



TOP
blog
STORIES



Marijuana
Brian Vicente on
crossing state
line with MMJ

By Michael Roberts



News
Mexican band
mistakenly
beaten by
Denver cops?

By Michael Roberts



Things to Do
Does size matter
in Extreme
Midget
Wrestling?

By Michael Roberts

Things to Do

Gay athletes panel: Patrick Burke shares his late brother Brendan's positive coming-out story

By Michael Roberts, Thu., Jan. 20 2011 @ 11:49AM

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As Melanie Asmar's post about [gay jokes at the Stock Show rodeo](#) demonstrates, homophobia isn't exactly a thing of the past. But Patrick Burke, who's moderating "Invisible Athletes," a panel discussion about gay athletes at 6 p.m. tonight on the Denver University campus (details below), believes talking about the issue is a good way to change hearts and minds. His best example? The experiences of his late brother, Brendan.



Big pics below.

Hockey is in the Burke family's DNA. Dad Brian is the general manager for the Toronto Maple Leafs and served in the same role for the U.S. hockey team at the 2010 Winter Olympics. Patrick is a scout for the Philadelphia Flyers. And Brendan skated for Miami University in Ohio -- and made international news thanks to a [2009 ESPN feature](#) in which he publicly announced that he was gay.



Not that Brendan kept his sexual orientation a secret from those close to him. "He was already out to his hockey team, and he was already out to his friends and his family -- and he had been supported unanimously," Patrick says. "There were no issues with friends, no issues with his team. And because of that, he felt he was in a safe place, where his story might be used as an example for others who might not feel they were

in such a safe place."

As for the public's response, Patrick says it was "almost universally positive. The only negatives were the type of anonymous Internet comments that aren't even worth discussing. My father spoke to everyone in the NHL on an executive level, and I spoke with everyone at the coaching and scouting level, and it was all positive."

Tragically, Brendan is no longer able to serve as a role model for the modern gay athlete. He died last February in an Indiana car crash caused by bad weather, Patrick says. But the Burke family remains devoted to spreading the message that homosexuality among athletes isn't something needs to be hidden.

"I think that's why we need forums like this one," Patrick maintains. "Most of the positivity we received was in private -- an e-mail someone sent to me, or having someone pull me aside in a press box. It's difficult to get thirty NHL general managers and a thousand hockey players to line up and say, 'We're okay with this.' So we need to have meaningful discussions such as this to let everyone know there are people in the sports world who are not homophobic and are completely supportive. Every time we get people to talk about this issue, it makes the hockey world safer for the next generation of gay athletes."



Brendan and Patrick.

The DU panel goes beyond hockey. In addition to David Farber, onetime captain of the University of Pennsylvania hockey team, speakers include Andrew Goldstein, a former All-American goalie for the Dartmouth College lacrosse team, and Brandy Ranshaw, who was part of the U.S. Ski Team and a qualifier on the women's pro circuit.

Patrick expects the conversation to be fascinating.

"I think for people in the Denver community who are either sports fans or have friends who are gay or who are just curious about the issue, this is going to be a very interesting forum," he says. "I think it's going to be fun and educational -- and do a lot of good."

The event takes place at the Driscoll Ballroom, in DU's Driscoll Student Center, 2055 E. Evans, Denver, Colorado. Click [here](#) for more details. Here's the flyer:





A forum held at the University of Denver



Join us to hear the experiences of

INVISIBLE ATHLETES

A discussion of issues facing gays in sports.

EVERYONE WELCOME

Who: GForce Hockey in conjunction with the University of Denver's Center for Multicultural Excellence; Undergrad Student Government; Gender & Women's Studies; and DU Athletics & Recreation.

What: Philadelphia Flyers scout Patrick Burke will moderate a panel of gay athletes as they present their personal stories and experiences. The forum will then be opened up to questions from the audience.

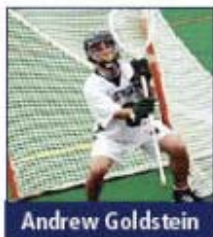
When: Thursday, January 20, 2011, from 6:00–7:30 p.m.

Where: Driscoll Ballroom, Driscoll Student Center, 2055 E. Evans on the University of Denver campus.



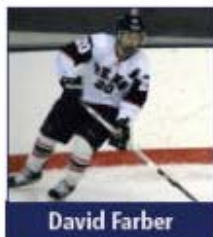
Patrick Burke

Scout for the NHL's Philadelphia Flyers and son of former NHL player and current Toronto Maple Leafs GM Brian Burke.



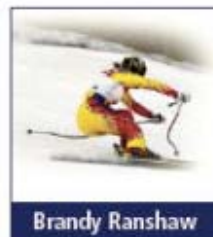
Andrew Goldstein

Former All-American goalie of the Dartmouth College lacrosse team and commentator on gay athletic issues for ESPN.



David Farber

Former scoring leader and captain of the University of Pennsylvania hockey team.



Brandy Ranshaw

Former member of the U.S. Ski Team and women's pro circuit qualifier.

OUR MISSION: GForce Hockey, a Denver, Colorado-based non-profit, seeks to break down negative stereotypes about gay athletes through competitive play and educational outreach. By demonstrating competitiveness, teamwork, pride and courage on the ice, and relating our diverse stories and experiences as gay athletes off the ice, we create a dialogue that changes the perceived differences between gay and straight athletes. We strive to create a sports landscape where athletes and coaches are judged by the possibilities of their talent and effort rather than their sexual orientation. WWW.GFORCEHOCKEY.COM

More from our [News archive](#): "[Gay teen suicides: GLBT Center tackles issue without attacking Focus on the Family.](#)"

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3