Conference Review

The Gay Games Conference: Benchmark for Scholarly Exploration and Artistic Expression

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History was made on Friday, June 17, 1994 in New York City, one day before the Opening Ceremonies of the Gay Games IV. On that day, the first conference was organized for the gathering of people endeavoring to express through art forms and to explore in a scholarly manner the arena of lesbian women and gay men in sport and sport management. There were 20 conference participants who presented a variety of papers and readings ranging from scientific studies to poetry or book readings. A total of 52 people attended to listen and discuss and participate in the day’s conference.

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of the conference. The following topics will be presented: a history of the founding and development of the conference, the purposes driving the development of the conference, the statement of purpose of the conference, a summary of some of the presentations given at the historic 1994 conference, and an overview of the plans for the second conference with Gay Games V in Amsterdam in 1998.

HISTORY of the FOUNDING and ORGANIZATION of the CONFERENCE.

During 1985 and 1986 I had been involved in almost two years of organization and fund raising efforts to take Team Louisville, a group of almost 30 people, to Gay Games II to be held in San Francisco in August, 1986. During that time I thought about the research possibilities and opportunities that the Gay Games presented. I began to search for research on Gay Games I (held in 1982) and for research relating to lesbian women and gay men in sport, fitness, recreation or athletics. To
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my surprise and disappointment, I found practically nothing. I searched further and could only find scant mention of sports as a part of lesbian women's and gay men's lives in one book (Katz, 1979). I realized that something had to be done because I knew that sports and recreation were very much a part of the lives of many lesbian and gay people. It was not, however, being researched or recorded in any way.

Every book and study I found on lesbian and gay people typically covered many aspects of their lives, such as, living together, coming out, workplace issues, language, cultural aspects, social and political organizations, and other topics. Rarely was there mention of sports or recreation as an element of life. And never was sports or recreation listed as a major section or chapter for discussion. Having been personally involved in sports, recreation and athletics all my life and knowing of many other lesbian and gay people involved as well, I became concerned that sports and recreation were not being recorded as important elements of our lives. I questioned why it was absent in scholarly literature. Was it because of lack of interest to conduct research in this area or was it because it was considered a taboo topic? I wondered why there was minuscule mention of it in the lesbian and gay literature. Was it because the various authors had no personal interest in sports and therefore didn't care to write about it? Was it because sports, in general, are usually not considered as a viable and vital element of our lives? Or was it a political statement? That is, there is the view of some lesbian and gay people that sports is a waste of time, energy, and money and that lesbian and gay people should be concentrating their efforts on addressing seemingly more important issues to further the political and legal agenda of lesbian and gay rights. Whatever the reason, the void existed and I wanted to do something about it.

In early July, 1986, I attended an international conference, held in conjunction with the Commonwealth Games in Scotland. While attending the conference I realized that most Olympic-level events and other large sporting events have a research conference held in conjunction with the event. The conference encourages research and attracts attention to treating the event and its participants as legitimate subjects for scholarly exploration and even artistic expression. I then had an idea. I wanted to try to convince the Gay Games to do the same—to sponsor a conference which would be held in conjunction with the Gay Games every four years. The conference could be held just prior to the Gay Games. The existence of the conference, I hoped, would encourage research and exploration and artistic expression of the lesbian and gay population in sports, fitness, recreation, and sport management. A month later when in San Francisco participating in Gay Games II, I envisioned the conference and decided to pursue the idea.

In January, 1987, I wrote to Richard Dopson, then Chairperson of