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## NATIONAL news

# THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

Millennium fever has folks making lists and tallying superlatives—  
here's a roster of the year's biggest gay news stories by Rawley Grau

**P**ress Pass Q: A Newsletter for the Gay & Lesbian Press Professional recently polled its subscribers about the most important gay-related news stories of 1999. More than 80 people—publishers, editors and reporters at gay and lesbian newspapers and magazines from across the country—offered their insights. Here are their top 10 stories:

### 1. MATTHEW SHEPARD'S MURDERERS CONVICTED

Nearly eight months after Matthew Shepard was beaten and left on a fence to die outside Laramie, Wyo., Russell Henderson, 22, one of the two accused killers, surprised observers by pleading guilty before the start of his trial on April 5 to the kidnapping and murder of the 21-year-old gay college student.

Then the trial of Henderson's accomplice, Aaron McKinney, 22, took place in late October, with McKinney's attorneys resorting to a "gay panic" defense. They argued that their client had attacked Shepard in a drug-induced rage after the gay man tried to grope him. The judge rejected this line of reasoning, and on Nov. 3 the jury found McKinney guilty on two counts of felony murder and one count each of second-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated robbery.

In a plea bargain, McKinney was spared the death penalty, receiving instead a sentence of two consecutive life terms in exchange for agreeing to waive his right to appeal.

Shepard's parents had asked the prosecutor not to seek McKinney's execution, calling instead for a time of healing to begin.

### 2. NEW JERSEY COURT OVERTURNS SCOUTS POLICY

In a unanimous decision Aug. 4, the New Jersey Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that the Boy Scouts of America had violated the state's civil rights law when it expelled Assistant Scoutmaster James Dale in 1990 because he is gay.

It was the first time a state's high court ruled against the Scouts' anti-gay policy. The court said that because the Boy Scouts of America is nonselective in its membership and receives support from state and local governments, it cannot exempt itself from the state's civil rights law governing places of public accommodation, and therefore cannot discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Dale, 29, had been involved in scouting for 12 years before his expulsion, winning many

merit badges and rising to the rank of Eagle Scout.

The Boy Scouts of America intends to appeal the New Jersey ruling in the U.S. Supreme Court.

### 3. CANADIAN SUPREME COURT REDEFINES 'SPOUSE'

O n May 20, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in an 8-1 decision that Ontario's Family Law Act infringed on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms by restricting its definition of *spouse* to people who are actually married or "either of a man and woman who are not married to each other and have cohabited...continuously for a period of not less than three years."

The case, *M vs. H*, involved a woman who was seeking spousal support from her former partner, another woman. The Supreme Court gave Ontario six months to remove the heterosexual definition of *spouse* from its laws.

On Oct. 27, the Parliament of Ontario revised 67 statutes, thus extending to same-sex couples all the rights and responsibilities enjoyed by common-law heterosexual couples, including those pertaining to breakups, adoption and hospital visitation.

### 4. HORMEL BECOMES FIRST GAY AMBASSADOR

O n June 4, while Congress was taking a 10-day break for Memorial Day, President Clinton used his recess appointment privilege to name James Hormel as ambassador to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, making Hormel the first openly gay U.S. ambassador.

The move came in defiance of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who, despite the nomination having been approved by the Foreign Relations Committee, had refused to allow it to come to a vote on the Senate floor, where it was expected to win confirmation.

Lott and the conservative Republican leadership claimed that Hormel, a businessman and philanthropist, was unsuitable because he appeared in a gay pride parade with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of gay men dressed as nuns. Clinton had first nominated Hormel to the post in 1997.

### 5. BRITAIN ENDS BAN ON GAYS IN THE MILITARY

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, found on Sept. 27 that the United Kingdom's ban on gays and lesbians

