

NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

**SPORTS PROJECT**

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

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## **THE POSITIVE APPROACH:**

Recognizing, Challenging, and Eliminating Negative Recruiting Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation

by

**Dr. Pat Griffin**

**Director**

**It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Sport,  
Women's Sports Foundation**

and

**Helen J. Carroll**

**Sports Project Director**

**National Center for Lesbian Rights**

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*The Positive Approach: Recognizing, Challenging And Eliminating Negative Recruiting Based On  
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## INTRODUCTION

In a Think Tank convened by the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in October, 2006, top sports leaders from across the country, including NCAA leaders, athletic directors, coaches and athletes, attorneys, conference commissioners, college presidents, researchers and executives of national coaching organizations, came together to discuss the impact of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. This recruiting practice is a persistent problem that undermines the principle and practice of ethical behavior and contributes to the continuation of the well-documented problem of homophobia in sport.

Equal opportunity in sport is a core principle that should be deeply valued and vigorously pursued. Negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, which refers to the practice of playing on stereotypes to deter recruits from attending rival athletic programs by alleging or implying that a rival coach or team members are gay or lesbian, undermines this core principle. Because sexual orientation is irrelevant to coaching, leadership, or athletic abilities, the actual or perceived sexual orientation of any coach or player should not be part of the recruiting process.

Consistent with the principle of equal opportunity, the talented experts assembled for this Think Tank believe in a “level playing field” where people are judged on the merits for their talent, capacity for hard work, and contributions to sport rather than on personal characteristics—such as sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. What emerged from the Think Tank were two issues: first, a deeper understanding of this type of discrimination, and second, a consensus that those involved in intercollegiate athletics need to be made aware of the problem and told what they can do to proactively address or remedy this problem. This report, issued by the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the Women’s Sports Foundation through its It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Sport, takes on these two challenges. It clearly defines this particular brand of unethical and discriminatory recruiting conduct, and then lists best practices that, if used consistently, can bring this conduct to a halt.

What recruiting practices should be used instead? Intercollegiate athletic recruiters should take “The Positive Approach,” focusing their recruiting activities on listing the positive attributes of the institution to which the recruiter hopes to attract talented student-athletes. The NCAA has a guiding phrase for the recruiting practices of their collegiate membership: “Keep It Positive.” The definitions and explanations of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, combined with the best practices for eliminating this unethical practice, are aligned with the NCAA’s philosophy. What we ultimately hope for, and work towards, is a day when we can say that discrimination and homophobia in sport have been eliminated.

# **Part 1: Understanding Negative Recruiting Based on Sexual Orientation in Intercollegiate Athletics**

This section defines negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, discusses the consequences of such negative recruiting on student-athletes and athletic programs, and identifies the benefits of eliminating this type of negative recruiting and encouraging positive recruiting.

## **Who Is This Report For?**

This report is intended for those involved with and affected by intercollegiate athletics, including college presidents, faculty athletic representatives, athletic conference commissioners, sport governing organization leaders, coach association leaders, school athletic administrators, student-athletes, and coaches. It also will be helpful to student-athletes, their parents and families, who, ultimately, are the targets of negative recruiting. It provides valuable information and insight for those interested both in the specific problem of negative recruiting and the broader issues of homophobia in sport.

## **What Is “Negative” Recruiting?**

Negative recruiting occurs when coaches or other school representatives make negative comments or inferences about other schools and athletic programs rather than focusing on the positive qualities of their own school. Negative recruiting can include criticisms or unfavorable comments about any aspect of another school, such as the coach’s experience or coaching style, the likelihood of the recruit getting playing time in another coach’s system, athletic facilities, academic programs the student-athlete is interested in, or the conference of which the school is a part. Negative recruiting can also include comments or innuendo about the coaching staff or team members at another school that the coach assumes would not be acceptable to the recruit and her/his family, such as race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or marital status.

## **Negative Recruiting Based On Sexual Orientation.**

Negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is when a coach at one school tries to persuade a student to accept an offer at that school by telling (or implying to) a potential student-athlete (and often the athlete’s parents) that one or more coaches or players at another school are lesbian or gay. While this type of unethical recruiting may occur in either men’s and women’s sports, it appears—at least anecdotally—that negative recruiting based on sexual orientation may be more common in women’s athletics. Negative recruiting in women’s sports is often intended to exploit the fears and concerns a high school student-athlete and her family may have about playing on a team with lesbian or bisexual coaches or teammates. While not currently as prevalent in men’s intercollegiate athletics, it is possible that, if unchecked, this unethical practice may become more common in men’s intercollegiate athletics as more gay student-athletes and coaches identify themselves publicly.

Lingering stereotypes about gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have unfortunately made homophobic negative recruiting an effective tool for some unethical coaches. Negative recruiting based on biased and unfounded stereotypes can be blatant and direct, such as coaches outright telling a recruit and her parents that a rival coach is a lesbian or that there are lesbian players on her team. It can also be more subtle. Unethical coaches sometimes allude to rumors about

another coach's sexual orientation or make innuendos about problems on another school's team caused by "lifestyle" or "moral" issues, which may be coded references to sexual orientation.

Coaches may do this even when they do not know the actual sexual orientation of the women coaches and student-athletes at another school. As a result, negative recruiting can also harmfully target heterosexual women, especially if they are not married to a different-sex spouse, as well as lesbians or bisexual women.

Though negative recruiting is more common among college coaches, some high school coaches play a role as well. High school coaches are often trusted advisors who are influential in helping student-athletes on their teams decide which colleges to attend and may engage in negative practices based on sexual orientation to steer a student-athlete and her family away from a particular college program. Regardless of whether negative recruiting is direct or subtle, the intention is to discredit another coach, team, and school by using homophobia.

### **What Are Ethical Recruiting Practices?**

In contrast to negative recruiting, ethical recruiting is where coaches focus on the positive aspects of their athletic program and, for NCAA Division I and II, the NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics), and junior and community colleges, entice student-athletes with scholarship offers. Coaches also tout other strengths of their schools such as academics and academic support programs, career services, the size, location or beauty of the campus, and other qualities of the school they believe would persuade potential recruits that they can best achieve their goals at the recruiting school. This "positive recruiting" of student-athletes, by focusing on appealing and outstanding qualities of their own college or university, is an ethical and acceptable practice. However, as the pressure to win increases and competition among schools for top student-athletes intensifies, some coaches also engage in the unethical practice of "negative recruiting," including based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, with unfortunate consequences.

### **Harmful Potential Consequences of Negative Recruiting Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation.**

The potential consequences of negative recruiting are far-reaching because this practice perpetuates harmful stereotypes and can contribute to a discriminatory educational or workplace environment. Ultimately, the practice affects all of those involved in the world of collegiate sports. The consequences for institutions or individual coaches engaging in negative recruiting can include unflattering media attention and bad publicity; damage to the school's, athletic department's and coaches' reputations; loss of recruits; sanctions from sport governing organizations; and litigation brought by student-athletes and their parents, employees, or other schools and coaches that often result in financial losses. All of these consequences can have serious ramifications for a school's ability to raise funds, recruit top student-athletes or maintain a top performing athletic department.

Of course, the practice of negative recruiting has a detrimental effect on student-athletes, so that the health and well-being of all student-athletes, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, is harmed by negative recruiting. Coaches, often the subject of the negative recruiting messages, can be directly harmed or indirectly affected. It is helpful to understand these consequences.

### **A. It is hurtful to lesbian, gay and bisexual student-athletes.**

Negative recruiting creates a difficult situation for lesbian, gay, and bisexual athletes. Coaches, who hold an important key to college admission, are recruiting them for their athletic talent while at the same time conveying to these students that they are really not welcome on the team because of who they are. As a result, lesbian, gay, and bisexual student-athletes often feel compelled to conceal their sexual orientation and information about their personal lives in order to secure a place on a team and at a college, and to protect themselves from bias and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Women student-athletes, in particular, often feel pressure from coaches and teammates to hide or deny their sexual orientation in order to protect the team from being stigmatized with a “lesbian” reputation, which will prevent the team from being able to draw top recruits in the future. But negative recruiting hurts male student-athletes as well, because it perpetuates homophobia in sports, driving gay and bisexual men student-athletes to remain hidden as well. For all LGB student-athletes, the pressure to remain closeted magnifies the isolation within their teams and often leads to a negative college experience and harmful personal consequences.

Having to hide also creates feelings of shame, which are detrimental. Numerous studies<sup>1</sup> and personal testimonies attest to the damaging effects of hiding one’s sexual orientation and living a life of secrecy and fear of discovery. Young lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who live with shame and fear are more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, or occasionally even take their own lives. Additionally, lesbian and bisexual women may engage in risky heterosexual sexual behavior. The added stress and pressure of being forced to hide such an important aspect of one’s identity take a toll, diminishing the student-athlete’s ability to focus solely on athletic and academic efforts. For many young lesbian, gay, and bisexual student-athletes, however, the draw of intercollegiate athletics is so powerful that they compromise their well-being to play a sport they love.

### **B. It puts pressure on heterosexual student-athletes.**

It is important to know that heterosexual student-athletes are also harmed by homophobia. Because of sexist and homophobic stereotypes, many heterosexual women feel pressured to counter assumptions that they “must” be lesbians merely because they are athletes. This pressure may cause young women to enter into relationships or to engage in sexual activity with young men prematurely to “prove” they are straight, before they are emotionally prepared. Heterosexual players may also feel resentment toward their lesbian teammates out of fear that the team will develop a “lesbian reputation.” Men encounter the opposite stereotype in which the assumption that there are no gay men in sport is accepted as the prevailing rule. This stereotype can lead to physical violence against gay student-athletes if their sexual orientation is revealed or discovered. Heterosexual men on the team may feel they must prove the masculinity of the entire team by pressuring a gay teammate to quit, or even resorting to violence to force

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, S. & Joyner, K. (2001). Adolescent sexual orientation and suicide risk: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91 (8), 1276-1281.; Jordan, K. & Deluty, R. (1998). Coming out for lesbian women: It’s relation to anxiety, positive affectivity, self esteem, and social support. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 35 (2), 41-63.; Lane, J. & Wegner, D. (1995). The cognitive consequences of secrecy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69 (2), 237-253., Meyer, I. (2003). Prejudice, social stress and mental health in lesbian, gay and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129 (5), 674-697.

him off the team. These stereotypes and pressures undermine team cohesiveness by encouraging prejudice, suspicion, and divisiveness rather than inclusiveness and respect.

Homophobia among some heterosexual women is so intense that they forfeit the opportunity to pursue an athletic career altogether out of fear that they might be perceived as lesbians because of their athletic interests. Lingering stereotypes that equate athleticism among women with lesbianism sometimes cause parents and friends of talented women athletes to discourage their interest in athletics out of concern regarding their sexuality or about how their sexuality will be perceived by others. Homophobia among heterosexual men may cause them to drive talented gay student-athletes from participating in sport, leading them to quit the team or to choose the safer (and less conflict-ridden) path of simply not advancing from high school sports to collegiate athletics.

### **C. It can create a hostile climate for lesbian, gay or bisexual coaches.**

Negative recruiting creates a hostile environment for all coaches regardless of their sexual orientation, but because they are not in a position to deny the allegations, the largest impact is on lesbian, gay and bisexual coaches. Lesbian coaches, in particular, are often stigmatized and stereotyped, regardless of their individual competence and character. In such a hostile climate where successful recruiting can affect a coach's career, lesbian and bisexual coaches often strategically hide their identities, pretend to be heterosexual or self-censor any references to their personal lives. As it becomes known that there are a number of gay coaches, negative recruiting likely will become more of a destructive tool in men's athletics. The psychological toll of silence, denial, and secrecy results in a climate of fear and hostility that many lesbian, gay, and bisexual coaches endure in order to pursue their profession. Others simply choose to leave the profession.

### **D. The threat of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation places heterosexual coaches at similar risk of being hurt by this unethical practice.**

Heterosexual coaches, particularly unmarried women, are also targeted by homophobic negative recruiting. Innuendo or rumors about the presence of lesbians on a team rely on fear, prejudice, and misinformation, and have unjustly damaged the reputations of many heterosexual women coaches and tarnished the image of college teams. The effects of negative recruiting can take a toll on a coach's ability to recruit athletes successfully, affecting her job stability as well as the school's reputation and achievement in that sport. Because of homophobia, which is perpetuated through negative recruiting among other practices, women coaches also feel enormous pressure to appear not to be lesbian. For example, many female coaches feel compelled to present themselves in a stereotypically feminine manner, especially with regard to dress, hairstyle, mannerisms and accessories, whether or not that is their preferred appearance, because of the fear of being labeled "lesbian." Fear of being targeted by negative recruiting encourages dishonesty, divisiveness, and fear among coaches with the result that women coaches rarely challenge negative recruiting against other coaches for fear of being targeted as lesbians themselves, whether or not they are.

## **Benefits of Addressing Negative Recruiting Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation.**

All stakeholders in collegiate athletics will benefit from eliminating such negative recruiting. Intercollegiate sport, even at the most competitive levels, remains an integral part of the process of education and development of young people, especially emerging leaders in our society. Addressing negative recruiting is an opportunity for school and athletic leaders to fulfill their commitment to create an environment in which all students can thrive, develop their full potential and learn how to interact with persons from diverse groups. Diversity is often touted as a strength at many colleges and universities, and specifically among athletic programs. In fact, many schools have enacted inclusive non-discrimination policies that list discrimination based on sexual orientation among the prohibited practices. Athletic departments and their staffs are among those responsible for creating and maintaining an inclusive and non-discriminatory climate in the areas for which they are responsible. Addressing negative recruiting provides school athletic leaders with a concrete opportunity to take responsibility and to clearly demonstrate their commitment to fair play and inclusion.

In contrast, when schools tolerate negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation as an inevitable part of intercollegiate athletics, this tacit acquiescence reinforces the image of intercollegiate athletics as a privileged activity not accountable to broad institutional and societal ideals of respect for difference and inclusion. Moreover, when all participants in athletics are committed to fair play, inclusion and respect, student-athletes are free to focus on performing their best in athletic competition and in the classroom. This climate promotes the well-being and achievement potential of all student-athletes. Every student-athlete and coach will benefit from meeting the challenge of overcoming fear and prejudice about social groups of which they are not members. This respect for difference will be invaluable to all student-athletes as they graduate and enter an increasingly diverse workforce in which knowing how to work effectively across differences is a professional and personal asset. Further, learning to differentiate between ethical and unethical practices, especially when the competitive stakes are high, is a valuable life skill that coaches and administrators should model and encourage student-athletes to develop.

## **Although Some Change is Underway, More Leadership is Needed.**

As general attitudes about lesbians, gay men and bisexual people continue to become more positive, homophobic negative recruiting in intercollegiate athletics is losing its effectiveness. This change has already begun, as a growing number of high school recruits and their families are offended by a coach's assumption that they share his or her negative beliefs about lesbians and bisexual women or put off by the coach's use of unethical recruiting tactics. Today, more high school student-athletes attend schools with gay-straight student clubs and more families know and care about lesbian and gay relatives, friends and co-workers. As these changes occur in the larger culture, homophobic negative recruiting will backfire more often as high school student-athletes and their families decline to attend a school *because* of a coach's unethical tactics.

Athletic leaders cannot, however, wait for this larger cultural shift to occur before addressing this problem. It is important that all educational and athletic leaders develop sound policies prohibiting negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. In addition, they need to educate their constituencies about the importance of focusing on positive recruiting, as well as the consequences of violating these policies. Athletic leaders have the

opportunity and responsibility to take a proactive stance to influence change. Taking a proactive stance toward policy development prepares athletic leaders to respond more thoughtfully and effectively to negative recruiting rather than reacting in crisis mode to situations that can quickly become embarrassing or costly. One early leader is the NCAA Division I Pacific Athletic Conference (PAC 10). The PAC 10 Code of Ethics focuses on positive recruiting. It says that “a recruiter must refrain from making degrading or derogatory comments about other institutions and their programs and personnel.”(Chapter 3, Section 2.e.(1)(4), PAC 10 Handbook, 2008.) It also specifically prohibits statements during the recruiting process that are false, misleading, or malicious, including statements against a person about that individual’s integrity, sexual orientation, or history of previous substance abuse.

Leadership is needed to eliminate negative recruiting, including from sports leaders at all levels and from multiple stakeholders in athletics. Further, challenging and eliminating negative recruiting requires an institutional and cultural change from passive tolerance to active policy development, monitoring, and enforcement. To help guide leadership and foster policy development, we offer recommended “best practices.”

**For More Information, See “Best Practices” In Part 2.**

The second part of this report focuses on identifying specific “best practices.” These suggestions are written to specifically meet the needs of the various individuals involved, including administrators, coaches, student-athletes and their families. They will also contribute to a greater understanding of how to eliminate negative recruiting for anyone interested in the issue. We invite you to read on.

## **Part 2: Best Practices for Challenging and Eliminating Negative Recruiting Based on Sexual Orientation**

This is Part 2 of “The Positive Approach,” which identifies “best practices,” or specific strategies, that coaches, administrators, student-athletes and parents of recruits can use to eliminate negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation in collegiate athletic programs. Although these practices specifically address unethical negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, we believe these strategies can be used to eliminate all forms of negative recruiting, including based on race, religion, gender, and gender identity. We start with a discussion of best practices that can be useful for everyone involved, then move on to identify best practices we recommend specifically to coaches, athletic administrators, student-athletes, and parents of recruits.

### **Provide Equal Opportunity**

Colleges and universities often have legal obligations to provide equal opportunity to student-athletes and to personnel, including coaches. All those involved in athletics should be aware of these obligations, and consider them core values guiding policies and practices. Negative recruiting may be a part of a systemic problem where the broader environment is unfriendly to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, or even overtly hostile and homophobic. It can also negatively affect men and women who may be heterosexual, but, for whatever reason are perceived to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Thus, negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, on its own, or as part of the common practices of athletic department, can undermine the core principle of equal opportunity, for the reasons laid out in Part 1 of this report.

### **Value Diversity**

In creating overall guidelines, or best practices, it is important to place this conversation in the context of athletic departments’ broader responsibilities to safety, fairness and respect for all participants. It helps when athletic department leadership, including coaches, come from a place of valuing all aspects of diversity. Collegiate athletics provides an opportunity to compete with, and against others who come from different races, cultures, religions, sexual orientations, and social classes, but all of whom share the common goal of achieving athletic excellence. Valuing this common ground enhances the social and competitive experience for all. Athletic administrators should make valuing diversity explicit in media interviews and other public speaking opportunities as well as in meetings with athletic department staff.

That diversity-valuing approach then becomes the approach that underlies activities throughout the athletic department and is conveyed to teams. All should also understand how these core values are important to team success and to individual team member development. Teams that value each member’s contribution to the unit, while respecting individual differences, provide a foundation for the whole team and each member of the team to focus on achieving their athletic and academic goals.

When diversity values are explicit, then negative recruiting can be framed within this context, as an unethical practice out of sync with core principles and established values. Athletic departments should also go a step further and develop explicit policy statements that prohibit

negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, recommend how to respond to this negative recruiting by others, and identify consequences for engaging in these unethical practices.

These policies may, if followed, protect schools, administrators, student-athletes and coaches from litigation and other negative consequences of engaging in unethical practices. Coaches should include explanations of these expectations in initial team meetings with student-athletes, visits with recruits and their parents as well as in public speaking events or coaching clinics. Parents should communicate the importance of these values in meetings with prospective coaches and athletic administrators. Student-athletes can discuss these values with prospective recruits, new team members and in public speaking opportunities

### **Best Practices for Coaches**

Best practices for coaches focus on being professional, using only ethical recruiting practices, and ensuring that others you work with do the same.

1. Get to know and understand your school's non-discrimination policy as well as applicable non-discrimination laws, and comply with these laws and policies. As part of your recruiting pitch, proactively tell recruits and their parents that your school has a non-discrimination policy that protects all students.
2. Know what your school's, conference's, coaches association's policies and rules are on what qualifies as ethical recruiting practices and what are unethical recruiting practices—including negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation—and abide by them.
3. Ensure that assistant coaches, associate coaches, student-athletes or other team representatives understand your expectations about engaging in positive recruiting, and avoiding such negative recruiting, in all of their professional interactions.
4. Focus on the positive aspects of your own program in all professional conversations, including recruiting. Seek help from your school's public relation or marketing department on best attributes of the college or university to which you seek to recruit talented student-athletes. **Avoid negative comments, implied or direct, about another school, athletic program, coach or team.**
5. Make it known that you value diversity. Be proactive by telling parents and recruits that your school's teams are made up of athletes from different religions, races, ethnic groups, economic classes and sexual orientations and that the core value on your team is respect for one another. Explain that diversity is an integral part of the athletic experience at your school and that this diversity is a positive and desirable part of the educational aspects of collegiate athletic participation. It helps prepare students for the diverse workplace they will encounter in their careers.
6. Ensure that all those who staff sports camps understand the expectations about valuing diversity, engaging in positive recruiting, and avoiding negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation in all interactions with campers and their parents.

7. Before recruits come to campus, prepare your student-athletes—especially those hosting recruits—for questions about lesbians or gay men in your program. Focus on diversity, respect and fairness and the broader team goals in these conversations. Coach them on how to deflect intrusive personal questions and re-focus the conversation on more relevant topics. (See the section on Student-Athletes recruiting, below, for more ideas.)
8. If recruits or their parents inquire about another school, coach, or team, tell them that every school has something to offer and the challenge is to make the best fit possible between the individual athlete and the individual school. Then make the case for why your school is the best fit for that recruit.
9. If parents of recruits or recruits ask about your sexual orientation, that of another coach, or of the student-athletes in your program, tell them that you prefer to focus on the accomplishments and qualifications of your staff and team and that respect for difference is a core value in your program.
10. If parents or recruits inquire as to whether there are gay men or lesbians on your team, acknowledge the diversity on your team and discuss that diversity as a strength. Note that the non-discrimination policy at your school prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, if this indeed the case at your school. Although it is appropriate to acknowledge that there may be gay or lesbian team members, you must also respect the privacy of individual players. It is not appropriate to identify which individuals you believe are (or are not) gay or lesbian.
11. If parents of recruits or recruits ask about the sexual orientation of another coach or student-athletes in another program, tell them you prefer to focus on your program and not another coach or another program. Tell them that all athletic teams at every school are made up of diverse groups of individuals and the important thing is that everyone involved with a team is treated fairly and with respect.
12. Help student-athletes understand their role in the recruiting process. Establish even-handed rules for team members who host recruits, making sure that everyone understands what activities are appropriate for introducing recruits to the campus and athletic department in order to reflect positively on the school.
13. Request that coaches associations provide training or educational sessions about negative recruiting based on sexual orientation that include specific guidelines and policies to help improve recruiting practices in your area.
14. In media guides or web sites, include only information that all coaches—regardless of sexual orientation—can comfortably reveal. Focus on descriptions of professional qualifications such as coaching approach and accomplishments, rather than personal information (such as marital status and names or pictures of spouses and children). When heterosexual coaches include such personal information in media guides, the omission of such personal information by other coaches can become a subtly homophobic tool in the recruiting process. Be aware that describing your team or

coaching approach as “family-oriented” or even “religious” can be interpreted as unwelcoming to lesbian and gay people.

15. If you believe your program has been targeted by negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, encourage parents and/or recruits to express their concerns to you. Reiterate that all teams are comprised of athletes with differing ethnicities, religious faiths, sexual orientations, etc., and that your job as a coach is to foster respect and develop a winning team using the strength of every team member. Make parents and recruits aware of school, conference or coaching association policies prohibiting negative recruiting. State that using negative recruiting is considered unethical by NCAA, conference and coaching association standards.
16. If you think a coach or representative from another school is using negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation against you or your team (whether or not you are lesbian or gay, or there are lesbian or gay members of your team), take action to address it. Unless coaches are willing to speak out about this type of negative recruiting, it will likely continue. Coaches who engage in these unethical practices need to be educated, and they also need to know that their actions will be challenged.
  - a. Talk to your athletic director about school, conference, and NCAA rules and/or policies that apply.
  - b. Ask your athletic director to discuss the situation with the athletic director from the offending school.
  - c. Talk directly to the coach who you have reason to believe is negatively recruiting against you to remind them of policies against negative recruiting, including high school coaches who may be guiding prospective recruits.
  - d. If a parent or recruit tells you that a coach at another school has given them negative information about your program, report this to your athletic director and discuss the appropriate action to take. Options may include calling the coach directly, reporting the allegation to your athletic director in accordance with conference regulations, and/or reporting the violation to your national coaching association ethics committee.
  - e. Follow school, conference, or coaching association guidelines for reporting unethical actions in the recruiting process.

### **Best Practices for Athletic Administrators**

Best practices for athletic administrators focus on prevention, policy development, education, enforcement procedures and consequences. These best practices will be helpful to a wide range of athletic administrators, including at colleges and universities, high schools, sport-governing organizations, coaches associations, and sports conferences.

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1. Understand that negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation often may be a department-wide or organizational issue, not a problem unique to one coach or team, and that, as a result, leadership from the top may be needed.
2. Make the expectations clear by developing specific written department or organizational policies governing the recruiting process that names negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation as an unethical practice. Ensure consistency among all conference, sport governing organization, and school policies.
3. Include reporting procedure and consequences for such negative recruiting in your department or organization policy.
4. Annually educate all coaches and other school representatives in the recruiting process about this type of negative recruiting.
5. Educate all coaches and other school representatives about potential legal liability for individuals and for the school if negative recruiting occurs.
6. Address negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation in coaching ethics statements.
7. Develop a formal feedback mechanism to gather information from parents and prospective recruits about the recruiting process and include items about negative recruiting: written or on-line surveys, entrance/exit interviews, etc.
8. Talk to administrators from other schools when an incident of negative recruiting by one of their staff members comes to your attention.
9. Advocate for athletic conference policies that specifically ban the practice of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.
10. Ask coaching association leadership at your national conference to hold training sessions on ethical recruiting practices, equal opportunity, and the problem of negative recruiting.
11. Develop resource materials on ethical recruiting practices for coaches, parents, student-athletes, and others involved in the recruiting process. Have these resources available as part of the recruiting package you provide for your prospective student-athletes. Materials available for use include NCAA publications, specific conference guidelines on recruiting ethics and individual coaching association recruiting ethics policies that emphasize positive recruiting.
12. Follow through with the reporting procedure within conference or coaching association guidelines when a coach or parent reports an incident of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

### **Best Practices for Student-Athletes Involved in Recruiting**

Best practices for student-athletes involved in recruiting other student-athletes focus on respectful behavior, safety, and valuing diversity.

1. During campus visits, if a recruit or parent asks about your coach's sexual orientation or whether there are lesbian or gay members of your team, tell them that your team includes many diverse members and the most important thing is that you all respect each other and everyone focuses on making their best contribution to the team.
2. During campus visits, if a recruit or parent asks about the sexual orientation of a coach at another school or about lesbian or gay members of another team, tell them politely that in recruiting the focus should be on the positive attributes of your own school, athletic department, and team.
3. If questioning persists, politely take the approach that the sexual orientation of any coach or player is not relevant to their coaching or athletic talents.
4. If campers or parents at a summer sports camp ask you to talk about which schools have lesbian or gay coaches or team members, refocus the conversation to talk about the positive attributes of your school, department, or team.
5. If you are hosting a recruit during a campus visit, conduct yourself as a representative of your school who is committed to communicating the values of athletic and academic excellence as well as respect for diversity.
6. Ask the student athlete advisory council at your school to plan an activity that teaches about the problem of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, and that frames the issue as one that undermines the principle of equal opportunity in sport and fair treatment for all.

### **Best Practices for Parents of Recruits and Recruits Themselves**

Best practices for student-athlete recruits and their parents include focusing on the unique attributes of recruiting schools, the competence and commitment of coaches, ethics of the recruiting approach, and the value of fostering a positive, respectful team climate.

1. Before beginning to visit colleges and universities, discuss your goals and strategies as a family. Make sure everyone understands that you have a right to have recruiting meetings that focus only on the positive attributes of schools, athletic programs, and teams. Make a list of all of your important questions. Agree in advance that all involved will politely but firmly refuse to tolerate negative recruiting approaches used by any coaches.
2. During recruiting visits, spend your time and energy focused on finding out the positive attributes of the recruiting school. There are many aspects of colleges/universities, athletic programs, teams, and coaches to consider.

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3. Convey to coaches right up front that you and your family value diversity as part of the overall college experience. Explain to the coach that you are more interested in how the coach unifies a team with differences in, for example, ethnicities, religious faiths, sexual orientations, to actually improve team performance. Ask the coach to address the importance of accepting and valuing all types of diversity in forming a team unit.
4. Understand that negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation may be based on assumptions the coach is making about you, your family, or your values. For example, the coach may not know that you value diversity. He or she may not know that a priority for you is acceptance of, and respect for, all players on the team. You can help set the tone by telling the coach your values at the beginning of discussions.
5. If a coach engages in negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation with you or your family, tell them that you prefer to focus on the positive attributes of schools, teams and coaches. If he or she persists, do not be afraid to tell them that you have been told that negative recruiting is an unethical recruiting practice, and that you view the practice negatively.
6. If the negative recruiting continues despite your efforts to stop it, it is unlikely that diversity will be valued at that school. You may choose to cross any institution that engages in negative recruiting off your list of possibilities and tell the coach and the athletic director you are doing so and why.
7. Realize that recruiting process will be a more positive experience for future high school athletes and their families if your concerns about persistent negative recruiting by an institution is reported to any or all of the following:
  - a. The Athletic Director and/or any campus office that addresses discrimination such as the President's office or the Office of Affirmative Action of the offending institution.
  - b. The Conference Commissioner in which that institution competes.
  - c. The athletic department's compliance office.

As discussed above, negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is a destructive practice that devalues diversity and perpetuates homophobia. By using the definitions, recommendations, and best practices set forth in this report, individuals and institutions can address this type of unethical recruiting and avoid discriminatory practices. Through these efforts, the emphasis in recruiting can be placed where it belongs: on the needs of the student-athletes, on the positive attributes of colleges and universities and their athletic programs, and on the beneficial nature of diversity in the student-athletes' collegiate experience. Ultimately, following "The Positive Approach" will benefit everyone involved in the recruiting process, and contribute to a fair and level playing field, which is exactly what is desirable in athletics.

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## **Part 3: Best Practice: Sample Non-Discriminatory Policy on Negative Recruiting Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression**

The following is a sample policy that may be added to or integrated into existing policies that address recruiting in general or negative recruiting specifically. In general, this type of policy language, which is specific to the problem of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, as well as gender identity and expression, should be included as an integral part of an overall school policy of valuing diversity and prohibiting discrimination, including specifically discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

Though the accompanying report focuses specifically on homophobia in sports and on stopping the frequently-occurring practice of negative recruiting based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, this sample policy recommends the best practice of adopting non-discrimination policies based on gender identity and expression as well as sexual orientation. Through this forward-looking approach, transgender and gender non-conforming coaches and student-athletes, a group that we can expect to see become more actively visible in athletics, will also be protected from discriminatory treatment in recruiting. We recommend that all policies adopted include both sexual orientation and gender identity and expression discrimination.

### **Sample Policy:**

Athletic department staff, including coaches, and other school representatives engaged in the recruiting process may not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and are prohibited from:

1. Creating or contributing to a discriminatory workplace or educational environment by making negative comments or inferences about the perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity or expression of athletic personnel or student-athletes at their school or another school.
2. Creating or contributing to a discriminatory workplace or educational environment by referring to the marital or other family status of athletic personnel or student-athletes at their school or another school as a means for making negative comments or inferences about the perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity or expression of athletic personnel or student-athletes at their school or another school.
3. Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted to prohibit affirmative statements of diversity with regards to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression or other statements protected by federal, state, or local law.

## Part 4: Resources



### **National Center for Lesbian Rights**

Sports Project

<http://www.nclrights.org/sports>



### **Women's Sports Foundation**

It Takes a Team! Education Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Sport

[www.ittakesateam.org](http://www.ittakesateam.org)

### **National Collegiate Athletic Association**

Keep It Positive

<http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/resources/file/eboe44b2414be/Keep%20It%20Positive.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&attachment=true>

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## REPORT AUTHORS

**Pat Griffin** is the Director of It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Sport. Dr. Griffin is a Professor Emerita in the Social Justice Education Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is author of *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbian and Homophobia in Sports* and co-editor of *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Trainers*, Routledge. For the past 25 years, Dr. Griffin has led seminars on diversity issues and lesbian and gay issues in athletics at numerous colleges and universities as well as at coaches and athletic administrators' association meetings throughout the United States and Canada. Dr. Griffin has discussed homophobia in sports on ESPN's "Outside the Lines," HBO's "Real Sports" and ABC Sports. In 2007 Pat was selected as one of the "Top 100 Sport Educators" by the International Sport Institute. She played basketball and field hockey and swam at the University of Maryland. She coached high school basketball and field hockey in Silver Spring, Maryland, and coached swimming at the University of Massachusetts.

A Women's Sports Foundation initiative, It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Sport is an education project focused on eliminating homophobia as a barrier to all women and men participating in sport. Our primary goals are to develop and disseminate practical educational information and resources to athletic administrators, coaches, parents and athletes at the high school and college levels to make sport safe and welcoming for all.

**Helen J. Carroll** is the Director of the National Center for Lesbian Right's Sports Project, which aims to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender players, coaches, and administrators receive fair and equal treatment—free of discrimination. She joined NCLR in 2001 after spending 30 years as an athlete, coach, and collegiate athletic director. Carroll is well known in the sports world as an acclaimed National Championship Basketball Coach from the University of North Carolina-Asheville. She was a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Athletic Director for twelve years, and now devotes all her efforts to helping the sports world recognize that the inclusion of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender diversifies and strengthens the sport experience. Carroll works closely with major national sport organizations including the Women's Sports Foundation and the NCAA. She has been a featured speaker on panels with Nike, ESPN's 'Outside the Lines', *The New York Times*, and many others. She is featured in Dr. Dee Mosbacher's award-winning film, *Out For A Change: Addressing Homophobia in Women's Sports*, Dr. Pat Griffin's book, *Strong Women, Deep Closets* and Jim Buzinski and Cyd Ziegler Jr.'s 2007 publication, *The Outsports Revolution*.

The National Center for Lesbian Rights is a national legal organization committed to advancing the civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families through litigation, public policy advocacy, and public education. The mission of the Sports Project is to create and ensure a sports culture where individuals may fully participate, free from sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination.

## **NCLR THINK TANK PARTICIPANTS**

The authors of this report drew upon ideas generated at the Think Tank convened in Indianapolis, Indiana and co-sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in October 2006.

Jennifer Alley  
Executive Director  
National Association of Collegiate Women  
Athletic Administrators (NACWAA)  
Wilmington, N. C.

Beth Bass  
Executive Director  
Women's Basketball Coaches Association  
(WBCA)  
Lilburn, Ga.

McKinley Boston, Jr.  
Director of Athletics  
New Mexico State University  
NCAA Division I Management Council  
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Helen Carroll  
Sports Project Director  
National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)  
San Francisco, Ca.

Elsa Cole  
General Counsel  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Joni Comstock  
Senior Vice President for Championships,  
Senior Woman Administrator  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Valerie Cushman  
Exec. Asst. to the President  
President's Office  
Washington and Lee University  
Lexington, Va.

Karen Doering  
Former Senior Counsel  
NCLR  
Tampa, Fla.

Kim Ford  
Associate Director for Diversity and  
Inclusion  
NCAA  
Staff Liaison to the Committee on Women's  
Athletics  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Bernard Franklin  
Sr. Vice President for Governance,  
Membership, Research and Education  
Services  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Pat Griffin  
Director, It Takes A Team! Education  
Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, bisexual,  
Transgender Issues in Sport  
Women's Sports Foundation  
East Meadow, N.Y.

Kayla Hinckley  
University of New England  
Former Division III Student-Athlete  
Advisory Committee, Committee on  
Women's Athletics Member

Jacque Joseph  
National Fastpitch Coaches Association  
Head Softball Coach  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Mi.

Kate Kendell  
Executive Director  
NCLR  
San Francisco, Ca.

Brian Kolze  
National Fastpitch Coaches Association  
Head Softball Coach  
University of Pacific  
Stockton, Ca.

Del Malloy  
Director of Athletics  
Salve Regina University  
Division III Management Council  
Newport, R. I.

Dan Mara  
Commissioner  
Central Athletic Collegiate Conference  
NCAA Division II Management Council  
New Haven, Conn.

Kristen Matha  
Former NCAA Enforcement Intern  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Shannon Minter  
Legal Director  
NCLR  
San Francisco, Ca.

Mike Miranda  
Academic Coordinator  
Plattsburg State University  
Division III Management Council (past  
chair)  
Suny, N.Y.

Karen Morrison  
Director of Gender Initiatives and Student-  
Athlete Welfare  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Delise O'Meally  
Director of Governance and Membership  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Dr. Roberta Page  
Athletic Director  
Shippensburg University  
NCAA D II Management Council  
Shippensburg, Penn.

Sue Rankin, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, Education Policy  
Studies, College Student Affairs  
Senior Research Associate, Center for the  
Study of Higher Education  
The Pennsylvania State University  
Harrisburg, Penn.

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Sexual Orientation, March 2009*

Celia Slater  
Executive Director  
WinStar Foundation  
NCAA Women Coaches Academy  
Tampa, Fla.

Rosie Stallman  
Former NCAA Director of Education  
Services  
Think Tank Facilitator  
Tampa, Fla.

Corey Steven  
Former Women's Tennis Student-Athlete  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
Former Division I Student-Athlete Advisory  
Committee  
Chicago, Ill.

Karen Weatherinton  
Associate Head Volleyball Coach  
Butler University  
American Volleyball Coaches Association  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Mary Wilfert  
Associate Director of Health and Safety  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Indiana

Matthew Stach  
Former Assistant Director of Education  
Services  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, ind.

Deborah Stanley  
President  
State University of New York at Osega  
NCAA Division III President's Council  
Osega, N.Y.

Ron Stratten  
Former Vice President for Education  
Services  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.

Charlotte Westerhaus  
Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion  
NCAA  
Indianapolis, Ind.