

### Champions Carry the Torch for Chicago Gay Games

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The much-anticipated Weekend of Champions, a double benefit for Gay Games VII, took place April 22-23 at Soldier Field's Cadillac Club. With its thousand attendees, the sold-out Saturday night gala dinner was a resounding success. Almost 500 people showed up for the Sunday morning Breakfast with Champions, where three panel discussions were scheduled. The unique two-day event brought together elite athletes, entertainers, Gay Games organizers, corporate sponsors, local leaders and members of Chicago's LGBT community. [ See photos this issue. ]

The Night of 100 Champions was hosted by Olympic gold medalist Greg Louganis and honored a long list of openly gay athletes, including former NFL players Esera Tuaolo, Roy Simmons and David Kopay. Many international gay athletes were also recognized for their sporting performances in their respective disciplines as well as for their influences as positive role-models. Among them were South African volleyball player Leigh-Ann Naidoo, Dutch sprinter Martje Hoekmeijer and German cyclist Petra Roessner.

U.S. Soccer Olympic team and national team star Saskia Webber, Olympic gold medal-winning swimmer Bruce Hayes, U.S. skeleton national team member Courtney Yamada and Andrea Zimbardi, former co-captain and star catcher of the University of Florida's women's softball team, also picked up awards. A number of teams were honored, including the Chicago Force pro women's football team and the Nubians, a women's softball team.

For their honest and fair portrayal of gay athletes and issues, sports writer/commentator Frank Deford of Sports Illustrated and NPR; and HBO's Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel were commended. From the latter, interviewer and tennis commentator Mary Carillo accepted the award she also received her own Champions honor. She said a few words about discrimination in sports, expressed her strong support for the Gay Games mission, and talked about the making of a long documentary on Billie Jean King, which is to air April 26 on HBO.

Dozens of national organizations and local businesses have proudly signed on as official sponsors of Gay Games VII. Among those, Kraft

Foods and Harris Bank have been the target of boycott attempts by extreme right-wing groups. For their steadfast support in the face of public pressure, the two companies were warmly applauded. The Crystal Lake Rowing Club, which earlier this month battled intense opposition by residents who did not want their suburban municipality to host the rowing competition, was also honored and cheered by the appreciative crowd of diners.

Persons and groups who have made substantial financial contributions to Gay Games VII were recognized. Interpreting for both weekend events was offered by Deaf Communication by Innovation. They will also donate interpreter services during this July's competitions. An updated list of all corporate and individual donors is available at [www.gaygameschicago.com](http://www.gaygameschicago.com)

Community leaders Dick Uyvari and Joe La Pat presented a \$75,000 donation to a scholarship fund that has been set up to assist participants with limited financial means. Uyvari and La Pat would like the money to help fund the South African women's soccer team. Three international athletes were invited to receive the symbolic check.

Mayor Richard M. Daley, a longtime supporter of equal rights for LGBT people and chair of the Gay Games VII Honorary Host Committee, was not able to attend. However, City Treasurer Judy Rice, who is co-chair of the Host Committee, was greeted enthusiastically when she reached the stage. State Reps. Ken Dunkin, Sara Feigenholtz and Larry McKeon, along with Aids. Tom Tunney and Helen Shiller, were named for their sustained efforts and legislative victories in the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and identity.

Gay Games founder Dr. Tom Waddell, who died of AIDS in 1987, was praised by Sara Waddell Lewinstein, a medal-winning lesbian athlete and mother of their daughter. Waddell Lewinstein is a Gay Games pioneer, civil-rights activist and AIDS educator. While she insisted that the vision and realization of the original Gay Games, held in San Francisco in 1982, were her husband's, she is widely considered a co-founder in her own right because of the relentless work she did on behalf of the fledgling gay sports movement.

Another posthumous award went to Mark Bingham, the rugby player killed in 9/11 on Flight 93; he was represented by his partner, Paul Holm.

The evening also consisted of a mix of entertainment featuring, among others, singer Billy Porter, actor Jason Graae, local talent Dylan Rice, footballer-turned-singer Esera Tuaolo, comic Poppy Champlin and

singer Sharon McNight. A live painting performance by artist Thom Bierdz provided a large sports-themed creation, and was later sold as part of the live auction. Cruises and other vacation packages were won in a raffle. The show, nimbly produced by Jeffrey Ortmann and his team, including event chair Tarrinna Dykes, was a definite crowd-pleaser. While it set the bar high for future Gay Games VII events, laudatory word of mouth should ensure that Chicago's LGBT community and its allies will rise to the challenge.