



CLEVELAND + AKRON

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## Gay Games salutes NBA's Jason Collins

### 'First' announcement has special meaning for gay athletes

CLEVELAND, OHIO (APRIL 29, 2013) – The 2014 Gay Games presented by the Cleveland Foundation salutes Jason Collins for his courage to come out today as the first openly gay athlete for a major U.S. men's professional sports team.

"This is huge – just the fact that there is someone who is stepping up to deal with public scrutiny and is brave enough to come out," says Rob Smitherman, director of sports operations for the Gay Games.

"He's going to be on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. That shows how far things are turning around for LGBT athletes in professional sports," he says.

Smitherman continues, "Athletes don't have to fear as much repercussion these days for being open about their sexual orientation. Many people thought they would lose or not secure sponsors if they announced they were gay or lesbian, but that is changing. Nike has even been very public in announcing its support for the first openly gay or lesbian professional athletes.

"He doesn't have to hide and that's nice. He can be himself and that will probably make him a better basketball player," Smitherman says.

A basketball player himself, Smitherman is particularly pleased. "He can play on my basketball team any time," he says, adding he would be happy to have Collins supporting other gay athletes at the Gay Games scheduled for August 9-16 in Cleveland and Akron, Ohio.

#### About the Gay Games

The Gay Games are an international sporting and cultural event held every four years. Launched in 1982, the Games invite participation from all competitors regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political beliefs, athletic or artistic ability, age, physical challenge or health status.

The 2014 Gay Games presented by the Cleveland Foundation will be August 9-16, 2014, in venues around Cleveland and Akron, Ohio, in the United States. More than 35 sports and culture events will be held, with more than 11,000 participants from more than 65 countries expected to join the Games. For more information, visit [www.gg9cle.com](http://www.gg9cle.com).