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## Athletic Trainers

A group of gay hockey players works to make life easier for the future John Amaechis and Dave Kopays of the world.

By Neal Broverman

Thanks to a mix of raging hormones and peer pressure, locker rooms are often terrifying places for young gay athletes. So says 41-year-old Denver real estate agent Glenn Witman, who often found himself in towel-snapping environs as a high school baseball, football, and hockey player. Witman, the current president and captain of the G-Force Hockey club, an all-star team of the best gay male players from across North America, is now working to make locker rooms—and fields, courts, and rinks—less terrifying for young gays in sports.

Witman's interest began in earnest four years ago when G-Force took part in a "gay versus straight" all-star game in Aspen. (G-Force lost that first year and the next but won the following three matches.)

"We got some decent media coverage out of [the game]," Witman says. "I started getting phone calls from different kids around the country. I would talk to them for a while about being gay in sports and then pass them off to another player on the team more their age."



Phone calls from gay athletes began rolling in on a regular basis, and Witman and his G-Force players continued offering suggestions and advice, and, sometimes, just lent an ear. Then, after last fall's wave of high-profile LGBT youth suicides, Witman wanted to heighten awareness of his fledgling mentor program. He hired a publicist, who named the program the Athlete Buddy System and reached out to media about it.

"We need to start pushing this forward because it really helps people," Witman says, reporting an uptick in calls in October and November.

G-Force also sponsors "Invisible Athlete" forums at universities and high schools, where sportsmen like former Dartmouth lacrosse player Andrew Goldstein and former University of Pennsylvania hockey captain Dave Farber talk about being out in sports. A January 20 forum at the University of Denver is scheduled to be moderated by Philadelphia Flyers scout Patrick Burke, the brother of Brendan Burke, the gay student manager for the hockey team at Ohio's Miami University who died in a car accident in February 2010. In addition, Witman is working with high schools and universities, including the University of Toronto and the University of Denver, to develop antibullying policies.



"Being a gay athlete in school is one of the hardest things to deal with," Witman says. "These are the most closeted group of gays, because they're always hearing 'gay' this, 'fag' that. I know if I could have talked to another gay athlete when I was a kid, it would've been life-changing."

Go to [GForceHockey.com](http://GForceHockey.com) for information on the group's programs and forums.