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Gay slurs rejected in the NBA

By Pepe Lozano

Gay slurs in professional sports are unacceptable and show irresponsibility on the part of both athletes and, if homophobic language is not adequately addressed, the entire industry, activists say. Professional athletes are role models to millions, and using anti-gay phrases should not be tolerated, especially when so many in the sports world still seek acceptance and equal rights based on their sexual orientation, they add.

The issue has come full circle recently, and LGBT rights groups, in partnership with the National Basketball Association and its star players, have taken measures to address it, despite recent setbacks.

Weeks after major advertisements by NBA star players supporting gay rights hit the airwaves, Chicago Bulls forward Joakim Noah was seen on national television May 22 shouting an anti-LGBT slur to a heckling fan during Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Finals.

Noah had gotten into early foul trouble against the Miami Heat in the first quarter before being benched. The fan insulted Noah, leading to the poor choice of words. The Bulls ended up losing, and Noah immediately apologized. The NBA fined Noah \$50,000 for his inappropriate actions.

Since then, Noah has said he wants to put the incident behind him and that he hopes to learn from the situation.



“You know, all my best friends live downtown in New York City. I was made in Soho,” Noah told ESPN’s Kevin Arnovitz. “Sometimes, when you’re at this level, you don’t realize the consequences of how much a word can bother people. My mom’s best friend was gay. So I’m disappointed because that’s not me. I didn’t mean any harm to anybody. I don’t want anyone to feel disrespected by what I said, and I understand that’s what’s going to happen.”

Last month, the Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant issued a similar apology after he too was seen on television yelling the same anti-gay slur at a referee after a technical foul was issued against

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him. Bryant was fined \$100,000, because his actions were directed at an official. Bryant said his words were “stupid and ignorant” and not indicative of his views toward the LGBT community.

LGBT rights groups and the National Basketball Association and its star players, have taken measures to address homophobia.

“Last month, the NBA sent an important message about how such slurs fuel a climate of intolerance and are unacceptable,” said Jarret Barrios, president of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, in a recent statement on the groups website. “These anti-gay remarks [Joakim Noah’s], coming so soon after, demonstrate how much needs to be done.”

Barrios continued, “Noah’s apology is a start. We are confident that the NBA will now take disciplinary measures and hasten its work with us to tell players that there is no place for anti-gay words and attitudes in the game.”

“It’s unfortunate,” Miami Heat forward LeBron James told the Chicago Sun-Times. “I don’t think Joakim is that person. Like he said, he’s not that [prejudiced] guy. He made a mistake, and he’s paying the price for it. All of us understand there are times when you become emotional. Things get said that you don’t mean. You just have to be more careful. Understand that there are kids watching, people watching, that look up to us as role models.”

Meanwhile, a major public service advertisement was launched by the Gay, Lesbian and

Straight Education Network to address the use of anti-gay language among teens. The commercial, which is being aired during NBA play-off games, features Phoenix Suns players Grant Hill and Jared Dudley and is an extension of the award-winning Think Before You Speak campaign.

Phoenix Suns star Steve Nash also voiced his support for gay marriage in a public video recently released by the Washington, D.C.-based Human Rights Campaign. “A growing number of professional athletes are speaking out in support of gay and lesbian couples getting married. I’m proud to be one of them. Join me and the supermajority of New Yorkers who support marriage equality,” Nash says in the video.

Phoenix Suns executive Rick Welts announced he is gay; supporters say his decision marks a new era of acceptance in the sports world.

“First of all, society discriminates against gay people,” said Hall of Famer Charles Barkley. “I’ve been a big proponent of gay marriage for a long time, because as a black person, I can’t be for any form of discrimination at all.”



Pepe Lozano is a writer for the People’s World.

Elizabeth Warren versus corporate shills

By PW Editorial Board

Republicans are practically foaming at the mouth in their crusade to block the nomination of Elizabeth Warren to head the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. In a House subcommittee meeting this week they fired a barrage of insults and completely baseless attacks at her.

It was so bad that Democratic subcommittee member John Yarmuth of Kentucky felt compelled to apologize to Warren. He pointed to what it’s really about, telling her:

“This hearing is all about impugning you because people are afraid of you and your ability to communicate in very clear terms the threats to our consumers and the threats to our constituents and possibly very, very effective ways to combat them.”

Republicans have been battling the creation of the CFPB since President Obama proposed it.

ThinkProgress notes that “Warren in particular has emerged as the GOP’s primary enemy on the issue.”

Warren has a long record as an expert and outspoken defender of consumers - in other words,

a defender of the American public. As head of the Congressional Oversight Panel looking into the TARP bank bailouts in 2009, she even challenged the Obama administration for handing over bailout money to banks who then turned around and jacked up homeowners’ mortgage interest rates or slashed people’s credit lines.

This simple, modest step to protect the public is just “too much for the lords of finance to stomach,” as columnist Sam Webb wrote here recently. He noted that the Wall Street lobbying machine has “gone into overdrive” to crush or weaken this and other financial reform measures.

Their Republican frontmen in the Senate are now trying to use a procedural maneuver to block the president from making a recess appointment of Elizabeth Warren while the Senate is on break next week.

“Bottom line,” our columnist John Case said last summer, “you want credit or a mortgage that doesn’t turn into Frankenstein on you?? - call and write your senators and congressperson to confirm Elizabeth Warren.”

Do it now.

Republicans have been battling the creation of the CFPB since President Obama proposed it.

Union helped hotel worker stand up to IMF chief

By John Wojcik

Several articles in the major media are discussing the high risk of sexual assault that housekeepers face in hotels. Sexual assault and harassment is rampant, maids are afraid to complain to management because of fear of losing their jobs and perpetrators think there is little chance they'll get caught.

Dominique-Strauss Kahn, former chief of the International Monetary Fund, wasn't so lucky, however, because he picked the wrong place to prey on a worker - a union hotel in New York.

"After he was arrested there was a lot of self-congratulatory praise and back slapping for how well this was handled in the United States, as opposed to how it might have been handled in some European countries, including France," said Tula Connell, a spokesman for the AFL-CIO. (A number of articles on the case claim matters involving sexual predation are more routinely swept under the rug in European countries.)

"But speaking out publicly against so powerful a world figure from the vantage of a hotelmaid required guts and, in addition, it required a union."

Connell cited an article by Adele Stan, an independent journalist, that said, "By any measure it was risky. There's a reason most rapes go unreported. But there was one thing that the housekeeper knew could not be done to her for reporting her account, she could not be fired because of her membership in a union, the New York Hotel Trades Council."

In a statement issued by the labor-backed Center for Economic Policy and Research, their director Dean Baker said, "In this particular case, the housekeeper belonged to a union that has provisions in its contract that require the management to take cases of sexual assault seriously. This meant the housekeeper knew that she could



make a complaint to management and not worry about being ridiculed or putting her job at risk."

Most workers in the hospitality industry are non-union and have few rights. They can be disciplined or fired without cause at any time. Those who are undocumented live almost entirely without any protection from the law.

The union says that management philosophy in the luxury service business expects workers to behave with extreme civility toward customers, who are called "guests." The "customer is always right" philosophy holds sway, the union says.

Stassel said the most common incidents are men answering the door naked, and workers being asked for sex, with or without pay.

Since the Strauss-Kahn arrest, many are speaking out more to one another, according to Arelia Valdiva, an organizer with Unite Here, Local 11 in Los Angeles.

Stassel said maids often don't report sexual harassment because "it happens so often."

"Union contracts are important," she said, "because they empower workers to speak up and demand justice."

Maids often don't report sexual harassment because it happens so often.

Michigan 2012 race has begun

By Joel Wendland

Citizens United, a Supreme Court decision that eliminated disclosure laws and limits on much campaign spending, Republicans have an almost bottomless well of money to buy misleading TV attack ads from shady front groups with innocuous sounding names.

Well-organized people-to-people campaigns have shown, however, that such drives can be beaten.

The presidential election holds special implications for working families in Michigan, a key state for the Electoral College vote tally.

Republicans are also targeting Sen. Debbie Stabenow. In their quest for a filibuster-proof 60 votes, they need to unseat her. But her popularity and leadership have proven a huge obstacle for even finding a Republican opponent.

In addition, only nine seats are needed to flip the state House of Representatives to Democratic control to check the current unfettered power of the GOP in the state. Unseating two Republican members of the state Supreme Court will also be an important line on the 2012 ballot.

Anxiety and hardship due to the economic crisis in Michigan and over-confidence about the 2008 election probably suppressed the vote here, leading to very odd electoral outcomes in 2010. The tide in Michigan is turning. People are fed up with the right-wing agenda. That isn't what they voted for in 2010.

Resisting Republican policies now is important, but harnessing this anger to mobilize a big electoral victory in 2012, including the reelection of the president in 2012, a progressive majority in Congress, and key state and local level candidates and issues will be just as important.

Tornado en Joplin, Misurí, el más mortífero en 60 años

Por Alan Scher Zagier and Jim Salter

Los socorristas se centraron en las tiendas y complejos de apartamentos de Joplin, abriendo agujeros en losas de concreto y buscando entre artículos regados, en una frenética búsqueda de sobrevivientes del tornado que dejó 117 muertos, el más mortífero que haya sufrido Estados Unidos en unos 60 años.

Sin inmutarse por relámpagos, ventarrones, la lluvia y el frío, los socorristas buscaban víctimas entre viviendas, negocios y vehículos destruidos por el tornado en esta localidad de Misurí, mientras los pronósticos del clima advierten de una posible nueva tanda de temporales.

La cifra de víctimas fatales alcanzó 117 el martes y posiblemente aumente. El número de muertos es el mayor en casi seis décadas.

Los socorristas rescataron el lunes a 17 personas de entre los escombros y el gobernador Jay Nixon dijo que las cuadrillas continuarán las búsquedas hasta que se conozca el paradero de todos los desaparecidos.

“Los socorristas creen que todavía hay personas vivas”, dijo Nixon a The Associated Press. Se trajeron reflectores para que continuaran las búsquedas durante la noche del lunes al martes.

Un tornado causó estragos el domingo por la noche en el centro de Joplin, una localidad de 50.000 personas al sur de Misurí y cuya fuerza laboral la constituyen obreros manuales. El meteoro causó daños en el

Centro Médico Regional de St. John.

El hospital confirmó que cinco de los fallecidos eran pacientes, todos ellos en condición crítica antes de que pegara el tornado. Un visitante también pereció en el hospital.

El tornado destruyó posiblemente “miles” de viviendas, dijo el jefe de bomberos, Mitch Randles, a la AP. El fenómeno arrasó con cientos de negocios, incluidos algunos grandes como la tienda para materiales de construcción Home Depot y una tienda Wal-Mart.

El desastre fue el segundo de mayor magnitud que deja un tornado en menos de un mes. En abril, una serie de remolinos recorrieron seis estados del sur con resultado de al menos 300 muertos, poco más de dos tercios de estos en Alabama.

En Joplin, una parte del paisaje de la localidad quedó irreconocible. Casas en hileras fueron reducida a escombros, numerosos automóviles quedaron aplastados como latas de gaseosas y numerosos residentes, todavía conmocionados, recorrían calles en busca de los desaparecidos de sus familias.

El peligro para nada ha terminado. Persistían diversos incendios debido a fugas de gas en la localidad. El ambiente olía a amoníaco y propano en algunas zonas de desastre.

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