

The importance of LGBTQ+ inclusive workplaces

28 May 2021

Marking the start of Pride month 2021, footballer and Just a Ball Game? patron Adam McCabe reflects on the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusive workplaces

Growing up and playing football, I never thought I could come out as my true authentic self.

Being a gay man in football was a foreign concept.

There was nobody out in the game and it was the biggest secret I ever had. Even when Robbie Rogers and other retired footballers came out I still felt like it was impossible.

The main reason was that my workplace - the game of football - was not an accepting and welcoming space for an individual like me.

Even five years since I left the game of football at the professional level we still see a lack of openly gay footballers.

While there have been huge strides in the game and more visibility for the LGBTQ+ community, it seems that it has not been enough to change the perception that football - and sports in general - do not provide an adequate workspace for people to be their authentic selves.

Now, I play football at a semi-professional and amateur level for the Georgia Revolution in Atlanta, Georgia. I am completely out, living my life as my true authentic self - and



thriving. But I no longer consider the game of football as my workplace.

My full-time job is now as a sales representative for a large pharmaceutical company. I work with doctors everyday around the city and feel very comfortable in my own skin. I feel respected, supported and valued in the workplace and at my job.

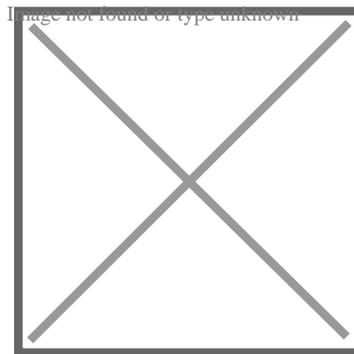
To be fair, I had these same feelings as a professional footballer – but I never felt comfortable, seen or respected as a gay man in football. This is a huge difference from my current role. My entire team knows that I am a gay man.

They ask about my partner and my life outside of work. I feel comfortable and confident discussing my personal life with them. I feel safe and represented in my place of work.

Studies show that a diverse, welcoming environment results in better teamwork, greater innovation, and more resourceful problem-solving because of the variety of experience and viewpoints.

In today's workplace, a diverse workforce helps a company generate more ideas and become more competitive. And with this focus on creating more diverse workplaces there has been a rise in the number of employee groups at individual companies.

The last three companies I worked for had an LGBTQ+ specific Employee Resource Group (usually known as a Staff Network in the UK). LGBTQ+ individuals and others in the company had the chance to discuss issues in the workplace, network and connect with similar individuals, provide outreach to the LGBTQ+ community and help improve the culture of the company.



When I reflect on my football career, I would have loved some sort of group, club, or any kind of space to be my authentic self whilst playing the sport of football. Unfortunately, that did not exist - but football has grown drastically.

There are now LGBTQ+ supporter groups, campaigns that promote diversity in the game and

organisations fighting to promote equality in the game – like [Just a Ball Game?](#)

There is still a long way to go, especially in making football an accepting place for LGBTQ+ athletes. And even though I feel comfortable, open and accepted at my place of work, there are certainly plenty of individuals who do not share the same sentiments.

There are plenty of people from the LGBTQ+ community who have to hide their sexuality or gender identity in the workplace and do not have the ability to be their authentic selves. There needs to be a shift in accepting and promoting diversity – because it's the right thing to do, and as it has been proven to improve several facets of a company.

If we continue to encourage the likes of staff networks and LGBTQ+ self-organised groups and prioritise a diverse work community, then more individuals will have the ability to be their true authentic selves.

I believe that there are only positives that can come from promoting and prioritising diversity. And I believe that companies will, and must, continue to encourage their workers to be their best, authentic selves.

Adam McCabe

Patron, [Just a Ball Game?](#)

GMB organises LGBT+ workers in regional self-organised LGBT+ groups fighting for liberation and against discrimination in their workplaces. Learn more about our [LGBT+ members' activism](#). On 19 June 2021 we're joining with [Just a Ball Game?](#) to invite GMB members and your families to learn about and celebrate LGBT+ people in sport.

