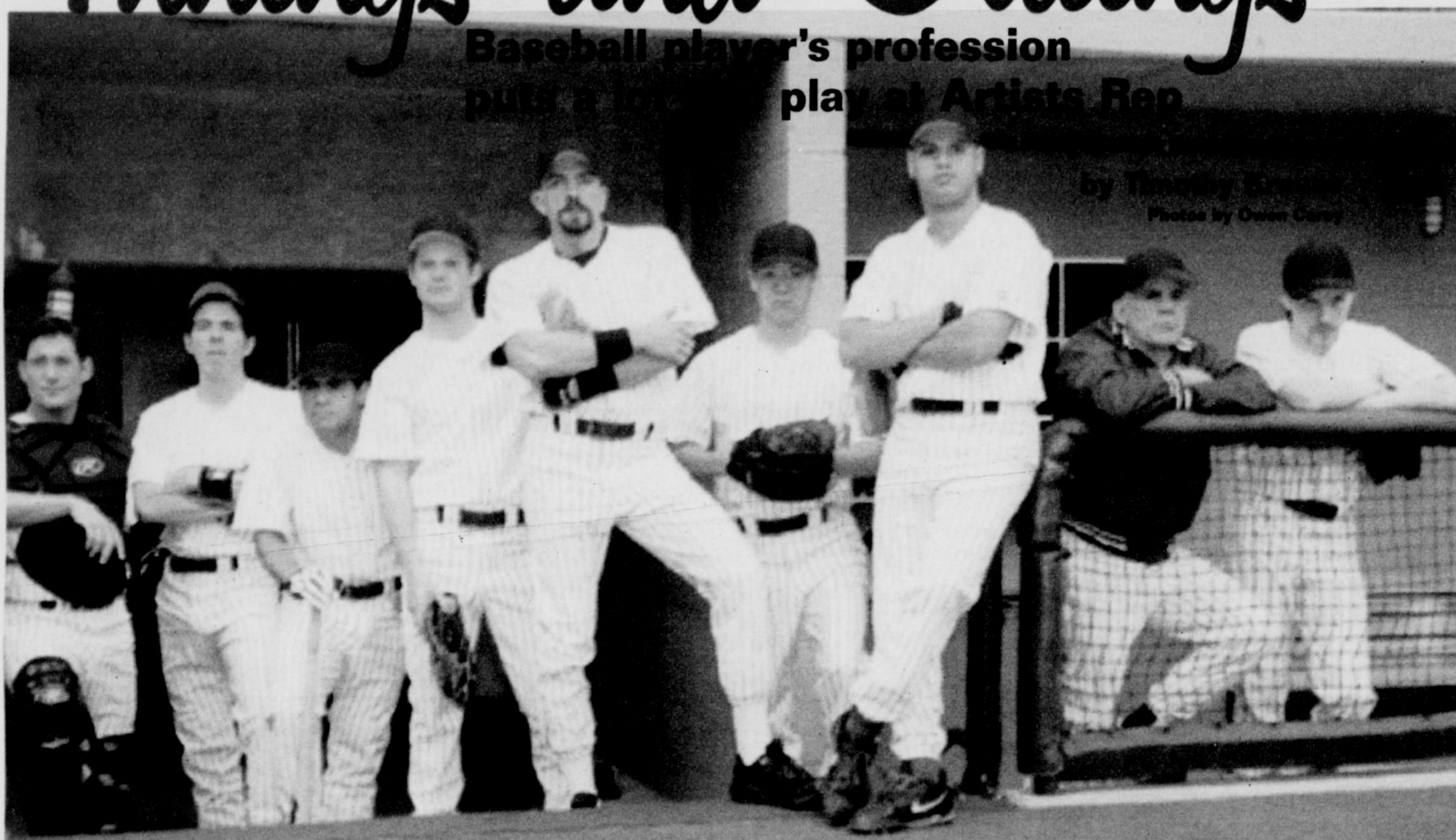


Innings and Outings

Baseball player's profession puts a lot of play at Artists Rep

by Timothy Krause
Photos by Owen Carey



Gay baseball pro Darren Lemming (Dennis Mosley, third from right) confronts unsportsmanlike conduct from homophobic teammate Shane Mungitt (Chris Murray, far right) in *Take Me Out*.

"I don't have a secret. I am a secret,"

discloses Darren Lemming, the professional baseball player at the base of Artists Repertory Theatre's new play *Take Me Out*. Lemming, a biracial athlete and star center fielder for the champion New York Empire, throws his team a curveball by suddenly revealing to the media that he is gay. The aftermath is Richard Greenberg's Tony Award-winning play of homosexuality and professional sports.

But as much as the script is about a celebrity's coming out and coming to terms, so too is this a celebration of the all-American pastime of baseball. And as much as the story is about a team of guys playing ball, so too is this a passionate discovery of our individual and collective sense of who we are and how we find—and redefine—our community. Moreover, *Take Me Out* is about rejuvenation.

Stepping up to the plate in the role of Darren is Seattle actor Dennis Mosley. Chris Murray, Portland homeboy and director of marketing at Stark Raving Theatre, dons the uniform of Shane Mungitt, the equally skilled but deeply racist and homophobic pitcher called up from the minor leagues. Coaching the ART team is guest director M. Burke Ward, who from 1970 to 1990 led Seattle's Empty Space Theatre as founding artistic director.

These three took a timeout from rehearsals recently for bullpen chat about how *Take Me Out* exposes identity, fraternity and, of course, full-frontal nudity. (The conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.)

Timothy Krause: So how did some more-or-less straight dudes who aren't really jocks approach this play about a sports hero who announces that he's gay?

M. Burke Ward: As I told Allen [Nause, ART's artistic director]: It's fun to finally be doing a play with real balls!

I found it absolutely enchanting at every level—in terms of the personal journeys, and in terms of the sports, and in terms of the fantasy aspects of it, which are very much a part of it. It's the twin journeys of Darren Lemming and [gay business manager] Mason Marzac as they complete themselves: Darren through acknowledging his sexual preference, and Mason through finding for the first time in his life a sense of community with other men that's not necessarily sexual. It's how they both open themselves to a new sense of who their community is, an *enlarged* sense of who their community is.

Dennis Mosley: For me, it's the baseball. It's the team chemistry. We're all different people, but we're going after the same goal. It's this ballplayer who happens to be gay, but that wasn't my focus. He's a ballplayer, he's a person, and his preference is what his preference is.

Chris Murray: I instantly fell in love with the play because of the pacing and the characters and the intelligence—or the lack thereof for some of the people on the team, my character included. There's a very lyrical quality, and it's very powerful; it's got the best of both worlds. But I definitely needed to get more into the baseball aspect of it because, you know, we've all done

poetry, lyricism, Shakespeare.... That wasn't something where I was, oh, shit, I hope I can be *beautiful* in this play or whatever. I was more like, oh god, I need to look like a professional ballplayer because I'm naked!

TK: Ah, yes, the nudity. We're talkin' ART's intimate surroundings here, so you're practically sharing soap with the audience. What will we see?

MBW: It's not going to be a big deal. It's right out there immediately within the first 15 to 20 minutes of Act One—

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MBW: I think seven out of the 10 guys get naked in the shower.... It's really just all about concentration.

DM: I have no problem with it. I think the audience will be more uncomfortable than I will.

CM: It's just so natural in this play.

MBW: It's integral to the world of the play. [The team] used to be able to joke around in the locker room, and now all of a sudden, everybody's self-conscious. What was the line? "What do we do now with our stray homosexual impulses? We can't pat each other on the fanny anymore!" [Darren's teammate Kippy] likens it to a kind of loss of innocence in the locker room but pooh-poohs it at the same time.

It's integral to the whole examination of male communities that the play goes into. The homosexual community is one of