

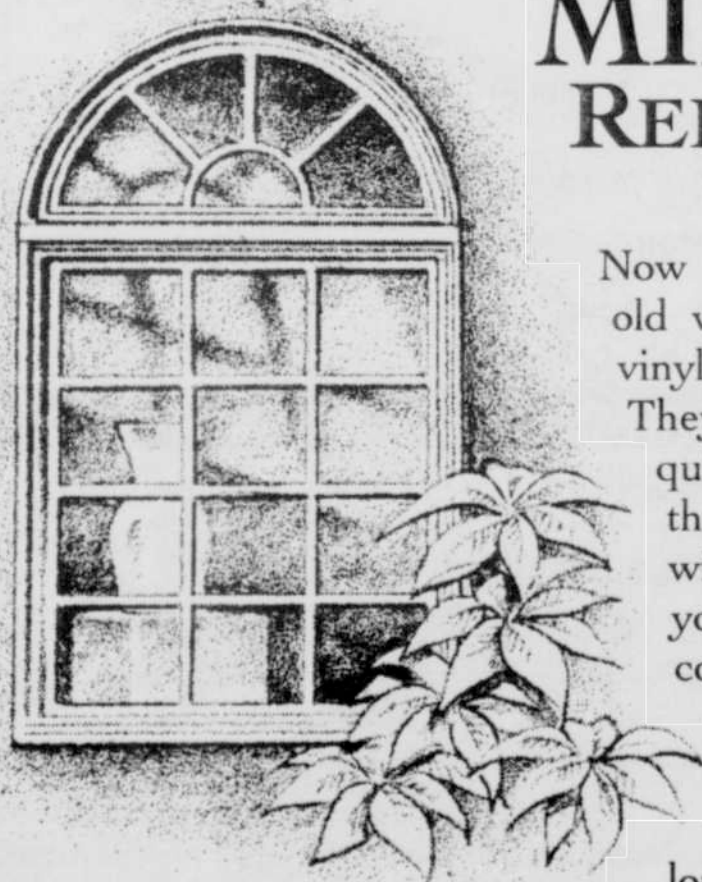
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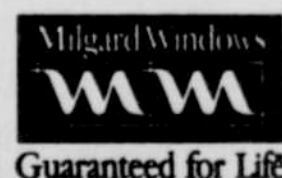


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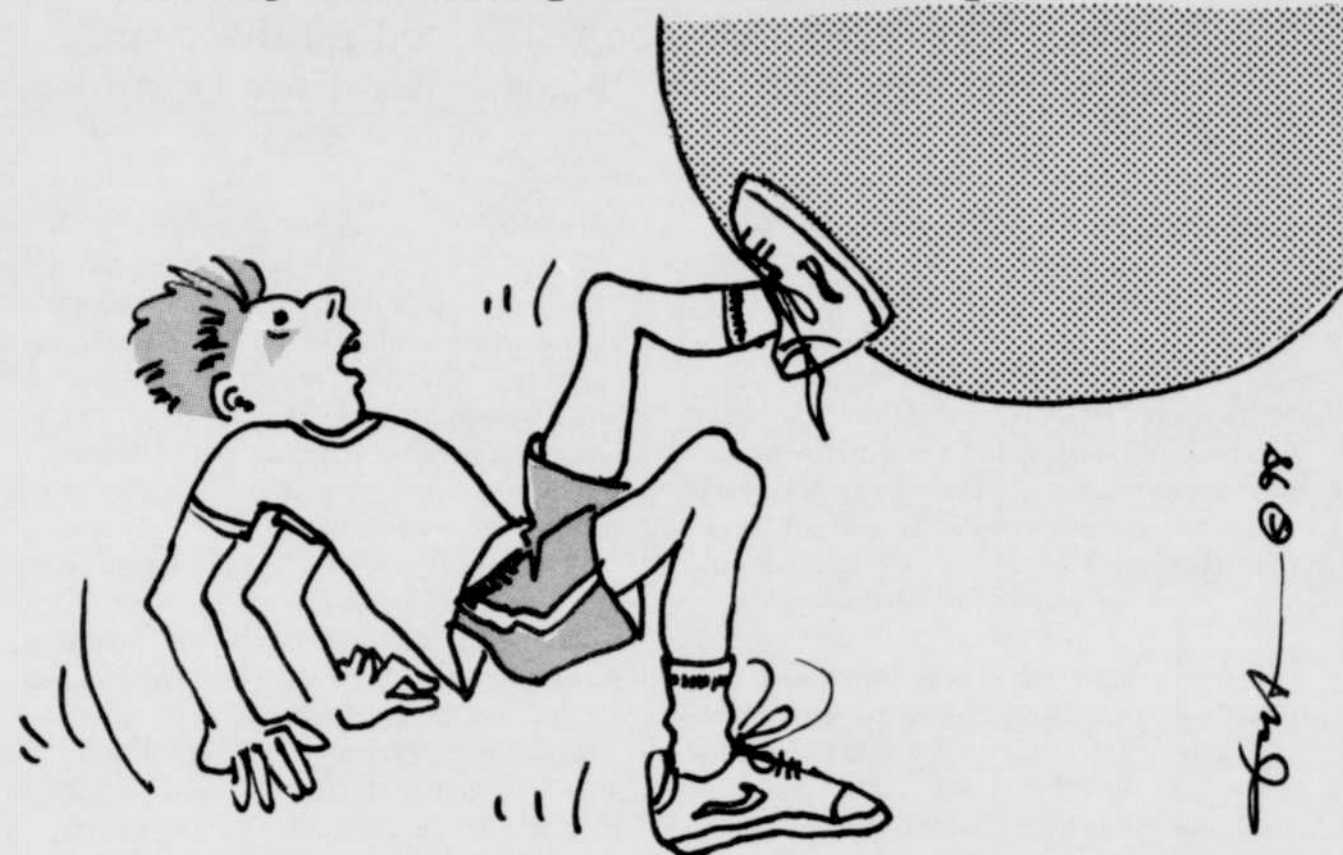
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Root for the homo team

The Gay Games help heal childhood sports scars



Generally, when I think of Amsterdam, I think of trams, Indonesian food, Anne Frank and getting stoned. But not this week. This week I think of Gay Games and throngs of queer athletes from all over the world. I'm not sure I can relate.

My first exposure to sports was, I'm guessing, in first grade. That's when my physical education started—of course, our teacher was a big dyke. I can't remember her name, but she

remains one of the burliest women I've ever met. Perhaps it was because I was so tiny that she seemed so intimidating. Either she had no gaydar when it came to children, or she simply had no sympathy for the sissy boys. But she wasn't so bad.

I don't remember there being sports, per se, in first grade; just a lot of running. Every class began with running a lap on our little legs. I remember liking it and finishing first once in a while.

Third grade was my first year for organized team sports. Like most every suburban, middle-class boy in 1977, I played soccer. 1977 was the year my parents divorced and I started getting fat, so I preferred playing full-back, which allowed me to just hang around my team's goal. Thankfully, there wasn't too much running involved.

Back at school, I started playing four-square with the girls and the other queer boys. Other boys played basketball, which, not being a lesbian, I didn't enjoy at all. Four-square seemed so laid back compared to the games those boys played, experiencing their first pre-pubescent hint of testosterone.

A born socialist, I never understood the urge to compete, despite my early wins on the track. The lesbian gym teacher assured us we weren't competing; only working toward our personal best.

My father's last act as head-of-household before the divorce was to insist that I participate in a season of wrestling. It was a horribly depressing winter. The family was falling apart, albeit none too soon, and I had to spend a couple of hours each week in a high school gymnasium, tackling people and looking out the little

chicken-wire-enforced window near the ceiling that revealed nothing but chilling pitch-black bleakness outside. I quickly, and very obviously, lost my first match. To save the family further shame, my father let me quit. Quitting was something the family frowned upon, but we knew it was time to make an exception.

Abandoning wrestling gave me more energy to expend on games of "smear the queer" at school. Another game we played at school was crab soccer. Crab soccer was surely concocted by some stoned gym teacher who thought how amazing it would be to watch children scrambling across a gymnasium floor on their hands and feet, torsos facing skyward, kicking an oversized, yet lightweight, ball about. One kid, Mike something or other, miscalculated and put his foot up to stop a ball flying through the air. The ball landed squarely on his foot, pushing his knee down into his chin, forcing him to bite a hole through his tongue. It was great fun.

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By high school, we were segregated by sex. I don't even recall lesbian gym teachers in high school, much less any queer men. It was just a lot of not-too-bright men built like tanks...

lot of not-too-bright men built like tanks and a couple of hardened ex-wives teaching tennis and dating English teachers.

Being physical, P.E. was the only class where bullies could torment you at will. Kids get hit in the head with baseballs everyday. Who's to say it's intentional?

I suppose when I think about the Gay Games, I'm just amazed that so many people in the community have found a way to embrace the sporting life. Don't get me wrong. In the name of Fraulein Maria, I'll gladly climb any mountain—as long as there's a footpath. Bicycling, canoeing, etc., the pedestrian pastimes are just fine with me. But this on-your-mark-get-set-destroy world of competitive sports was the first place I got an anti-queer vibe.

I'm glad not everyone feels the same. It's a pretty safe bet that many, if not most, queer kids were alienated on the playing field as children. It must say something about our resilience as a community that we've reclaimed those playing fields for our adult selves.

STONEMAN BABY
BY
WILL
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