



## Irish Sport Rife with Homophobia; Country near bottom for Inclusion of Gay People

- 75% of Irish participants witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport
- 1 in 4 gay men did not play youth team sport, nearly 1 in 3 (32%) blamed negative experiences in school physical education classes
- Only 1% of Irish thought lesbian, gay and bisexual people are 'completely accepted' in sporting culture while nearly half think they are 'not accepted at all' or only 'accepted a little'

### Online editors: Infographics and country rankings available

As debate over “marriage equality/same-sex marriage” rages in Ireland, the first international study on homophobia in sport has found most Irish participants believe homophobia continues to be more common in sporting culture than in the rest of society. The “Out on the Fields” study found widespread homophobia in Irish sports, particularly among youth and spectators. This contributed to Ireland being ranked near the bottom of the six English speaking countries for the inclusion and acceptance of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in sport. Only the United States was ranked lower.

The study is the largest ever conducted on homophobia in sports, with nearly 9500 participants, including 501 from Ireland (115 were straight). It focused on comparing the six, predominantly English speaking countries. The research was conducted on behalf of the Bingham Cup (world cup of gay rugby) and a coalition of LGBTI sports groups, including the Federation of Gay Games and You Can Play. The data was collected and analysed by global sports market research firm Repucom and overseen by a panel of seven international experts from six universities, including Brunel University London and America’s University of Massachusetts.

Homophobia was widely reported in sporting environments, with 75% of Irish participants saying they have witnessed or personally experienced homophobia around sport. Of those, more than half of gay men (54%) and nearly 2 out of 5 lesbians (40%) and nearly 1 in 5 straight men (19%) said they had been the victim of homophobia, with homophobic language and slurs the most common. In fact, of those who said they had been victims, 83% of gay men and 89% of lesbians said they had received verbal slurs such as ‘faggot’ or ‘dyke’ while playing or watching sport.

Homophobic behaviour in spectator stands stood out as a particular area of concern in Ireland, though slightly less so than in the UK and United States. Still, an alarming 82% of Irish participants believed an openly gay person would not be very safe as a spectator at a sporting event. Meanwhile, 43% believed that spectator stands are the most likely environment for homophobia to occur, followed by school physical education classes (23%).

Former Leeds player, **Robbie Rogers**, who now plays for the LA Galaxy, is one of the world’s only current, openly gay male professional athletes. “It’s very disappointing to see that the overwhelming majority of people, including the many straight people, have experienced homophobic discrimination. This is not acceptable, everyone should be able to enjoy sport. It’s time that all sport enforce a zero tolerance of hateful language on and off the fields. I strongly support immediate venue bans for anyone using homophobic, racist or any other form of discriminatory language. Players also need to receive stiff penalties for using this language. It is also important that international governing bodies, including FIFA, make committed and determined efforts to ensure LGBTI people feel welcome.”

While the Out on the Fields study shows that homophobia is still a major issue in sporting culture, there are positive signs that things are starting to change in Ireland and the other English speaking countries. Young people (under 22) are now much more likely to say they are ‘out of the closet’ to at least some members of their youth sport team than previous generations, with 17% of Irish youth saying they were open about their sexuality with their entire team. However, this decision to be more open seems to be coming at a cost. Young people are much more likely than older people to report being victims of homophobia.

Openly gay Welsh rugby legend **Gareth Thomas**, said, “This massive international study has cast a very bright and much needed light on the extent of homophobia in sport. I’m very inspired to see that more gays and lesbians are gaining the courage to come out of the closet in youth sport. It is even more amazing that they are doing this despite the widespread homophobic behaviour that continues to be reported around sporting fields and among fans.”

**Professor Ian Rivers**, from **Brunel University London**, was one of seven internationally respected experts on homophobia in sport who sat on the study's review panel. "It's very clear from this study that much more needs to be done around addressing homophobia. This form of discrimination is not only affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people but the study shows many straight men are also being targeted. I strongly hope that sport governing bodies, organisers of major sporting events, coaches, referees and even athletes take this report away and consider what we each can do to ensure lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel safe and welcome."

**See full report or summary of Irish findings for more detail of the study results.**

**After embargo:** [www.outonthefields.com](http://www.outonthefields.com)

#### **About the study**

Out on the Fields is the first international study and largest conducted on homophobia in sport. The study focused on issues of sexuality which is why LGB is used rather than LGBTI or LGBTQ. It also focused on team sports and the English speaking countries (USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand and Australia). Global sports market research firm Repucom conducted the research (pro bono), while the study was initiated by organisers of Bingham Cup Sydney 2014 (the world cup of gay rugby) in partnership with a coalition of sports organisations, including the Federation of Gay Games, You Can Play, International Gay Rugby and the Australian Sports Commission. The study methodology and results were reviewed by a panel of seven academics from six universities including Victoria University (Australia), Penn State University, University of Massachusetts (USA); Brunel University London (UK); University of Winnipeg and Laval University (Canada). Data was collected through an anonymous 10-15 minute online survey which included multiple choice questions and an option to submit more lengthy details of personal experiences. It was promoted through social and traditional media and by sporting organisations, professional athletes, corporations and government. Around 25% of participants were heterosexual.

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