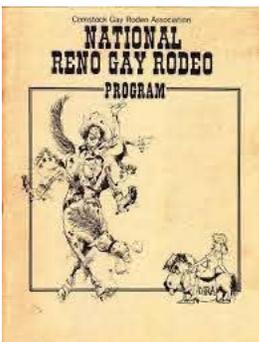
1973 Billie Jean King won the influential “Battle of the Sexes” tennis match at the Houston Astrodome. [More](#)



1974 Patricia Nell Warren’s widely popular book *The Front Runner* chronicled a gay romance between a running coach and his athlete. [More](#)



1975 Dave Kopay became the first NFL player to come out publicly as gay. [More](#)



1976 The first gay rodeo took place in Reno, NV. [More](#)



1976 After undergoing gender reassignment surgery, a court ruled that Renee Richards could compete in tennis' US Open as a woman. She lost in the first singles competition but made it to the finals in the doubles. [More](#)



1978 Glenn Burke, an African-American baseball player thought to have co-originated the “high five,” came out as gay to his teammates. [More](#)



1982 One of the most talented tennis players in history, Martina Navratilova came out. [More](#)



1982
[More](#)

The inaugural Gay Games took place in San Francisco.



1982 Writing for the *Anchorage Daily News*, Roger Brigham became the first openly gay sports journalist at a major metropolitan newspaper. [More](#)



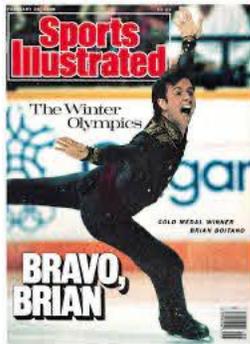
1983 Bodybuilder Bob Paris won the title of Mr. Universe. Six years later, he came out and advocated for gay rights on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. [More](#)



1988 After getting outed, MLB umpire Dave Pallone was dismissed from his job. [More](#)



1988 Equestrian Robert Dover became the first publicly gay Olympic athlete. [More](#)



1988 Brian Boitano became the figure skating champion at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. [More](#)



1992 On the TV show *Donahue*, Roy Simmons, a former NFL player, came out as gay. [More](#)



1995 Greg Louganis, a four-time Gold Medal Champion, came out as both gay and HIV-positive in a widely-watched interview with Barbara Walters. [More](#)



1995 Missy Giove, a mountain bike racing pioneer, came out. [More](#)



1996 Figure skater Rudy Galindo won the U.S. national champion. [More](#)



1996 Muffin Spencer-Devlin became the first professional golfer to come out publicly. [More](#)



1999 Billy Bean, a former professional baseball player, came out. [More](#)



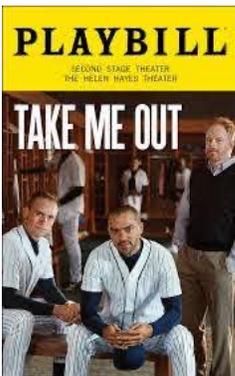
2000 Brian Sims became the first openly gay football captain in the history of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Now he is a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. [More](#)



2001 The National Center for Lesbian Rights established the Sports Project, which seeks to end homophobia and transphobia in sports by means of litigation, outreach, and advocacy. [More](#)



2002 Former football player Esera Tuaolo broke ground by opening up about being gay. [More](#)



2003 Shedding light on homophobia and racism in professional baseball, *Take Me Out* by Richard Greenberg premiered on Broadway. It also won the Tony Award for Best Play. [More](#)



2004 Figure skater Johnny Weir started his three-year streak of winning the U.S. national champion. [More](#)



2006 Jennifer Harris, a basketball player on the Pennsylvania State University Lady Lions, filed a lawsuit against her university due to the homophobic discrimination she received from her coach, Rene Portland. [More](#)



2007 John Amaechi became the first former basketball player to come out publicly. [More](#)



2007 As the Oregon State softball coach, Kirk Walker became the only openly gay coach of a Division I sport. [More](#)



2007 Sports journalist Christine Daniels came out as a trans woman in the *Los Angeles Times*. [More](#)



2009 After coming out, Brendan Burke, an ice hockey player and manager, started a public conversation on the culture of homophobia in sports. [More](#)



2009 Sherri Murrell became the first openly lesbian coach in Division I women's basketball. [More](#)



2010 Kye Allums, a member of the women's basketball team at George Washington University, came out as a trans man. [More](#)



2010 Lana Lawless, a professional golfer, filed a lawsuit against the Ladies Professional Golfing Association, which was refusing to allow her to compete due to her trans identity. Ultimately Lawless won the case. [More](#)



2011 Rick Welts, a high-ranking sports executive, came out as gay. [More](#)



2011 Sheryl Swoopes was deemed one of the fifteen greatest players in league history at the WNBA All-Star Game. [More](#)



2011 Straight wrestler Hudson Taylor founded Athlete Ally, an organization combatting homophobia and transphobia in athletic communities. [More](#)



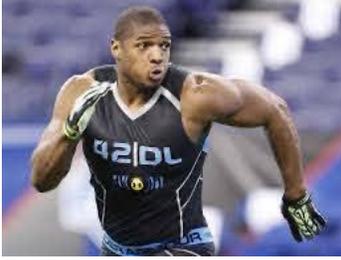
2012 Sports journalist LZ Granderson acknowledged his gay identity in a column for CNN.com. [More](#)



2012 WNBA star Seimone Augustus came out while voicing her support for gay marriage. [More](#)



2013 At the age of 64, Diana Nyad became the first known person to swim from Cuba to Florida without a shark cage. [More](#)



2014 Michael Sam became the first publicly gay football player to be drafted in the NFL. [More](#)



2014 After coming out, NBA superstar Jason Collins was featured on the cover of the “100 most influential people” edition of *Time* magazine. [More](#)



2015 Caitlyn Jenner, a former Olympic medal-winning decathlete and reality television star, came out as trans, quickly becoming one of the most visible and famous trans women in history. [More](#)



2016 Named Thrasher Magazine’s Skater of the Year in 1999, Brian Anderson came out, making him the first openly gay professional skateboarder. [More](#)



2016 Leo Baker, a non-binary skateboarder, won the Street League Skateboarding Super Crown World Championship. [More](#)



2018 Figure skater Adam Rippon represented the U.S. at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, where he won a bronze medal. [More](#)



2019 College wrestler Michael Johnson was released from prison after serving five and a half years of an outrageous thirty-year sentence for not disclosing his HIV status to sex partners. [More](#)



2019 Star soccer player and LGBT activist Megan Rapinoe won gold with the American team at the FIFA Women's World Cup. [More](#)

(End November 2020)