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as a means of proving that he and all members of the sexual minorities community can do almost anything.

Both Colley and Tompkins were in Australia during the Gay Games in 2002, but neither participated in either the athletic competitions or the social events. The opportunity to be part of the Games—and to experience it with his partners—is almost more exciting than participating in the triathlon for Colley.

"It will change the dynamic to be part of the crowd instead of on the fringe. There is a different sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that you don't have when you're not a participant," Colley says. "It will build a bond between us. The fact that we're sharing it and will be part of the action instead of just on the fringe is exciting."

Edmund Gaines

Edmund Gaines has not participated in a team sport since embarrassment forced him to flee from the locker room in high school. Decades later, the 50-year-old is part of the queer basketball team that is preparing to make its debut at the Gay Games.

"I wanted to see what it would be like to be on a team with other people who are just like me," he says. "I wanted to be on a team where I could relax and enjoy the game without being concerned about dribbling right and being judged."

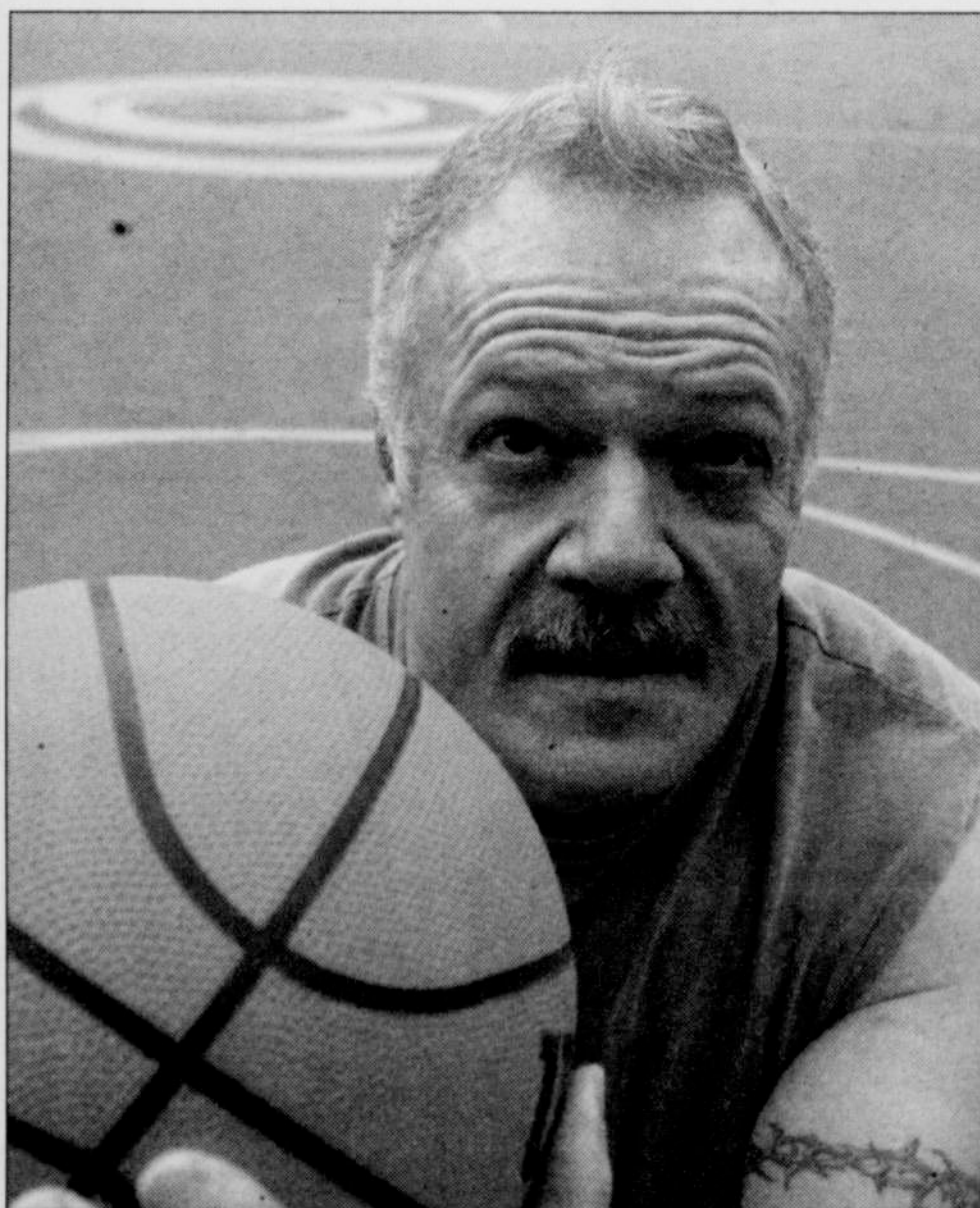
Gaines admits he is a little nervous about playing basketball in front of thousands of fans. The nervousness is intensified because he has not met his teammates. In fact, he might not meet the men and women he is playing with until the day of the game.

There are not enough players from the local queer league interested in going to the Gay Games. According to the rules, teams without enough players can band together in order to compete, which is exactly what Team Oregon plans to do.

"I am going with the goal of playing basketball and having a great time," says Gaines. "I don't have a lot invested in winning, but I do have a lot invested in showing up and playing as well as I can."

The basketball team will not play its first official game until later this month, which gives the players who are going to the Games just four months to perfect their plays. In the meantime, Gaines has intensified his personal training schedule. In addition to lifting weights and running, he is playing basketball more often—and spending a lot more time analyzing his game.

This is the first Gay Games for Gaines, and he has high hopes for the experience.



Edmund Gaines imagines the Games "will be like a huge Pride celebration to the 10th power."

He plans to travel to Chicago with his partner, Aaron Hall, to spend the entire week participating in the festivities, including the opening and closing ceremonies. During the basketball game, Hall, a self-professed "athletic supporter," will be in the stands cheering for Gaines.

"I imagine it will be like a huge Pride celebration to the 10th power," says Gaines. "I am really excited about being out and proud and part of a global community; I think it is really important for everyone to be as out and visible and positive as we can be."

Chris Gaarder

The moment Chris Gaarder heard that the Gay Games were going to be held in Sydney, Australia, he decided it was time to fulfill his lifelong dream to travel to the land Down Under. He came up with the idea to carve out time in his travel itinerary to participate in the 2002 Games. It sounded like the perfect plan, but Gaarder faced a significant challenge: He signed up to participate in several swimming events but had not swam competitively for almost 20 years.

"I figured it would be just like riding a bike as far as technique went, but swimming is a hard sport. It was tough to get back to the level where I left off," he recalls. "I trained for 18 months and went to the Games without any expectations of winning."

Gaarder participated in the 50m and 100m breaststroke; the 50m, 100m and 200m freestyle events; and the 50m butterfly in Sydney. He placed ninth out of 81 swimmers in the 100m breaststroke and reignited his passion for swimming.

"There was no pressure from a coach or teammates; I was doing it for myself," he says. "It made me remember all of the positive aspects of swimming—the camaraderie and the fitness and the competition."

Gaarder was excited about attending the 2006 Gay Games, but a disagreement between the organizing committee and Montreal, the original host city, led him to re-evaluate his plans. He made the decision to attend the Outgames in Montreal with his partner, Michael Armstrong, who will compete in pool at the event.

"It is going to be an interesting experience," says the 41-year-old athlete. "We'll see if the gay sports world can support two international sporting competitions in one year."

Just four months before the competition, Gaarder is taking training seriously. He is training upward of 12 hours a week in order to prepare for his events, which include the 50m, 100m and 200m breaststroke; the 50m backstroke; and the 400m freestyle. Gaarder wants to win.

"I am taking it much more seriously than a lot of people," he says. "I know

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