



BY BEN STOREY, MD

Get out and row in the Outgames

SO WHAT IF YOU'RE NOT ON THAT TEAM—YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE GAY TO RACE AT THE GAY GAMES

❖ unconventional wisdom

IN A COUNTRY WHERE same-sex marriage has just become a legal part of regular society, the Gay Games are bound to be a good time. Montreal is the host in 2006, so there could hardly be a better place to take in this most inclusive and least known event on the international games circuit. To be more accurate, Montreal is actually hosting the Outgames after some political struggles with the Gay Games people. Infighting over the Outgames apparently. It's not clear to me what the underlying story is, but the Montreal Games are going to be huge. Not on that team, you say? Unlike the relatively exclusive World Master's Games, the religiously affiliated Maccabiah Games, or even the highly organized Police and Firefighter Games, you don't actually have to be gay to take part in the Gay Games. And you don't have to wrestle with pesky selection trials and arbitration in order to make the team either.

Although it seems slightly paradoxical to promote a separate 'Gay' or 'Out' Games as a path to mainstream integration, it is probably still necessary to promote events which will desensitize people who are disturbed by questions of sexual orientation. People used to be disturbed at the sight of women's kneecaps, after all. And sure you can watch "Will and Grace" in prime time television, but we—and I would include Canada as well as the United States in this generalization—are still a very long way away from having a comfortable level of acceptance for gay and lesbian people in everyday life.

In any case, rowing will be contested by athletes at next year's Games in Montreal and you should consider going. Partly because it's a rowing regatta and partly because it's probably the right thing to do. What better way to support the gay friends and crewmates you have or have had

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than by participating in a regatta at an historic Olympic rowing course? There is little doubt that they would appreciate the support. Although the rowing community as a whole is a relatively liberal thinking group, there is no shortage of hardship and discrimination from homophobic thinking everywhere you look.

Despite that something like three percent of the population is homosexual, it's hard to come up with many professional athletes who are gay. Martina Navratilova for one, but any others? It really is an extremely disadvantaged population—to the point where it may be preferable for people to not know. Although certainly there is the fact that people's private lives are their private lives, we hear just about everything else about their kids and dogs. It's not just a coincidence that sexual orientation is so frequently guarded.

The only possible downside to this particular endeavor is that the competition may be a little on the weak end compared to other Games. Although I have to say that the rowing clubs that are specifically geared towards gay athletes seem to be very enthusiastic, it's not the highest caliber of rowing out there. This is largely a question of numbers of course, but any competition is basically what you make it. There are certainly many very good gay rowers out there in college and club crews, and perhaps this could provide an impetus to encourage more participation from the heterosexual rowing population. And who is going to complain about weak competition anyway? Even though it is only the Gay Games, what grandchild wouldn't be proud to see Grandpa's gold medal 50 years down the road? You have to think about the future. And really and truly, you would have to be either extremely repressed or a die-hard baseball fanatic in order to avoid enjoying Montreal in the summer.

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The idea in general, of course, is to support and embrace diversity in society and to celebrate our differences and similarities through sport. Thinking about this is kind of our duty as responsible citizens, but it's also a great opportunity to partake in a unique event. And for those of you who still feel a little uncomfortable, remember you can always enter the straight four. 