

THOMAS HITZLSPERGER

Thomas Hitzlsperger, a former German international who has spent many years playing professional football in Germany and abroad, speaks publicly about his homosexuality.

Personal statement

Munich, 9 January 2014

A free and conscious decision

I have come to realise over a considerable period of time that I am homosexual. I have now made the decision to declare this publicly. It is also a good time to do so, because my active career as an athlete has come to an end and a new phase of my life is now beginning. For a number of years I have taken the view that the intrusive questions about my sexuality and that of other footballers have to stop. They force weaker people to live a lie. If the issue of homosexuality is to be debated, however, then I would like to offer my own contribution to what is being said, glossed over or concealed.

I am not under any pressure or coercion from an outing campaign. On the contrary, I have taken a conscious decision to confront publicly the prejudice and hostility shown towards homosexuals. I have nothing to be ashamed of.

End of a phase of life

In recent years I have gradually come to realise my own inclinations. At first, I simply could not find the right words – I could not even have spoken about it at home or in my circle of friends, and certainly not in the team.

After several injuries, doctors advised me to end my professional career in the summer of 2013. This gave me a lot of time to think and reflect on my life. It became clear to me during this period that a new start included being open about my sexuality.

Solidarity and support

I did not come to a sudden realisation overnight – it was a process that had to run its course. I only began to talk about it with my family and friends about three years ago. They showed great solidarity and support, and still do. I'm very fortunate to have this and am very grateful for it. It shows me that the people who know and value me do not define me by my sexual orientation, but see

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in me the sportsman and person Thomas Hitzlsperger and accept me for who I am.

Performance and passion

Football has always been at the centre of my life. I have lived the life of a professional player and identified wholeheartedly with football. My performance has always been my primary concern. For me, the issue of homosexuality has been virtually irrelevant. Whether in Germany, England or Italy, in the dressing room there are far more important things to talk about. There, it's all about the team. Professional players have other priorities. They include opportunities to play, whether they are in the team or on the bench, career and fitness, demands and performance, injuries and, often, criticism in the media. A player's thoughts on homosexuality rarely came up for discussion in the dressing room.

Reality instead of cliché and prejudice

Homosexuality is simply ignored in football. The media, on the other hand, have been interested in the subject for years. It's just that the players concerned have not dared to declare their inclinations, because the world of football still sees itself to some extent as a macho environment. The image of a gay player is typified by cliché and prejudice. The reality is rather different. People see a gay footballer as a contradiction in terms. And that is why virtually no professional player wants to expose himself to this kind of pressure. Each has to know when and how to take a stand. Over the past year a few professional athletes in other sporting disciplines have revealed their homosexuality. This is encouraging, and the hope is that at some stage it will cease to be something to write or talk about.

Not a spokesman

Every human being should be able to live without fear of discrimination due to his or her background, skin colour, sexual orientation or religion. I do not see this as a political statement, but as a self-evident fact. My disclosure has nothing to do with the World Cup, which I will not even be part of. I do hope, however, to take the public debate a step further. Our society is more open and tolerant than many people believe. Sexual orientation must no longer be treated as a scandal. That is also why the DFB (German Football Association) took a clear and unambiguous stand last year when it published a brochure on the subject of 'Football and homosexuality'.

Taking a new path

By taking this step in public, I hope to be able to encourage young players and professional athletes. I firmly believe that professional sport and homosexuality are not mutually exclusive. I will soon be following a new career path and facing new challenges. I will not forget my family, friends, colleagues and fans and my memories of those times.

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