

Slam Dunk

Ex-NBA player comes out, confronts "deeply ingrained homophobia... within our sports culture"

It's been a rollercoaster week for the Human Rights Commission and for National Basketball Association players. Early in the week HRC announced that former NBA player John Amaechi will serve as a national spokesman for the organization's Coming Out Project, a program designed to help gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people come out and live openly.

"John is making history this week, becoming the first NBA player to ever come out and talk about his life and experiences as an athlete and a gay man," said HRC president Joe Solmonese. "In sharing his story, our great hope is that John will pave the way for more GLBT and straight athletes to openly support fairness and respect on and off the playing field."

The embracing of Amaechi follows a pattern of celebrity validation that HRC seems to seek. A few months ago Lance Bass was the hot newbie to follow. Now it's a basketball player. I bet that a few weeks ago this NBA star had no idea of who or what HRC and National Coming Out Day are, and look, now he's a national spokesman.

While one basketball player outs himself as gay, another blows the door off the idiot's closet. Following Amaechi's announcement, former Miami Heat player Tim Hardaway commented in a radio interview: "Well, you know, I hate gay people. I let it be known, I don't like gay people. I don't like to be around gay people. Yeah, I'm homophobic. I don't like it. It shouldn't be in the world, or in the United States. So, yeah, I don't like it."

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation was quick to respond: "Hardaway's comments are vile, repulsive and indicative of the climate of ignorance, hostility and prejudice that continues to pervade sports culture. And by apologizing not for his bigotry but rather for giving voice to it, he's reminding us that this ugly display is only the tip of a very large iceberg."

"It would be a mistake to assume that since such prejudice is rarely aired so blatantly and so publicly that it is in fact rare. It is not. And the media that are now doing a commendable job holding Hardaway accountable for his intolerance also need to turn their attention to the deeply ingrained homophobia that continues to thrive within our sports culture at all levels."

All of the factors noted here are indicative of a morass of problems that extend far beyond the mouth of one basketball player.

Sports and TV celebrities are not the only ones accused of hate speech. *Just Out* has also been tagged with that label. An anonymous writer questions why we use the words "trans, trannys, etc." The writer continues: "All these sisters that I know of, none of us wants that label. Even those of us you can 'read' a mile away—it doesn't matter. We've put too much into what we are and, really, always were. We are men or we are women. We're not 'trans' anything."

In one way I can completely see this writer's perspective. It's logical that "trans" is a temporary, or transitioning, period in a person's life. You start in one place and finish in another. You are a man, you are a woman. However, at the same time, activists for years have fought to proudly put the "T" in

GLBT. Self-identified trans activists have toiled with passion and with tears as they struggle with efforts to make hate crimes legislation and non-discrimination laws inclusive of trans-identified people. And now, you find this reviling?

So, writer, are you asking that the entire movement drop the "trans" from our coalition identity as the gay, lesbian, bi and trans community? You ask for a different, kinder view. What do you suggest? How about considering that if you're not trans any longer, perhaps someone else is? Maybe what we're writing is about them, and not about you?

To our other "trans-identified" readers, does this writer speak for all of you? How do you wish to see yourselves viewed in our pages, in our community? Is the "trans" movement ready to move on?

Words, speech, language, these have garnered a lot of attention lately. Tensions heightened, perspective becomes cloudy. Sensitivities take on a sharper edge. While deep-seated issues must be handled with serious regard and respect, it's equally important to learn when to shift the load and lighten up a little.

Portlanders are lucky to have a great community treasure; we have among us the wit and wisdom of the wonderful Darcelle XV. Now is a very good time to reflect upon the words with which Darcelle closes each of her shows: "First we learn to laugh at ourselves, then we can learn to laugh at each other."

By the way, I was wrong when in the last issue of *Just Out* I speculated that former Basic Rights Oregon executive director Roey Thorpe, already departing from Freedom to Marry, would be joining up with the Gill Action Fund. Turns out that's not the case at all. Thorpe instead has joined Equality Federation, a national network of state-based gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender advocacy organizations. She will join the federation March 5 as its first director of advocacy services.

I must admit to having no familiarity with Equality Federation. According to its not-very-current Web site, this organization is a national alliance of statewide sexual minority advocacy organizations, working together and with national allies to achieve full civil rights by building a strong, state-based movement for justice. It appears that its focus is more on working with states' rights issues rather than seeking change at federal levels. The listed partner organization of Equality Federation in Oregon is Basic Rights Oregon.

Back to local politics: A recent article in *The Oregonian* writes of Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey and her announcement that she plans to run for reelection to her seat in 2008. The article states that her strategy for victory is in place. Work

hard, play nice and hope voters let history lie.

Will that work for you? If you're in the commissioner's district, do you see yourself voting for her? A lot of work can be done in two years. I'll ask the question again as the election draws near.

Hope to see you all Feb. 19 at Gay Skate. Check our Web site daily for news updates, calendar announcements, humor, wit and fish evictions. 10



Former NBA star John Amaechi (top) came out as gay days before Tim Hardaway came out as homophobic.



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Minh Tran collaborates with fellow Vietnamese choreographer for cross-cultural artist residency

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