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to cheer them on as they paddle toward victory.

"[The fans] are awesome. We can hear them cheer us on about halfway across the Willamette during Rose Fest," Lutz-Harden says. "It makes a huge difference. We all love to race and most of us are pretty competitive. We practice hard for it, too. Racing in front of our fans and family and other spectators is the bomb!"

For more information on the Amazon Dragons Paddling Club, visit [amazondragons.org](http://amazondragons.org).

—ERIN ROOK

### Striking a Chord

Portland NetRippers Football Club kicks it into gear year-round

You've seen the billboards. You've seen the lines wrapping around the corner of the Bagdad Theater, the blathering of nimble-footed competition cloaking the sports bars. You've probably even seen the over-celebratory sways of passionate fans juking downtown with their gold-and-green scarves whipping in the spring wind. It's official: Soccer fever has hit Portland. And with the Portland Timbers overflow of new fans, Portland's NetRippers Football Club is already gearing up for the inevitable swell of interest in



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PORTLAND NETRIPPERS

their inclusive organization.

"The arrival of the Timbers will definitely strengthen soccer's popularity here in Portland," explains NetRippers president Lisa Wong. "[Recently], we tried watching the game at the local 4-4-2 Bar and we couldn't even get in, it was so packed! The advertisements all over town have done a tremendous job [of] keeping soccer on everyone's mind."

The NetRippers—Portland's only soccer club for LGBTQ players and friends—is into its fifth year, and has slowly but steadily established itself as one of the most popular inclusive

sports organizations in the region.

"I have seen our numbers double in the time I have been with this club, especially in the number of women participating," says Wong, noting that currently there are around 80 members. "The guys who started NetRippers really made an effort two years ago to reach out and welcome female players; the number of women participating has tripled."

The popularity of the organization stems from a gender-blind standpoint, as well as its encouragement of players at all skill levels, whether "you were the captain for your high

## Game Changer

GLSEN's new sports project addresses homophobia in school sports BY RYAN J. PRADO

On March 17, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) announced a new program aimed at providing a safer and more inclusive environment for K-12 sports and physical education departments in America's schools. Dubbed "Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project," the initiative brings together a diverse coalition of athletes, journalists and sports figures to address and educate on the implementation of measures designed to combat bullying in sports.

While announced just in time for the start of the spring sports season, the program is still in its infancy, meaning the measure of its influence here in Oregon will likely not be felt until the program becomes more established. But with all-star sports personalities like Billie Jean

King, Scott Fujita and John Amaechi having already signed on to help spread the word, the reach of this critical program won't be under wraps for long.

"The launch of the website is really just the beginning, and we've been thrilled so far with the response we've received from athletes at all levels of competition," explains Daryl Presgraves, communications director at GLSEN. "We believe the time is right for the sports world, which is one of the last bastions of acceptable homophobia and transphobia in this country, to finally start looking internally about how it treats LGBT people and LGBT issues."

Among the initial facets of the GLSEN Sports Project is the Team Respect Challenge, which encourages sports teams and clubs to

make a strong, public commitment to live the values of respect and inclusion for all team members, spanning differences such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and religion.

Presgraves reports that so far, only a few teams have taken part in the Team Respect Challenge. GLSEN plans on sending wristbands to K-12 teams that participate to provide a visible way for them to show their support.

"We hope teams across Oregon will learn more about the challenge and take this simple but impactful step to make sports safe and inclusive for everyone," says Presgraves.

Les Brown, co-chair of GLSEN's Oregon chapter, explains that though the program is new, he's confident that Oregon Gay-Straight

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