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 The inaugural Gay Games took place in San Francisco. More

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-watch 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

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

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

2020  In an interview with The New York Times, Hig Roberts, a two-time U.S. national champion, becomes the first elite men’s Alpine skier to publicly come out as gay, hoping to encourage others to be themselves. More

(End December 2020)