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Pride march a 'game changer' for Stockholm football clubs

Published: 31 Jul 09 11:29 CET

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As **Stockholm** gears up for the weekend's Pride Parade, The Local's Gabriel Stein takes a look at the difficulties facing two Stockholm-area football clubs as they attempt to show their solidarity with the city's gay community.

- **Football clubs take a stand for gay pride** (2 Aug 09)
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For the first time, two of Stockholm's professional sports clubs, including representatives from their professional football teams, will participate in Stockholm's Pride Parade this Saturday.

While many applauded the move, it has also sparked a passionate debate within the male-dominated, masculine arena of Swedish football, and throughout the entire Swedish sports community.

Earlier this spring, AIK, Sweden's largest sports club and the parent organization of a popular professional football team, invited its rival club and football team, Hammarby, to join them in the annual parade. Both clubs announced the landmark decision in the beginning of July.

"We have come to this point after many years of hard work," says Jessica W. Sandberg, press spokesperson for the Stockholm Pride Festival, the largest pride festival in the Nordics.

"Both AIK and Hammarby are making history. Not only are they making an important statement for equal rights for all, but they are challenging many people's attitudes in their own community."

But some football fans, more known to chant, scream, drink alcohol and sometimes illegally shoot off fireworks in stadiums or brawl outside of them, disagree. In recent days discussions on football forums and fan websites have taken on a more serious tone.

Some have responded with overt homophobia, but the majority who are opposed to their clubs' participation argue, at least in public, that it is wrong for sports clubs to get involved in what they consider external affairs that are unrelated to football.

"To participate in a festival that takes a stance on an issue is to make a political statement despite how good or right the question may be," writes

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Daniel Sundqvist, Chairman of Bajen Fans, on a Hammarby fans' website.

Hammarby board member Henrik Appelqvist disagrees, and says fans who oppose the decision are in the minority.

"This was a political issue once upon a time, but we are way beyond that now. We decided to participate in the Stockholm Pride parade to make a clear statement that Hammarby is open to everyone," he says.

Sweden has a reputation as being one of the most open and liberal societies in the world and has historically been at the forefront in providing rights to homosexual, bisexual and transgendered people.

In the mid-1990s, gay couples were given legal partnership rights. And this April Sweden became the fifth country in Europe to allow same-sex marriage. Even the Church of Sweden has said that same-sex couples should be allowed to participate in religious wedding ceremonies. They will make their final decision this October.

However, if you compare the Swedish sports community to the Swedish military, for example, whose soldiers participate in the Stockholm Pride Parade in an official capacity and march openly in uniform, it becomes even more evident that the former has been slow to address homophobia. Only a day before the parade, none of the sports clubs' popular male football players have committed to marching through Stockholm on August 1st.

"In many ways football is the final barrier to break in Sweden when it comes to homophobia, or what I call collective homophobia," says Frank Ågren, Chairman of SFSU, the Swedish Football Supporter's Union. He recently came out in favour of his club's decision to participate in the parade in his weekly newspaper column.

"Most fans wouldn't consider themselves homophobic or anti-gay, but it is still common place to hear fans screaming 'fag' at a game," he says.

Many, like Johan Strömberg, Chairman and President of AIK, have been surprised how controversial the decision has been.

"I can't believe this is such a big question. Now that I see the emotions it has brought up, I am even more convinced that we made the right decision to participate. It is an obvious decision for us to stand up for human rights and equality," he says.

Despite the controversy, there is no doubt that AIK and Hammarby's support of the Stockholm Pride Festival is a game-changer, an impossible achievement ten years ago and unlikely in most any other country in the world.

"The question now is whether or not this discussion of homophobia in sports will die out or if we are able to grow it and make real change," says Mr. Ågren.

"That real change will come when we can make an impact in the locker rooms, with the players' association and with the younger players."

By Gabriel Stein

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13:15 July 31, 2009 by [ooh456](#) #1

This is a big deal. I support gay rights. It's a big step forward. Congratulations. Another great day for Sweden. Homophobia is not any more funny, cute, or justifiable than racism or any other form of discrimination.

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08:00 August 1, 2009 by [Str8RichardBlack](#) #2

Been in Sweden for less than 4 weeks and can not believe what I am seeing. It's sad that the state and the few in the media are validating a depraved lifestyle. Swedes already are seen as unmasculine do they need to walk in a homosexual parade? Western nations are dying.

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14:31 August 1, 2009 by [Ammaria](#) #3

This is a wonderful step in the right direction for gay rights. Excellent move from the two big sports actors - you will hopefully set the tone for other sports teams.

To signature Str8RichardBlack - get with the times and the new situation you are in. As a woman who has lived in several different countries, I can only say that there is nothing as masculine as a man who is secure in his sexuality and others' sexuality. A lack of prejudice in a person is of course also a beautiful characteristic. Hopefully you will reconsider your view on both masculinity and homosexuality. You have a lot to learn, best of luck to you.

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19:46 August 1, 2009 by [bocale1](#) #4

My compliments to AIK and Hammarby. I hope that their example will be followed by other football clubs. Prejudices on sexual orientation of people is an heritage of the middle age that we need to leave behind.

@Str8RichardBlack, racism and prejudices are depraved states of mind. Intolerance and military machismo are what is killing the entire world. Not the freedom of people of living according their preferences in the respect of each other diversity. Maybe this is the first lesson you should learn in Sweden, even before the local language.

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21:04 August 2, 2009 by [voiceofreason](#) #5

I'll like to see some gay parade through Rosengård, and a wedding in the mosque. I trust my muslim (I'm no muslim) brothers to do due justice.

This whole gay charade is just another attempt to cast of restrain and plunge further into depravity. It is not convenient lifestyle because the body is not even designed to work that way (laughs).

Smacks of a mind that as lost control to the body and is now dictated to by the genitals.

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07:10 August 3, 2009 by [peropaco](#) #6

I wonder if AIK and Hammarby would lend their support if it was a parade for abused children, battered wives, obese people, asylum seekers, blind people, abused men, constipated teenagers, single mothers, handicapped police officers. Etc. would the gay community support such initiative to have a parade for those other groups?. BTW, Hammarby and AIK suck big time.

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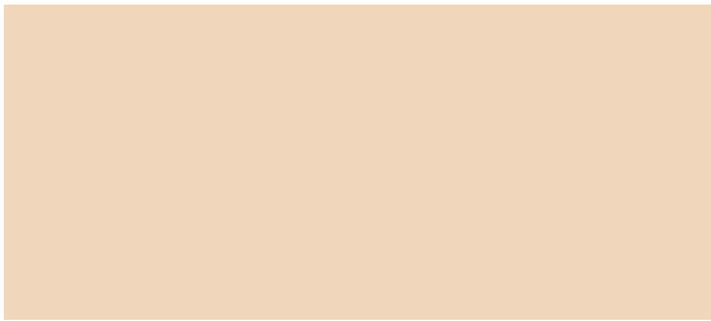
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