Gay athletes enter conspiracy of silence

by Mørten Romby

Statistically about 10 per cent of all athletes are homosexual, but very few dare to talk about it openly. Canadian academic Roger LeBlanc refers to the phenomenon as “the conspiracy of silence of gay athletes”.

Many homosexuals stop doing sport during their teenage years because they feel tyrannized or left out by their team players. As homosexuality is getting more acceptable in society, the same is not the case in the world of athletes. Primarily in male contact team sports.

Canadian Roger LeBlanc has done research in this area. He has among other things interviewed 15 rugby players in New Zealand. On the basis of his studies he has uncovered what he calls a conspiracy of silence in the world of male team sports.

A player in New Zealand talks about how the silence is put into practice.

“I don’t think I or anyone else would speak out against someone during a rugby game, who yelled out faggot or poofer to a player on the pitch. Even if they didn’t know I was gay, they still would not react positively to my comments,” Jake said in one of LeBlanc’s research interviews.

LeBlanc calls attention to the fact that many sports organisation do not exclude gay athletes, but on the other hand they do not have a policy to include them either and create an environment where it is possible to come forward.

Another player in LeBlanc’s research interviews articulates the problems in this way:

“I dream of the day, when something or someone would change all of this. I can’t see myself fronting up to the media or my officials.”

Football’s World Cup 2010 is a common African cause

by Mørten Perregaard

For the first time ever, a so-called mega sport event will take place on African soil. South Africa is the host for the soccer World Cup in 2010, and it was not only South Africans who were excited and glad when the decision was made to place the World Cup on the continent.

“Everywhere there is a sort of solidarity between Africans that is difficult to describe further. But when South Africa was elected as the host nation it created a hype among all Africans,” the Kenyan journalist, Charles N yende explains. He covers sports for the Kenyan newspaper, the Nation.

That means that high expectations are following the host country from the rest of Africa and especially its neighboring countries. Indeed spillover effects are expected to come to the countries on the Southern part of the continent — one way or another.

Already the implementation of the mega-event has created a bottleneck with regards to expertise in South Africa. Therefore the South African ambassador to Kenya suggested that the surrounding countries could contribute to the workforce with for example engineers and economists. They will then gain expertise in South Africa and bring it back to their own countries.

There are also suggestions about creating a world cup visa where tourists going to South Africa can join a safari in for instance Kenya or Tanzania before heading further south.

“There will always be a risk that tourists will be more attracted to South Africa than to other countries in the summer of 2010, and they will lose for it,” Charles N yende believes.

For South Africa itself, it is expected that the impact on the economy will be huge even though there are high demands for infrastructure, construction of stadiums - and costs in the form of forced evictions. If South Africa succeeds in hosting the World Cup, Charles N yende believes the door will open up for many other events but perhaps not of this magnitude.

“Hopefully it will show the rest of the world that Africa is able to cope with an event of this scale, and thereby change the legacy of Africa known so far,” the journalist from Kenya says.
Shouting and name calling is common for child athletes
by Janus Sejersen Laursen and Alexander Borch Nielsen

Yelling and beating of children is often related to third world countries and dictatorships. Nevertheless it is a common experience for many children in sports to find themselves in unpleasant situations on the football pitches and in the sport arenas around the world due to harsh demands from adult coaches and teachers.

“My research shows that a lot of them are yelled at. I know this from a lot of people in sports and from my own observations as a coach and advisor to the British sports world,” says Richard Bailey, professor and director of the Centre for Physical Education Research, Roehampton University, United Kingdom.

In Richard Bailey’s view, China has become a target for child abuse stories just as Africa and South America are known for trafficking. But in the English culture there are problems as well.

“In the Anglo-Saxon world there is a macho attitude in sport. There is an idea based on “it is tough to be in sports.” We hear shouting and name calling in for instance American football and Canadian ice hockey. Words like “don’t smile”, “gay” and “you girl” are being used to push children,” explains Bailey.

Bailey does not see sport as a universally good contribution to children’s development. The good values are very dependent on the coaches to avoid antisocial and aggressive behavior. He believes that the international sport organisations fail in this responsibility.

- Abuse of children is not seen as a problem by the organisations. They often react with denial or saying it is a part of sport. Like Jacques Rogge, president of the International Olympic Committee, IOC, said when confronted with abuse in China: “It is blowing it out of proportion.” But the sport education system has to change. You can’t change children. You can try but at some point you will discover that it is wrong and you must change the way you teach, says Richard Bailey.

Kosovar athletes want to play the game
by Sanne Juul

Since 1991, Kosovar athletes have not been able to compete at an international level, and Kosovo has not had a national team in any sport because the country is not recognised as a nation. Trapped in a political game, athletes are waiting to be let back in to the good company of international events.

According to Driton Latifi, sports journalist at the Lajm Dally in Kosovo, Kosovo is ready to get back on the international scene. He also believes that it is important for the Kosovo people to get their own identity and national shirt:

“Sport means a lot to us. It also means everything for us to get our own national shirt because it is the patriotic feelings that keep us alive.”

A Kosovo national shirt can be close to becoming reality. In the summer of 2007, Kosovar athletes took the streets of the capital Pristina to speak up about what they believe to be discrimination in sport. A working group has been set up, and it has made contact with both international football union FIFA and the International Olympic Committee IOC.

Whether the Kosovar athletes will be allowed to compete in the Olympics Games is still uncertain. The working group is still negotiating with the IOC to let Kosovo compete in the Olympics 2008 on the background that East Timor was allowed in the Olympics in Sydney in 2000 even though the country was not yet internationally recognized as a nation then.

Sports journalist Driton Latifi is hoping for just that to happen:

“We are Kosovar and that is how we want people around the world to see us. We want to be recognized for who we are.”

This article was written before Kosovo declared independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008. Just a week later, Kosovo made its first appearance as a sovereign state on the international sporting stage at the table tennis world championships in the Chinese city of Guangzhou.

“This was outstanding work done by the Pulse team – pulling off some interesting stories on the conference and very timely too”. Murali Krishnan, Journalist, Indo-Asian News Service, India.