



For more than a decade, the global LGBT sports community has endured a “schism” created by the decision of a handful of organizers to create the World Outgames rather than sign an agreement to host the Gay Games in 2006. For half a decade we have heard calls for an end to that schism, an end to the “dueling” global quadrennial events, and a return to the single quadrennial sports and cultural festival which for more than three decades has brought LGBT athletes and artists together in common cause and celebration.

In 2009, Team SF urged the end of the World Outgames and unification in the Gay Games Movement as the best possible means to achieve that common goal. The evidence that that is the best course of action has only increased in the years since.

Therefore Team SF once again urges that our common community move forward by:

- a) continuing the Gay Games and EuroGames as they have been since their inceptions;
- b) ending the global World Outgames as being a counterproductive strain on community loyalties and resources; and
- c) encouraging and supporting the development of the continental Outgames in underserved areas as a method to reach out and empower even more individuals through art, athleticism and advocacy.

The power and value of the Gay Games is indisputable. All of our organizations have been influenced to one degree or another by their existence, whether they served to bring together the “critical mass” necessary for our groups to form or whether they served as the training grounds for our leaders or they provided invaluable advice for our club business. Each quadrennium, thousands and thousands of LGBT men and women come together in common cause and celebration and return to their homes full of enthusiasm and greater empowerment. Our lives are profoundly changed by the Gay Games, collectively and individually.

One of the most important but seldom discussed distinctions of the Gay Games is that it is an event entirely in control of the athletes themselves, through the membership mechanism of the Federation of Gay Games (FGG) and the collegial relationship between hosts and the FGG that is built into the license agreements. This allows us to ensure that the integrity of our sports are respected and the mission of Inclusion is never shortchanged for sake of economy.

That is a position — and an event — worth defending.

So let us look at why “merging” the World Outgames and Gay Games is not a practical or desirable option.

**They are substantially different events with radically different means of undertaking their missions.** The FGG and its member organizations remain intimately involved with the planning and running of Gay Games events throughout the entire quadrennial cycle, giving the host sports and creative support and expertise it otherwise would lack. This has proven to be the best method for ensuring that host decisions reflect Participation, Inclusion and Personal Best through every step of the process. In shorthand, the event is in the hands of the athletes. Competition groups are not collapsed or smaller sports dropped for the sake of saving money.

In contrast, hosts are almost solely responsible for the organization of World Outgames events and do not have the interactive checks of the Gay Games to prevent collapsing of competition brackets (Outsports referred to the collapsing of volleyball brackets in Copenhagen as a “clusterf#ck”, and the decision to make heavyweights and lightweights wrestle each other that Outgames created dangerous conditions that should never have been allowed), or to eliminate tournament events in smaller sports entirely, as was done in martial arts and wrestling in Antwerp. Those kinds of “economies” gut the very reason athletes train and pay to participate.

**The events approach human rights through conflicting methodologies.** The Gay Games use participation and visible inclusion through culture and sports as a means to empower our community. They do this through an event that is unique in its breadth of inclusion. In contrast, the Gay & Lesbian International Sports Association (GLISA) has consistently insisted throughout previous discussions that human rights conferences form an equal part of the program — a third “pillar” of their mission — and have an equal budget line even though the conferences are not financially self-sustaining.

The FGG has never opposed conferences and previous Gay Games have had conferences. But history of both the Gay Games and the World Outgames have shown that those conferences end up taxing host resources and consuming resources that otherwise would have gone to cultural and athletic components. This was formally acknowledged in the post-Sydney 2002 reports and the post-Copenhagen 2009 report.

Therefore Team SF and others active in the FGG have advocated allowing hosts to hold associated sports human rights conferences, organized and budgeted externally, at future Gay Games. That would insulate the athletes and artists, at the events to perform and participate, from in essence having to subsidize other activities. There are many opportunities for conferences, but very few for the kind of artistic and athletic experiences the Gay Games provide.

That position has been supported by other organizations and by a widely signed online petition in 2009. It is a position GLISA has thus far refused to accept.

**History does not suggest the FGG and GLISA would make good “partners.”** In March 2004, Montreal organizers unilaterally decided to make the Outgames a recurring event and initially planned to announce the second event would be held in 2010. Attendees at the conference in Boston where the announcement was to be made were furious and told them that that would

prove they were determined to destroy the Gay Games. The next day the announcement was made, but for 2009, not 2010.

In February 2005, Outgames organizers were emailing GLISA representatives at a London conference with the FGG that the FGG was not recognized as “being international or valid,” accused the FGG of “Machiavellian” and “coercive” tactics, and compared the FGG leadership to Stalin. In more recent discussions between the two, the FGG asked for any financial revenue in a mutual event to be based upon professional external assessment of the value of the two organizations, as a matter of proper business practice, whereas GLISA insisted on a starting point of 50-50 based on nothing but desire. The FGG wanted fiscal risks to be shared equally with hosts; GLISA’s stand kept the risk on the shoulders of hosts.

As recently as last year, at the Sin City Shootout, some of our members heard advocates staffing the World Outgames booth belittling the Gay Games and accusing the FGG of not negotiating fairly in their endeavor to get them to register for their event. These are not the positive or neutral words or a respected would-be partner.

Team SF therefore urges GLISA to cease holding the World Outgames. It encourages GLISA to explore talks with the FGG about organizing external sports conferences to be held in conjunction with future Gay Games. It urges the European Gay & Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF) to resume its three-years-out-of-four calendar it adopted after being born out of the Gay games experience in Vancouver but abandoned with the birth of GLISA. And it supports the development of continental Outgames outside Western Europe and Canada, recognizing that although they cannot offer the diversity of sports experience in the smaller sports that that global events do, they do empower participants through more modest sports coupled with conferences.

It makes no sense to Team SF that we should try to combine two such divergent events or organizations, with the resulting loss in vision and mission of both parties. We would rather see the FGG concentrate on what it does best (sports and culture) and GLISA on what it does best (conferences).

Dr. Tom Waddell envisioned more than 30 years ago in San Francisco one quadrennial event to unify LGBT athletes and artists globally, and we are all the beneficiaries of his vision. We can best empower the next generation by returning to that one quadrennial event and making future Gay Games the best experiences possible.