



ST KILDA FOOTBALL CLUB MEDIA INFORMATION



Wednesday 20 July

History created – inaugural Pride Game launch

St Kilda will officially launch the inaugural AFL Pride Game against Sydney Swans today.

St Kilda CEO Matt Finnis said the Round 21 clash is believed to be the first Pride Game for a professional sporting competition in the world.

“This is a proud and important day for our football club and the AFL,” Finnis said.

“I want to pay tribute to Jason Ball and the Yarra Glen Football Club who initiated the 2014 Community Pride Cup which paved the way for this inaugural AFL Pride Game.”

Finnis said the Saints were committed to this game because ‘pride’ is the opposite of ‘shame’ and that St Kilda firmly believes that communities can only thrive when all people belong.

“This belief stems from our bayside birthplace where the annual Pride March takes place. It’s a progressive, eclectic place where everyone is welcome,” he said.

“Sadly, we know from research that many in the LGBTIQ community do not feel safe at sporting events and do not feel they can truly be themselves at sporting clubs.

“We want the LGBTIQ community to feel welcome and safe at AFL games and free to be themselves - this goes to the heart of our club’s *How I Want To Be* spirit.

“We also know that suicide rates in the LGBTIQ community are significantly higher than the wider community – that is a horrible fact and we want to do our part to help address that.”

In a show of support for the LGBTIQ community, St Kilda players will wear rainbow patterned numbers on their guernsey and Sydney players will wear rainbow socks.

The 50m arch, match-day ball and goal umpire flags will also be branded with the rainbow colours or logo – the symbol of LGBTIQ pride - and other ‘welcoming’ activations will also take place.

Sydney Swans CEO and Managing Director Andrew Ireland said the match will help raise awareness and champion change.

“The Sydney Swans are very proud to be playing in the AFL’s first Pride Game against St Kilda in Round 21,” Ireland said.

“The Swans aim to be a leader in offering an open, safe and inclusive environment that celebrates diversity. To that end, we are proud to have welcomed the Rainbow Swans as our official LGBTIQ supporter group.

“Our home at the SCG is in the heartland of the Mardi Gras, one of Sydney’s most colourful celebrations of diversity. One of the key messages of the Mardi Gras is to end homophobia in sport – it’s an issue our football club is passionate about and one we hope this match will raise awareness of.

“Through the Pride Game we have a wonderful opportunity to educate and show how sport can lead the way in creating change in our community.”

Jason Ball, who in 2012 became the first male Australian Rules football player at any level to publicly come out as gay in the media, said the game will send a powerful message to young LGBTIQ people all over Australia that they are welcome and safe in our sport.

“Growing up, the footy club was the one place I thought I’d never be accepted. Homophobic language was routinely used on the field and it left me scared to be myself,” Ball said.

“Struggling in silence with my identity caused me so much heartache and pushed me to a very dark place. An event like this Pride Game would have made all the difference and given me confidence that I could belong.

“I’ve seen the impact a Pride Game had in my local community; it has changed the culture of clubs and created a safer, more inclusive environment for all players and supporters. I am so proud to see it taken to the national stage and I have no doubt it will be a life-changing event for many within the AFL family.”

VicHealth Mental Wellbeing Program Manager, Irene Verins, said the Pride Game is about taking a stand against homophobia and celebrating diversity.

“Playing or watching sport is a powerful way of bringing people together. The focus should be on the competition and enjoyment of the day, not on anyone’s sexuality.”

“VicHealth is supporting the Pride Game because of the extremely serious impact homophobia has on mental wellbeing.

“The statistics are incredibly worrying. Same-sex attracted Australians are up to three times more likely to experience depression and have up to 14 times higher rates of suicide attempts than their heterosexual peers.

“That’s why VicHealth is proud to stand alongside St Kilda FC to support the Pride Game and what it stands for – raising public awareness and educating the whole AFL community about how they can become more inclusive for LGBTIQ supporters, players and officials.”

Key Statistics

Homophobia in sport statistics¹

- 87% of young gay Australians who play sport feel forced to completely, or partially, hide their sexuality
- 57% of participants think adult sport was not a safe place for LGB people who are open about their sexuality
- 80% of all participants and 82% of LGB participants said they have witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport
- 78% of participants believe an openly gay, lesbian or bi-sexual person would not be very safe as a spectator at a sporting event.

¹Statistics taken from ‘Out on the fields’ - the first international, and the largest study conducted into the experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people in team sporting environments - <http://www.outonthefields.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Out-on-the-Fields-Final-Report.pdf>

Mental health impacts of homophobia

- Same-sex attracted Australians have up to 14 times higher rates of suicide attempts than their heterosexual peers.²
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are three times more likely to experience depression.³
- Around 60 per cent of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people said they experienced verbal abuse because of their sexuality, while 18 per cent reported experiencing physical abuse.³

² <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/bw0258-lgbti-mental-health-and-suicide-2013-2nd-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

³ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/FTFLGBTI.pdf>

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