



Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities

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Celebrating and Serving the GLBT Community Since 1980

June 3, 2009

Minnesota Twins
Attention: Broadcast Department
34 Kirby Puckett Place
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Dear Broadcast Dept. Staff:

I am writing to register a complaint about some comments made by Bert Blyleven on the Sunday, May 31 TV (WFTC, Channel 29) broadcast of the Twins-Rays Game. I found some sophomoric comments of his to be insensitive and offensive to and disrespectful of myself and all other members of the Minnesota gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) community and their families and friends – many of whom are Twins fans. His comments were also misguided and unnecessarily macho and narrow-minded about what it means to be a man in today's world.

Ironically, Mr. Blyleven's offensive remarks were part of his response to a fan's question about role models in baseball. In the bottom of 2nd inning of Sunday's game, Dick Bremer read aloud the fan question of the day (i.e., the "Car Soup Email the Booth" segment of the broadcast) directed to Bert and Mr. Bremer: "When you were kids who were your baseball role models?"

In response, Bert said that his role models were pitchers Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale of the LA Dodgers. Dick then said his was former Twin Bob Allison, whom he described as "strong, athletic, and good-looking." Dick then asked Bert whether he agreed that Bob Allison was "good-looking." And Bert replied (apparently attempting to playfully put down Mr. Bremer), "I don't really look at guys that way and say, 'Boy, he's good-looking,' but I guess you do." As Dick struggled to clarify that he meant Allison was "handsome," Bert interrupted and added, "He was just a nice man, but for you he was 'good-looking'"

A few seconds after those mildly offensive words of Bert's came a remark from him that was clearly insensitive, misinformed, and derogatory regarding gay men – and also misguided and narrow in what it implied about heterosexual men. Dick had just named the Rays' current batter, "Gabe Gross," and reported that the count on him was 2 balls and 1 strike. At that point, Bert quickly quipped, "And what you said was "gross" (clearly referring to Bremer's description of Bob Allison as "good-looking" and once again putting Dick down for the comment but with a more pejorative word).

I am 62 years old and have been an avid Twins Fan since I was 14. My first visit to the old Metropolitan Stadium for the first Knot-Hole Gang Game when I was playing Little League baseball in St. Paul is still clearly in my memory. I have also spent most of my life playing, coaching, and umpiring amateur baseball and competitive softball – from Little League baseball to Men's Senior Class B Softball.

My life in amateur baseball/softball includes the 17 years during which I played competitive softball in the gay men's Twin Cities Goodtime Softball League (www.tcgsf.org), which today numbers 34 teams and over 500 players. Founded in 1977, the league plays every Sunday during the summer and early fall at the Northeast Athletic Fields in Northeast Minneapolis. A sister league for lesbian softball players, called Northern Lights Women's Softball League (www.nlwsl.org) comprised of about 22 teams and 400 players holds its summer and fall games Sundays at Dunning Field in St. Paul. Both leagues are also members of the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance (www.nagaaasoftball.org/), whose members number 680 teams from 34 cities

throughout the United States and Canada. I am quite certain all of these players and their families and other fans would disagree with Mr. Blyleven's offensive comments.

As I have already stated, I am a loyal Twins fan and baseball lover **who also happens to be a gay man**, of which I have been aware since the age of 6. I have a life-partner of 11 years, who also loves baseball, having played varsity high school baseball in Memphis. He also happens to be gay – as well as an African-American, and a physician. It has been many years on my life's journey since I became convinced that God created me to be gay and loves me just as much as all His/Her other children.

This conviction was so strong that in 1980 I cofounded the Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities (CPCSM). CPCSM is an independent and progressive grass-roots non-profit organization of Catholic GLBT persons, their parents, and church and educational professionals, which has been working in Twin-Cities-Area among Catholic parish communities and high schools over the past 29 years. Throughout its history, CPCSM has provided educational and consciousness-raising sessions about the special needs and gifts of GLBT lesbian persons. Today, I am still the Vice President of CPCSM's Board of Directors.

Current and former professional baseball stars – such as Mr. Blyleven -- are role models for many of today's youth. Just as Mr. Blyleven would not be allowed to use the "N" word or to make other racist, sexist, or ageist comments while working as a spokesperson for the Minnesota Twins, he should also be admonished not to make homophobic remarks that can have serious implications for the approximately 5-10 % of the TV viewers who are GLBT – such as loneliness, isolation, depression, and self-hatred -- and for their families and friends. *(This assertion is supported by research results reported by many educational, mental health, and medical professionals and by their professional associations, including University of Minnesota pediatrician Dr. Gary Remafedi, who reports that gay teens are almost seven times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual teens. In his conclusions about his study, Dr. Remafedi – as well as a researchers in a number of other studies – state that gay teens engage in suicide attempts and other at-risk behaviors not because they are gay but because of society's negative reactions to them. [American Journal of Public Health, 1998, pp. 57-60].)*

Such biased comments made by one of today's role models about GLBT people also can have a negative effect on young heterosexual viewers by encouraging their oppressive treatment of their GLBT peers, such as discrimination, verbal and physical harassment, and sometimes even more severe violence. Young people should not be taught to misunderstand, fear, and hate other children and teens who are different than they are, but should be encouraged to accept and support them. It seems that Mr. Blyleven, and perhaps also Twins officials who tolerate such narrow-minded and homophobic speech, need some educating and consciousness-raising about their GLBT fans and viewers.

I realize that professional sports is one of the last bastions of homophobia in today's society, but a community-oriented organization such as the Minnesota Twins could set an invaluable example by educating its spokespersons and other leaders so that *all* members of the Minnesota community can feel welcome and respected by the Twins. I don't believe that when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball that historic moment should be viewed only as a milestone in fighting racism in baseball. It should also be seen as the first step in heralding the beginning of human liberation in baseball, so that everyone – including *all* minority groups -- can feel welcome to participate in the American pastime.

Sincerely,



David J. McCaffrey
Co-founder and Vice-President of the Board

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