

## local news

**W**hen the announcer at a recent Portland Power game publicly welcomed the Portland Lesbian Choir, there was a rollicking round of applause.

"Can you believe they said *lesbian*," hooted one revved up dyke a few seats down from me. I imagined that for both lesbian and nonlesbian spectators alike it was quite a surprise.

"I was shocked," says PLC steering committee coordinator Mary Larsen, who says large groups attending Power games can request a public acknowledgment.

"We probably had about 40 choir members there," she says. "But I kind of wondered whether the announcer might somehow 'forget' to mention us."

That didn't happen, and the step forward for lesbian kind obviously caught the notice of at least one radio talk show host and some of his listeners.

Marty Davis, a *Just Out* staffer and Power fan, says the Monday following the PLC welcome, she was listening to the *Katy Steding Power Hour*, a program on KXYQ 1010, a local AM radio station.

The weekly show features Power player Katy Steding, who discusses women's basketball, team and American Basketball League happenings, and fields calls from the public. The *Power Hour* is co-hosted by KXYQ's Jeff Kafoury and Stan Love.

"What I first want to stress is that Katy was not involved, nor was anyone from the Power. Katy was at practice and these guys were doing the show," says Davis.

What Davis heard was an on-air dialogue between the hosts and *Power Hour* listeners, some of whom were lamenting the marked lesbian presence at Power games.

"One listener called in and essentially asked 'What's with all those lesbians at the Power games?' Another man said he wanted to take his teenage daughter to the games but he was worried about all the lesbians," explains Davis. "One of the radio guys responded by saying, 'Take her but keep an eye on her all the time.' He was serious, too."

Additionally, Davis says one male caller asked how lesbians make love, while another said it was inappropriate to mention the Portland Lesbian Choir at the game. "He said his 10-year-old son turned to him and asked him what a lesbian was, and that he felt he shouldn't be put in the position of explaining that," says Davis.

Finally, Davis says the hosts mentioned that "management here" was trying to "sweep the lesbian issue under the rug."

"I took that to mean the station," she says.

"That's not what we meant," says KXYQ's Kafoury. "We were told by people who work closely with the Power that they didn't want to create the perception that the team was catering to

## Power outage

Comments heard on a local radio talk show raise the question "Is the Portland Power shy about its lesbian fan base?"

by Inga Sorensen

lesbians. They said they didn't want to offend people who were not gay."

Kafoury tells *Just Out* a Power player made similar remarks. He would not reveal any of his sources.

He also says the lesbian issue initially arose after Love made a statement about the PLC announcement. "Stan made a comment that the biggest round of applause at the game came when they announced the lesbian choir," he says.

That apparently generated a slew of inquiries about lesbians.

Kafoury says he does not recall either he or Love advising a worried dad to keep an eye on his

"We acknowledge that part of the market, but we're not treating any group differently from the next," she says. "People are people. I say consider the source."

Weston further says she has not heard any derogatory remarks about lesbian spectators at the games. "Unlike [Trail Blazer management], people really feel free to walk up to our staff and express their opinions about many things," she explains. "We're extremely accessible and the public does it all the time at games. Not once has anyone said anything about this to me. Trust me, if it were a burning issue, we would know about it."



Power players sign autographs at a meet-the-team scrimmage in October

teenage daughter while at Power games.

"Maybe a caller said something like that," he says. "There were those kinds of calls. One guy called to say that lesbians shouldn't even be allowed into the games, but I told him, 'Well you can't do that. Would that be OK to do to people because of their race or religious affiliation?'"

Linda Weston, Portland Power's general manager, strongly denies that Power management is fearful of or downplaying the lesbian presence at Power games.

She adds, "We also want to say that we really appreciate the community's support."

Not surprisingly, other ABL teams have large lesbian followings as well.

"It's definitely all the rage up here," says Kim Stephenson, a staffer with the *Seattle Gay News*. The Emerald City is home to the ABL outfit Seattle Reign. "You see zillions of lesbians up here with their Seattle Reign T-shirts. It's a real dykefest," she says.

Mike Salinas, editor of the *Bay Area Reporter*,

a San Francisco gay and lesbian newspaper, says the nearby San Jose Lasers also appear to be very popular with the women.

Neither Stephenson nor Salinas had heard of any type of problem arising due to the respective teams' queer fan base.

"I've estimated that as many as 40 percent of season ticket holders are dykes," says Joan T. Sherwood, managing editor of *Southern Voice*, an Atlanta-based weekly lesbian and gay newspaper, which recently ran a story on its local ABL team, the Atlanta Glory.

"Management won't say anything to offend us, but they're not necessarily reaching out to the lesbian community either," she says, adding the Glory has not advertised in *Southern Voice*. (Power marketers, meanwhile, have worked closely with *Just Out* sales staff.)

"They say their budget is spent, which certainly could be true," she says.

One ABL team in particular seems to be doing serious outreach into the lesbian community: the Columbus Quest, which also happens to be the first place team.

According to Kim Dill, office manager for Stonewall Columbus, a gay and lesbian organization, the Quest has made a concerted and consistent effort to court lesbian customers.

"We probably have about five or six lesbian bars in Columbus and the Quest has been to all of them. A group of players, as well as the coach and assistant coach, has come out to the bars after their games. They sign autographs and hang out and chat with the community. They do this a lot."

She adds, "None of the players are officially out, but the Quest acknowledges that some of the players are lesbians and some are straight and they respect their players regardless of one's sexual orientation."

"We haven't heard of any problems with homophobia and the ABL," says Rachel Zuk, a spokeswoman for the Women's Sports Foundation, a national nonprofit, educational, member-based organization dedicated to promoting and enhancing the sports and fitness experience for all girls and women.

"In fact, this is the first call I've received about this," she says. "The questions I usually hear about the ABL are 'Will the league survive?' 'What's the future look like?' and things about pay. Questions along those lines."

Our calls to ABL co-founders Gary Cavalli and Steve Hams were not returned.

Zuk says the lack of inquiries around homophobia in the ABL "should be heartening."

"What it says to me is that it's a nonissue and that people are looking more at the women as athletes rather than at their sexual orientation," she says. "One of the goals is to get bodies into the seats. That may include targeting different audiences. There's nothing wrong with that."

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEINER

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