

THE YEAR IN sports

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A HOLIDAY REVUE

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The sports world as a whole felt bureaucratic and boorish all year long. The NFL lockout that almost was; the NBA's truncated season due to labor disputes; the NBA's playoffs marred by audible, and televised, anti-gay slurs; the Atlanta Braves' Roger McDowell motioning as if he were going to use a bat to assault a pair of San Francisco Giants fans whom he questioned about being gay. On and on it went... It was enough to make you loony. But as with all valleys, a peak shouldn't be far away.

Whether the biggest LGBTQ sports story of the year was a peak or valley is up for debate, though.

A settlement was finally reached in a high-profile lawsuit filed against the **North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance (NAGAAA)** by three softball players whose sexual orientation was questioned in the wake of the 2008 Gay Softball World Series in Seattle. The debacle followed the players' team's second-place finish. NAGAAA's rules stipulate that any team competing in a NAGAAA-sanctioned tournament is allowed

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-JAKE PACKER, FORMER OPEN COMMISSIONER, ROSE CITY SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION

only two heterosexuals per team. Following a protest, a hearing was held wherein the three players were reportedly questioned whether or not they desired predominately women or men. Following the closed-door hearing, the plaintiffs' team, D2 from San Francisco, was disqualified, and the team's second-place finish was stripped.

The lawsuit brought into the limelight rules about the straight-player limits in gay sports. Earlier this year NAGAAA changed its policy to include an unlimited number of LGBT players on any team, with the two-

player limit applying strictly to self-identified straight players.

The players insisted they were bisexual, and the settlement reportedly awarded them reinstatement to the league, and their second-place finish fully recognized. NAGAAA commissioner Roy Melani argued that the players never answered questions about their orientation during the hearing. Nevertheless, the commish was pleased with the settlement.

"This settlement and [the] judge's rulings have shown that NAGAAA has the right to define their membership requirements," said Melani. "It's the Gay Softball World Series. It's important we defend our right to maintain that identity."

Others weren't as convinced of NAGAAA's infallibility.

"NAGAAA has a serious image problem," said Jake Packer, former open commissioner for the Rose City Softball Association from 2008-11. "Any message of the good that NAGAAA may achieve, its primary purpose, plays second fiddle to [this] controversy. The only way to change that is to truly embrace everyone that wants to support the LGBTQ community and gay softball, regardless of their sexual identity."

Anti-gay bullying once again emerged as a cornerstone movement to rally against in 2011, most notably in sports and schools. Scattered headlines declaring more and more professional athletes coming out ran parallel to news of an increased number of schools adopting new bullying policies designed to protect students. Leading the charge, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) announced a new program in March 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 was designed to bring together a diverse

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