

Generational shift in attitudes among young footballers towards gay teammates

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Young footballers on the verge of becoming professionals are now much more likely to be supportive of gay teammates than a decade ago, according to new research from sociologists at the universities of Kent and Winchester.

Conducted via interviews with 22 Premier League academy footballers aged 16-18, the research found that all the participants would openly accept one of their colleagues coming out.

The research, led by Dr Steven Roberts, of the University of Kent's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, and Professor Eric Anderson, of the University of Winchester's Faculty of Business, Law and Sport, made use of intermittent interviews over a four-month period between November 2012 and February 2013.

All the participants identified themselves as [heterosexual](#) in their interview and all said they were from a lower to upper working class background. The study results showed a marked difference in acceptance of gay teammates compared to the findings of the last such study, carried out a decade ago.

Dr Roberts said: 'The interview results were broadly consistent with other recent research on young British men of their age in that these men showed no overt animosity towards gay men.

'In fact, they were more than tolerant and showed an inclusive attitude

toward the hypothetical situation of having a gay teammate, best friend or roommate reveal their sexuality. The results are clear: among the 22 future footballers we interviewed, all were unbothered by the issue of gays in sport.

'This indicated a marked shift in perception from the last study. Although there was some evidence then that attitudes were changing, there has been a generational shift over the last decade. Lads now are saying "we would openly support and accept one of our colleagues coming out".'

The last similar research into the attitudes of young sportsmen was carried out in 2002 by Professor Eric Anderson, of the University of Winchester, one of the three co-authors of the new research. His study found that gay male athletes were tolerated by teammates, 'as long as they played the sport well'. However, there were no findings of active 'support'.

Professor Anderson said: 'Recent comments by Robbie Rogers, the former Leeds United footballer who came out but then left the English game to return to play in the US, suggested he didn't know how easy it would have been to make the transition.

'However, our research does suggest that attitudes in the locker room among young British players would lay the foundation for a player to be able to come out.'

More information: The paper 'On the Door-Step of Equality: Attitudes toward Gay Athletes among Academy Level Footballers' is published in the journal *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. [intl-irs.sagepub.com/content/e ... 90213495747.abstract](http://intl-irs.sagepub.com/content/e...90213495747.abstract)

Provided by University of Kent

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