

A Gay Soccer Group? The Ramblers Soccer Club of New York

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There are many articles and books devoted to the role of minorities and women in sports, yet, there is little academic discussion of gays in sports. Some biographies exist, as David Kopay's in which he describes his life as a professional football player who is gay; there are discussions of Bill Tilden and others in tennis; and occasionally there are articles on suspected gays in a given sport like ice dancing or body building.

Outside academia, general newspapers sometimes hint at the alleged gay orientation of a major athlete, as occurred around Carl Lewis and Jurgen Hingsen during the last Olympic Games. The general media may mention the law suit against the Gay Olympic Games by the U.S. Olympic Committee that resulted in the former having to drop the word Olympic from its title. But such articles might be in the law section of a newspaper. There is some coverage of gay sports in the gay press, but its circulation is usually limited to the gay community. Most often, this coverage lacks analysis, is at best descriptive, and sometimes merely provides an excuse for photographs of swimmers or wrestlers.

This paper aims to describe one organization, the Ramblers Soccer Club of New York, which was founded in 1980 and continues to exist. First, however one must provide a quick outline of gays and team sports in general. Then, on a different track, the paper discusses the effects of the Stonewall rebellion on the gay community, particularly in relation to sports in the 1970s. The Rambler Soccer group gathered together in May 1980 and grew rapidly during that summer. Decisions had to be made for a group doing something different, on uncharted seas, concerning leadership, membership, tone, openness to women, and to straights. That fall and winter the Ramblers attempt to develop a gay soccer league, both outdoors and in.

In the summer of 1981 the founder of the group abdicated, and new leadership was chosen. The Ramblers then entered the powerful Cosmopolitan Soccer League, thus facing major, straight competition. This new Rambler leadership stressed the A-team players and slighted the B-team, which could not compete in league games.

1982-83 brought changes. As the then president was moving West, a new leader had to be chosen to replace him. The new director came from the B-team, and the Ramblers did not participate in any league this year. There were games throughout the year, but they were informal.

In the summer of 1983 two new leaders were elected, one of whom was Leslie. He would remain a co-president until 1985. During this period the Ramblers re-entered league play, through the United Nations League.

In 1986 Leslie moved West, and new co-presidents were chosen whose main task was to get a team to San Francisco to partake in Gay Games II. The Ramblers were a sizable part of the New York contingent, one of the largest in the event.

By summer 1987 the Ramblers neared collapse, however. They revived by the fall of 1987 and travelled to Boston for matches there. The New York team later hosted the Boston Strikers, a new gay team, for the Halloween weekend.

In addition to a history of the club, the paper discusses other issues: how the club related to straights, socials, class, demeanor, the closet. Finally, the paper ventures into the ethics of sports, for both gays and straights.