



Homophobia holds on in athletics

TOM HASKIN
Editor-in-Chief

The South community is widely recognized for its acceptance of homosexuals: the state's first public school Gay/Straight Alliance was formed here, and TBGLAD Day, when the student body participates in a variety of forums and lectures on gay issue, has become an annual fixture.

Bob Parlin, history teacher and GSA adviser, estimates that in the last few years, the number of "openly" gay

students has dramatically increased.

"In the past, we always used to have only one or two kids who were out," he said. "My perception is that now we have at least 15 or 20 kids in the building."

But even so, most agree the school has work to do. And interviews with more than a dozen student and faculty members reveals that one particular part of the school – athletics – still has the farthest to come.

HOMOPHOBIA, 29

Athletics remain final frontier for gay students

HOMOPHOBIA, from 1

Athletic Director Scott Perrin thinks part of the problem lies in the nature of athletics themselves.

"Sports brings out a level of machismo and heroism and also, people have their own insecurities," he said. "It's an easy place to throw stereotypes around, but that doesn't make it right."

The boys' locker room is one place where this behavior is prevalent.

Senior John Beck, a three-sport captain, said he hears homophobic remarks "all the time," before and after practice.

"Somebody will brush up against another kid by accident, and that kid will turn around and scream, 'Get off of me you f***ing faggot!'" he said.

Parlin, too, was an athlete in high school, but it was comments like these that ultimately led him to quit the football team. Now openly gay, he said he "hated every minute" of his high school sports experience.

"I even had a girlfriend, deliberately, so I would pass as being straight," he said.

For him, the locker room was about as bad as it could get. Still today, he worries about safety of gay athletes.

"Locker rooms, and other sports areas, are less supervised by adults than other places in the school. And therefore they become the most dangerous places. That's an element of fear that you don't see

in other parts of the school," he said.

History teacher Michael Kozuch, also openly gay, has participated in workshops aimed at making schools, and sports departments, more accepting for gays.

He recently sent a set of posters in support of gay athletes, featuring quotations from ex-NBA player John Amaechi and former Dartmouth lacrosse goalie Andrew Goldstein, both now openly gay, to Perrin to post around the field-house area. They were torn down within days.

Kozuch also told the story of an incident in North Adams, Mass., that happened in the 1990s.

"There was a soccer kid who was found in the locker room, I guess he was taking a shower after practice, and the football team came in, too. And I guess there were rumors about him being gay, so the football team guys put soap in their socks and just beat him," he said.

Stories like these might deter openly gay students from joining South's teams. And even if that kind of violence wouldn't occur in Newton, other factors have kept homosexual students away, as in the case of senior Sam Donovan.

He said that his sexuality has stopped him from signing up for both the

track and swimming teams, two sports he's had his eye on.

"I just didn't want to be looked at funny, or questioned like that," he said.

Jordan Sawyers, an openly gay senior who has considered joining the lacrosse team come spring, said that while he has never felt physically endangered at South, it's "definitely something" that has crossed his mind.

He also worries about the attitude his teammate might have, regardless if any physical violence occurred. "I would feel uncomfortable if other people weren't comfortable around me," he said.

And there are athletes at South who would fall into that category.

Junior Sam Hyun, a baseball player, said if he had a gay teammate, he'd be "fine with it" unless the person "was flamboyant and liked hitting on other guys and stuff."

Sawyers sees this statement as a sad misconception.

"There's this idea that some people have that gay people are attracted to every guy they see," he said. "For one reason or another, people think that I'm attracted to every man."

"We're teenage boys and we're going to say stupid and controversial stuff sometimes. But I don't think it has a lot of weight."

SAM HYUN
CLASS OF 2010

In other sports, like wrestling, some people's discomfort would deal more with the physical nature of the activity.

"To be wrestling some kid who was homosexual, I would be a little uncomfortable with that with all the grabbing and stuff," senior Saleem Sabree said.

"But then again, I could have wrestled some kid who was gay and never known it."

Yet wrestling coach Alan Rotatori, who has 21 years of experience, disagrees with Sabree's position.

"When you're grabbing your opponent and trying to bring him down, that's the last thing you're thinking about," he said.

Rotatori, whose office is in the locker room, said that when he hears anti-gay remarks, he tells kids to "keep their opinions to themselves."

Hyun admits that the language used by the team in the locker room, on the bus and even on the paying field can sometimes go a bit too far.

"We're teenage boys and we're going to say stupid and controversial stuff sometimes," he said.

"But I don't think it has a lot of weight; most kids don't really see it as homophobic."

"Of course," Hyun added. "If I ever knew somebody on the team was gay, I'd alter the way I say stuff, because after all, he is your teammate."