

THE 2010 GAY GAMES

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In 1982, a physician from San Francisco named Tom Waddell founded what he initially called “the Gay Olympics”, renamed the Gay Games after the IOC (represented by then-attorney Vaughn Walker, our recent hero-judge of late in the 9th Circuit court striking down California’s Proposition 8) objected. Since then, every four years, there has been an international sporting competition of LGBT athletes and our allies competing in the usual summer Olympics events (track and field, swimming and diving, volleyball and weight-lifting) and those you’d maybe not expect (chess, bridge, ballroom dancing and figure skating). This year, 10,000 LGBT athletes and our allies turned up to compete.

I’d decided a year ago, at the urging of my psychologist friend John O’Brien, to run the marathon at the Games. I’d run a marathon before, and although I knew what a grueling experience it was, I’d been training for a year, and felt I was prepared to do 26.2 miles – in the company of other LGBT athletes. But what I wasn’t prepared for was how it would feel, as part of the US team, to march into a stadium roaring with spectators cheering us on in our events, and cheering for all of us as a community of LGBT jocks. Who knew? The Opening Ceremony was moving beyond description. I wept as I marched; the sound of the crowd, the recognition that we were all members of a marginalized community engaged in sports, and that this was our time, was incredibly moving. Is this real, I wondered as we marched through the stadium to the roar of the crowd.

After composing myself, I wept again as the German Secretary of State gave a rousing speech about “religion never being an excuse for murder”. I wept as the “Olympic” flame was lit and I wept as Olympic Gold medalist diver Matt Meacham

took the oath of athletes for all of us. When it was over, I couldn't tell if my tears had been joy, relief, grief, or a combination of all those emotions.

My week with the LGBT athletes of the world was phenomenal. For the entire week, I felt that we were not only engaging in our favorite sports and supporting each other in so doing, but that we were visible - totally and fully integrated and valued in the life of a major city. My event, the Marathon, was the very last of all the competitions. It was a sunny, beautiful day, and the course was extraordinary: through lovely woods and out into a meadow reminiscent of the opening scene of "The Sound of Music". Exhilarated, on the first of two 13-mile laps, I felt like Julie Andrews (the second time around, I felt more like one of the cows). Nevertheless, at the finish line, I was greeted by my friend Stuart Anthony (Gold Medalist for the British Squash team), and did honor for my friend Brad, to whom my run had been dedicated.

An entire week with other LGBT athletes made this an unforgettable experience. We were unified, together in our community, and having a great time. I never imagined anything like this in my entire life. For me, in Cologne, Germany, a dream came true.