



Anti-LGBTQ Language in Athletics

from NCAA's "Champions of Respect"

The use of demeaning language as a casual put-down, a joke or an intentional insult contributes to a disrespectful and unsafe climate in athletics. Derogatory terms, such as those based on sexual, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, race, disability or religious stereotypes are never appropriate. Accepted in some athletics settings as "part of the game," derogatory terms referring to sexual orientation or gender are sometimes used to taunt opponents, shame teammates, motivate greater athletics effort, tease a teammate or express negative feelings toward other people or even objects ("That shirt is so gay").

Some coaches or student-athletes claim that when they use this kind of language they do not intend it as an insult to LGBTQ people or allies. However, the effect of using anti-LGBTQ language can create a disrespectful climate whether intended or not. Student-athletes who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity often understand the acceptance of anti-LGBTQ language by teammates and coaches as an indication that being open about their identities would not be tolerated or welcomed. For student-athletes who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, the climate perpetuated by the acceptance of anti-LGBTQ language can be perceived as especially hostile. Straight student-athletes who have LGBTQ friends or family members also may be offended by the use of anti-LGBTQ language by coaches, staff, fans and teammates.

Coaches and team captains set the tone for team climate. If coaches and team captains use anti-LGBTQ language or allow others to use it, team members learn that it is acceptable. When coaches and team captains set expectations for respectful interactions in which name-calling, bullying or the casual use of anti-LGBTQ language is not accepted, the entire team can benefit from the knowledge that everyone will be treated respectfully.

A Comprehensive Strategy for Addressing Anti-LGBTQ Language

- **Set a Positive Example.** Make sure your behavior as a coach or team captain and the language you use sets an example of respect for all team members. Expect the same of your support staff and fans.
- **Be Proactive.** At opening team meetings at the beginning of the season or school year, talk with the team about coaches' and captains' expectations that interactions with teammates and opponents will be positive. Be specific about naming anti-LGBTQ language as unacceptable on the team. Frame this conversation positively in that, as student-athletes, they are role models for younger students and representatives of their school. Explain that you expect them to be role models for respect.
- **Ask the Team for an Affirmative Buy-in.** Have team members sign a team pledge or take some other action that requires them to actively affirm their commitment to creating an inclusive and respectful team climate.
- **Respond.** If a team member, coach administrator or support group uses anti-LGBTQ language, remind them of the team commitment to an ethic of respect. Encourage all team members to respond so that it is not just coaches and team captains who have the responsibility to speak up.
- **Invite the Team To Participate in a Respect Visibility Campaign.** Sign the Athlete Ally Pledge, make a You Can Play video or take part in some other team action to let the public know your team stands for respect and inclusion.