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Forget Outing Gay Sports Players. I Outed a Straight One!

After ex-NFLer Dave Kopay came out of the closet, I found a heterosexual who had infiltrated a gay softball league

posted by John Stark, May 1, 2013 [More by this author](#)



John Stark is the articles editor of Next Avenue. Follow John on Twitter @jrstark.



Headline and drawing from the San Francisco Examiner, Dec. 18, 1975

Thirty-eight years before the NBA's Jason Collins announced he was gay, another famous athlete did the same thing. While one is being roundly praised for his actions, the other was mostly scorned. I know. I was reporting from the sidelines.

The athlete was former NFL running back Dave Kopay, who's 70 now, and lives in Los Angeles. In December 1975, he publicly outed himself. He was 35, a year older than Collins is now. The difference between

what they did is timing. Collins is an active pro team player. Kopay had been retired from pro sports for three years.

While Collins is making sports history, Kopay has been almost forgotten.

I was a sports writer at the San Francisco Examiner when Kopay dropped the G-bomb. It's funny that I say sports writer because I didn't think of myself as one. Three months before Kopay's coming out I was transferred to the department by a new editor in chief at the Examiner. He believed that writers who know nothing about a subject can bring a fresh perspective to it. So I went from Arts & Entertainment to jocks and locker rooms.

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Once I got over the shock of my new beat, I got into it. I was able, for instance, to do a series of profiles about people who worked at the Golden Gate Fields racetrack, like jockeys, groomers and owners. One of my first assignments was to cover a college soccer game. It took place at sunset, in a beautiful warm light. When the story was printed the new editor in chief sent me a note saying how much he liked it, adding, "but readers are calling to complain. Can you include the score next time?"

I had been in the department about three months when the Kopay story broke. He came out to a writer at the now-defunct Washington Star newspaper. She had written a story about the difficulties of gays in sports. After it appeared, the Star was flooded with hate mail, saying it couldn't be true, that gays did not exist in the National Football League.

Kopay decided to set the record straight, as it were. He contacted the journalist, Lynn Rosellini, who wrote a follow-up article that detailed his time in the NFL as a closeted homosexual. The story went viral before there was viral.

The crusty old Examiner sports writers were in shock. How could this be? What was Kopay trying to prove? Just how homophobic were they? I remember a profile I did of an athlete who was competing in a gay sporting event. In my interview he said he had served in the Navy. The night copy editor, without my being told, inserted a snide comment into the text that implied he

had joined so he could ogle the other sailors. The line came out after the first edition. Had I not protested, it would have remained.

But it was Kopay who provided me with the inspiration to do my best sports reporting ever, though most of the sports staff didn't think so.

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I had to get to the truth of a story I had just heard. A friend of mine who was in San Francisco's gay Community Softball League told me that he suspected that one of his teammates was secretly straight. I figured the outrageous irony of it would help put the Kopay controversy in perspective. Some lightness was needed.

I was able through my friend to contact the player. His name was Metz, which was short for William Metzler. He was a 29-year-old second baseman. Even though he worked as a bartender in a gay saloon to earn money to go to dental school, he was, he swore to me, 100 percent hetero. The bar he worked at sponsored his team. The affable gay deceiver just wanted to play ball. The CSL was, after all, a damn good league that always wound up its season by playing a game against all-stars from the San Francisco Police Department.

I went to Larry, our sports editor, who had also just been transferred to the sports department by the paper's new editor-in-chief; he had been a copy editor on the news desk. He was a laid-back guy who wore western shirts, lariat ties and cowboy boots. I don't think he knew much more than I did about sports. But like me, he did recognize a story, and said, "Let's go for it."

On Dec. 17, 1975, Metz dropped by the Examiner office to confess his secret.

My groundbreaking interview ran the next day with a headline that said, "Exposé! Journalist Discovers a Straight in Gay Sports."

Metz's words were almost identical to what Kopay had told the Washington Star.

"I had to be honest with myself," Metz said in the article, "I've been a closet hetero for several years now. What I'm doing is not easy."

He admitted to having a live-in girlfriend: "When I was with my team I tried to make sure that every innuendo implied I was gay. I felt I had to talk about the date I had last night and use the word 'he' when it was really a she."

At one point I quoted Metz as saying, "I don't feel that sexual preferences make any difference in one's athletic ability. I only hope, however, that my disclosure of being straight doesn't affect my relationship with the boys in the locker room after the game."

It didn't. The other teammates, after the story appeared, couldn't care less if he was straight, gay, bi or whatever.

But the paper's new editor-in-chief, who was a conservative from Atlanta, did care. So much so that a few days later I was transferred back to the Arts & Entertainment section.

But not before I got my big scoop! Thank you Dave Kopay. I'll never forget you.

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