

RUBY: 'It has definitely been a weight off my shoulders.' *Continued from page A1*

coming to Keizer in 2021 to play in the Mavericks League inaugural season.

In the offseason, Ruby, a native of Nashville, Tenn., moonlights as a country music songwriter, often working with popular music singers such as Hayden Joseph and Xavier Joseph.

Ruby has been passionate about baseball and country music for the majority of his life. But as a teenager, he never encountered anyone that was like him in the baseball or country music scene, which is why coming out was so important to Ruby.

"That was the whole reason I wanted to do this. Being in two industries that, historically, queer people aren't represented, that is why I wanted to share my story," Ruby said. "It's a scary spot to be in if you don't see anyone that is like yourself — especially when you love baseball and country music. I wanted to be the person I could never see as a kid."

"I don't think of it as coming out. It's really more like inviting in. This is who I am and who you are shouldn't impact what you can do. Sexuality shouldn't be a barrier to what you do. I am hoping my story will help people in the same situation. You never know what people are struggling through."

When Ruby officially made his announcement, he was overwhelmed by the amount of support that he got, receiving more than 6,000 notifications on his phone in a 24-hour period.

"I had to go walk around a state park for an hour just to clear my head. It was nuts," Ruby said. "I got so many messages. I was honestly so surprised and humbled to see how far of a reach it had. I wasn't expecting that. I couldn't believe how many people were inspired," Ruby said.

Ruby said he received a similar response when he came out to his teammates.

"My teammates and coaches were so supportive and awesome. The moment I stepped back onto the field, everyone embraced me. It couldn't have gone better," Ruby said. "If you are a hard worker and a good teammate, you will be respected by teammates. I hope that when people hear this story, they won't be scared."

The day after he went public with his sexuality, Ruby had a base hit with an exit velocity of 102 miles-per-hour, his hardest hit ball of the season.

This was no coincidence according to Ruby, who believes that being out will make him a better ballplayer.

"There is so much wasted energy when you are trying to hide in plain sight. Now, I am just able to play better," Ruby said.

Ruby's announcement comes on the heels of a summer where Las Vegas Raiders defensive end Carl Nassib and Nashville Predators prospect Luke Prokop also came out as gay. While Ruby was inspired by both of their stories, his first inspiration came from his hero and mentor, Billy Bean.

Bean played Major League Baseball (MLB) for six seasons and is the one of the only living players (current or former)

that is openly gay. In 2014, he was named MLB's first ever Ambassador for Inclusion, a role which puts him at the forefront of the League's efforts for a fair and equitable workplace throughout all of baseball. Currently, Bean serves as the MLB Vice President and Special Assistant to the Commissioner.

Three years ago, while still in college, Ruby sent a handwritten letter to Bean, sharing his secret.

"I wasn't expecting anything in return. I didn't even put my last name or what college I went to. I just had my return address at the top," Ruby said.

Ruby not only got a letter of encouragement in return, he was also invited to the MLB Commissioner's Office in New York City.

Ruby still has Bean's response letter framed on his wall.

"Most people don't get to meet their heroes, but I did. I felt supported. I felt like if anything bad happened, he would have my back," Ruby said. "He has been such a trusted resource."

Additionally, Bean also gifted Ruby a special pair of cleats that Ruby has worn



Ruby routinely wears cleats given to him by Billy Bean, who is one of the only living former MLB players to come out as gay. During Pride Month in June, Ruby wore rainbow colored shoelaces to go along with his special cleats. File

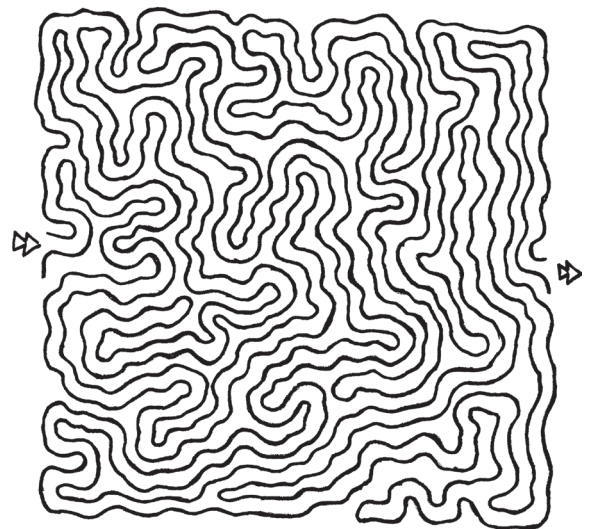
brainfood

sudoku

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maze by Jonathan Graf of Keizer