

An open letter to Marcello Lippi

September 2009

Since its inception in 1989 the European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) has fought for the rights of gays and lesbians in sport. 20 years on we remain committed to this cause. And, with the help of organisations like the Football Against Racism Europe (FARE) network, and a membership base of over 30,000 people, we're confident we can continue to make positive strides to ensure football, and sport in general, is open and accessible to all regardless of sexual preference.

There is, however, much work to be done. Homophobic behaviour is still evident in football. This notion was reinforced in a recent interview with Italian national football team coach, Marcello Lippi, who was quoted as saying gay men were unable play sport at the highest level. Remarks like this do little to help dispel the myth that gay people cannot reach the pinnacle of a given sport. Moreover, it is worrying when a figure of such high esteem can openly declare such a lack of understanding.

Sport is an area where the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community encounter the most difficulty in simply being themselves. This often results in LGBT youngsters sadly turning their back on sport forever. Therefore it is crucial that those tasked with providing guidance and support to others, should use their position to help athletes feel at ease, and approach their sport with confidence, safe in the knowledge that their performance on the field of play is all that counts.

Coaches and trainers need to be aware of the damage they could do to youngsters struggling with their sexual orientation. A good coach is one who can assist an athlete on both sporting and personal matters. It would be difficult for a young gay athlete to place his or her trust in a coach with such narrow-minded views as those illustrated by Mr Lippi. It is the obligation of every sport to ensure its coaches display a commitment to equality and diversity and without any reservation to those with an 'alternative' sexual orientation.

The remarks by Mr. Lippi counter this approach and if we want the game of football to be open to all, then these remarks should not be tolerated. The EGLSF and FARE call upon the Italian Football Association to act by publicly condemning these comments. In addition, we would like to invite Mr. Lippi to meet with the EGLSF so we can discuss some of our work with him.

We would welcome such an opportunity.

Yours sincerely

FARE - Football Against Racism in Europe
EGLSF – European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation