Beyond the Checklist: Integrating LGBTQI+ Inclusivity Into Your Team and Department Culture

Coaches play a critical role in supporting and advocating for athletes and staff who are LGBTQI+ and gender nonconforming. This includes valuing and respecting the identities of the athletes they coach and the staff that they work with, and understanding that they cannot separate out their identities. People are their whole selves wherever they go; a person's experiences, within and beyond athletics, are impacted by their other identities. By acknowledging, valuing, and working to understand the gender identities and sexualities of team members, coaches recognize them as a whole person.

Coaches are in a position to cultivate an inclusive team culture that supports LGBTQI+ and gender nonconforming team members. Together as a team, athletes and staff members can develop expectations for all team members, which are useful because they provide a shared framework for behavior. Expectations also allow team members to take ownership of the team environment and feel accountable to others on the team.

Part 1: Reflection Prompts and Recommendations for Action

- How does your team and/or department demonstrate valuing respect, diversity, and inclusion? Do you talk about valuing team members not just as athletes, but as whole people? Do you have team values that pertain to diversity, equity, and inclusion?
    - I'd like to get started
        - Team values can serve as shared guidelines for how team members interact with one another. Have a discussion with your team in which student-athletes share what they need from others to be able to engage with the team as their full selves. Agree on team values that encourage behaviors that are consistent with what team members need to feel supported by the team.
    - I'd like to take this a step further
        - Every team member brings different perspectives to the team, due to their unique combination of identities and experiences. Consequently, it is possible that team members agree that a set of values are important, but they may have different understandings of

how these values are demonstrated through everyday behaviors. Have a team discussion in which the team develops examples of behaviors that demonstrate the values that the team has claimed. Team values may also change over the years, depending upon the interests and needs of current members. Are there any behaviors that team members believe are important to ensure that team members feel supported that are not prioritized by one of your current team values?

■ Consider how team social media and events reflect these values. If your team values include respect and inclusion, do you post content advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion in sport, including but not limited to LGBTQI+-inclusion in sport, on your social media? Does your team dedicate a home game to be a Pride Night?

- How does the athletic department ensure safety for student-athletes on campus?
  - I'd like to get started
    - Evaluate, develop, and publicly share policies that provide legal protections for student-athletes against discrimination such as a nondiscrimination policy, a sexual misconduct policy, a transgender and nonbinary student-athlete inclusion policy, and a fan code of conduct
  - I'd like to take this a step further
    - Consider how these policies are reinforced by everyday practices, such as using inclusive language, providing gender-inclusive locker room facilities, providing gender-inclusive uniforms.
- How do you collaborate across campus for inclusion?
  - I'd like to get started
    - Host an event for Athletics staff and/or student-athletes in collaboration with your campus LGBTQI+ Center, such as a brown bag lunch discussion, training about LGBTQI+ inclusion, or Pride home game that includes sharing informational materials about LGBTQI+ inclusion.
  - I'd like to take this a step further
    - Develop an Athletics Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force that includes committee members from centers across campus, Athletic Dept. staff, and student-athletes, to work together on

initiatives such as developing a department trans and nonbinary athlete inclusion policy, or planning educational events for staff and student-athletes. (Examples include Marist College Athletics' Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action (IDEA) Committee and Towson University Athletics' LGBTQ+ Inclusion Workgroup.)

- How do you provide opportunities for well-rounded leadership development?
  - I'd like to get started
    - Consider what educational opportunities student-athletes have access to, and in which they are encouraged to be engaged. Do team members regularly participate in educational opportunities about diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as a Safe Zone training or brown bag lunch with a speaker addressing LGBTQI+-inclusion?
  - I'd like to take this a step further
    - Engage student-athletes in planning events for the team and the department to contribute to education about LGBTQ+-inclusion. They may be members of an Athletics Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, start a student-led Athlete Ally Chapter, or form a sub-committee that is part of SAAC.
    - Engage student-athletes in the Athletic Department's efforts to develop policies and practices that are outlined in the Athletic Equality Index.
- How do you invest in ongoing learning opportunities for staff to support student-athletes?
  - I'd like to get started
    - Invite the campus LGBTQI+ center to offer a training, such as Safe Zone, for Athletic Department staff
  - I'd like to take this a step further
    - Plan a series of brown bag lunches with guest speakers who are experts on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including but not limited to LGBTQI+ inclusion from the campus community and outside of the college/university, from organizations such as Athlete Ally and Return on Inclusion.

Part 2: Guide for Inclusive Recruiting Questionnaires

Recruiting forms are one of your first points of contact with prospective student-athletes. The questions that are asked and the language used in a recruiting form can communicate that you and your team strive to be inclusive of LGBTQI+ and gender nonconforming student-athletes and family members. Additionally, recruiting forms are an opportunity for prospective student-athletes to share about themselves with the coaching staff. Enabling them to describe themselves through fill-in options allows them to share about who they are with you in their own terms, rather than conforming to prescriptive, check-the-box options that may not reflect who they are. Furthermore, recruiting does not end when an athlete is signed. How will you make sure that the language used in the forms is used consistently throughout each student-athlete's experience, including on intake forms, in athlete profiles, in articles about them, and during everyday interactions?

Preferred Name
Ask prospective student-athletes to share their preferred name. Many names are gendered, and the name that a prospective student-athlete was assigned at birth may not align with their gender identity. Asking prospective student-athletes' to share their preferred name enables them to tell you how they want to be referred to, and using this name demonstrates respect for their self-ascribed identity.

Pronouns
Ask prospective student-athletes to share their pronouns. Pronouns should not be assumed due to participation on a women's or men's team, nor due to a prospective student-athletes' name or appearance. Possible pronouns may be listed (such as she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, and he/him/his) and a fill in the blank option should also be provided. Do not label the fill in blank option as other. This suggests that the listed options are normal and the identity filled in the blank space is abnormal. Instead, the fill in the blank may be labeled as "Not listed."

Gender Identity
Sports teams are organized according to sex assigned at birth. A prospective student-athlete's gender identity should not be assumed based on their sex assignmed at birth. Their gender also should not be assumed due to their name or appearance. Allow student-athletes to share their gender identity. Possible gender identities may be

listed (such as nonbinary, woman, man) and a fill in the blank option should also be provided. As stated above, do not label the fill in blank option as "other." This suggests that the listed options are normal and the identity filled in the blank space is abnormal. Instead, the fill in the blank may be labeled as "Not listed." If you ask for caregivers', guardians', and/or siblings' gender identity, using the same approach demonstrates inclusivity and respect for their identities as well.

Caregivers and Guardians
If you ask prospective student-athletes to share information about their caregivers and guardians, use these words in the place of the word "parents," or "mother" and "father." The words "mother" and "father" assume the gender identity of caregivers and guardians, while "caregivers" and "guardians" are inclusive of all gender-identities. Additionally, prospective student-athletes may be cared for by an adult who is not their parent. Using the words "caregiver" and "guardian" is inclusive of many family structures.

Siblings
If you ask prospective student-athletes to share information about their siblings, use the word "siblings" rather than brothers and sisters. The words "brother" and "sister" assume the gender identity of a prospective student-athletes' siblings, while "siblings" is inclusive of all gender identities.

Sample Recruiting Form

<u>Prospective student-athlete information</u>

First Name:

Last Name:

Preferred Name:

Gender Identity:

Man

Woman

Nonbinary

Not listed:

Pronouns:

She/her/hers

They/them/theirs

He/him/his

Not listed:

<u>Caregiver/Guardian 1</u>

First Name:

Last Name:

Pronouns:

She/her/hers

They/them/theirs

He/him/his

Not listed:

<u>Caregiver/Guardian 2 (if applicable)</u>

First Name:

Last Name:

Pronouns:

She/her/hers

They/them/theirs

He/him/his

Not listed:

<u>Siblings (if applicable)</u>

First Name:

Last Name:

Pronouns:

She/her/hers

They/them/theirs

He/him/his

Not listed:

First Name:

Last Name:

Pronouns:

She/her/hers

ATHLETE ALLY

They/them/theirs

He/him/his

Not listed: