



PINK MEDIA

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LGBTQ+ SPORTS

Market Guide 2026



Gay Games XII València · Sin City Classic · Rugby & Soccer Worldwide
Swimming, Tennis, Softball & Flag Football · The League Universe
Pro Sports & Out Athletes · Marketing Best Practices

An in-depth companion report to the
2026 LGBTQ+ Marketplace Guide — celebrating 20 years

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Table of Contents

LGBTQ+ Sports Market Guide 2026

- 1 Introduction & About This Guide
- 2 From the Closet Locker Room to Team LGBTQ: A History
- 3 Market Size: The Queer Sports Economy
- 4 The 2026 LGBTQ+ Athlete & Fan
- 5 The Global Game: Rugby & Soccer
- 6 The Core Four: Swimming, Tennis, Softball & Flag Football
- 7 The Wider League Universe: Sport by Sport
- 8 Gay Games XII València 2026 & the Mega-Events
- 9 Sin City Classic & the Tournament Circuit
- 10 Pro Sports, Pride Nights & Out Athletes
- 11 Trans Athletes & the Inclusion Battleground
- 12 The Business Layer: Sponsorship, Tourism & Media
- 13 Marketing Sports to LGBTQ+ Audiences: Best Practices
- 14 Program & Campaign Spotlights: 2024–2026
- 15 Sources & Further Reading
- 16 About Pink Media

“The locker room was the last closet in American life — so the community built its own leagues, its own World Series, and its own Games. Ten thousand athletes in Vegas every January aren’t waiting for permission anymore.”

1 | Introduction & About This Guide

The most organized grassroots layer in the entire LGBTQ+ marketplace

Welcome to the **LGBTQ+ Sports Market Guide 2026**, the tenth in-depth companion to Pink Media's 2026 LGBTQ+ Marketplace Guide. This report maps queer sports end to end: **the global federations where rugby and soccer run deepest, the sport-by-sport league universe — swimming, tennis, softball, flag football and far beyond — the mega-events crowned by Gay Games XII in València this summer, the annual tournament circuit led by Las Vegas's Sin City Classic, the pro-sports and out-athlete story, and the business layer underneath it all.**

Sports is the LGBTQ+ marketplace's sleeper giant. While brands chase Pride parades, the community quietly built the most organized recreational infrastructure it owns: **hundreds of leagues, dozens of international federations, and a tournament calendar that moves tens of thousands of traveling athletes every year** — 10,000+ to Las Vegas each January alone, 9,000+ to València this summer. Every one of those athletes books flights, hotels, bar tabs, and team kits; every league is a ready-made community channel most marketers have never heard of.

This guide is designed for **sports brands and apparel makers, destinations and tourism boards bidding for events, pro leagues and teams building Pride programs, beverage and CPG sponsors, the federations and leagues themselves, and the agencies who serve them all.**

What's Inside

The history — from Tom Waddell's first Gay Games (1982) through Outsports' Team LGBTQ era.

The global team sports — International Gay Rugby's 100+ clubs on six continents and IGLFA soccer's 30-country reach, with the Bingham Cup heading to Brisbane.

The sport-by-sport map — aquatics (IGLA), tennis (GLTA World Tour), softball (the Gay Softball World Series, the largest annual single-sport LGBTQ+ event), flag football (the Gay Bowl — with the sport now LA28 Olympic-bound), and the wider league universe from volleyball to rodeo.

The events calendar — Gay Games XII València (June 27–July 4, 2026), the Sin City Classic (January, Las Vegas), and the group-by-group tournament circuit.

The business & marketing layer — sponsorship, sports tourism, media, and best practices with campaign spotlights.

A Note on Selection

As throughout this series: lists are arguments. Selections favor documented scale, longevity, and community standing; event dates are verified as of June 2026 but should be confirmed with organizers before contracting.

2 | From the Closet Locker Room to Team LGBTQ

Four decades of building a sports world of our own

1974–1982: The Founders

Queer sports organizing began where this series keeps finding origins — San Francisco and New York in the 1970s: **Front Runners** (1974, named for Patricia Nell Warren’s novel *The Front Runner*) made running the first organized queer sport; gay bowling (IGBO’s roots, 1980) and softball leagues followed. Then **Dr. Tom Waddell**, an Olympic decathlete, created the **first Gay Games (San Francisco, 1982)** — 1,350 athletes, and a USOC lawsuit that stripped the word “Olympics” from the event but not the idea: a Games built on participation, inclusion, and personal best.

1980s–1990s: The Federation Era

Through the AIDS years — which devastated the founding generation, including Waddell himself (1987) — the infrastructure multiplied: **IGRA rodeo (1985)**, **NAGVA volleyball**, **NAGAAA softball’s Gay Softball World Series** growing into the world’s largest annual LGBTQ+ single-sport event, **IGLA aquatics (1987)**, **GLTA tennis (1991)**, **IGLFA soccer (1992)** — and the Gay Games themselves growing to global scale (New York 1994 drew more athletes than that year’s Olympics). **Outsports launched in 1999** — the same dot-com moment as this series’ founding WSJ story — giving queer sports its newsroom.

2000s–2010s: Rugby, Visibility & the Pro Wall

International Gay Rugby formed in 2000; after 9/11 hero **Mark Bingham** — a gay rugby player aboard Flight 93 — the **Bingham Cup** (2002) became inclusive rugby’s world championship, and IGR earned formal World Rugby recognition. Pro sports cracked slowly: Jason Collins (NBA, 2013), Michael Sam’s draft moment, Robbie Rogers (MLS) — while women’s sports normalized out stardom decades earlier (Navratilova came out in 1981 and paid for it in sponsorships; Megan Rapinoe’s generation got the endorsements instead).

2020–2026: Team LGBTQ’s Era — and the Backlash

Outsports counted a record **~200 out Olympians at Paris 2024** (“Team LGBTQ” would have ranked high on the medal table as a country); Carl Nassib became the NFL’s first active out player (2021); Quinn became the first out trans Olympic champion (soccer, Tokyo). The same era brought the inclusion battleground of Chapter 11 — trans-athlete bans and the IOC’s 2025–26 policy shift — making community-run sports spaces more essential, not less. Which is exactly where 2026’s twin showcases arrive: **Sin City Classic in January, Gay Games XII València in June**.

3 | Market Size: The Queer Sports Economy

Athletes, fans & the travel math

10,000+

Athletes & allies at the Sin City Classic (Las Vegas, January) — the world's largest annual LGBTQ+ sports event

9,000+

Participants expected at Gay Games XII València, across 39 disciplines (June 27–July 4, 2026)

100+

Inclusive rugby clubs in International Gay Rugby, across six continents

~200

Out LGBTQ+ Olympians at Paris 2024 — a record (Outsports' Team LGBTQ count)

Three Economies in One

The participation economy: hundreds of recreational leagues — kickball to rugby — with dues, kits, sponsorship inventory, and bar partnerships in every major metro; the most local, most loyal layer in this entire series.

The event-travel economy: tournament weekends are pure travel product (the Travel guide's logic, in cleats): the Sin City Classic fills Las Vegas hotel blocks every January; the Gay Softball World Series brings 5,000+ athletes and 230+ teams to its host city; València expects a Games-scale tourism impact this summer. Destinations now bid for these events like conventions — because they are.

The fandom economy: LGBTQ+ fans over-index in women's sports (the WNBA's famously queer fanbase is a marketing fact of the league), Pride Nights run across all five major U.S. leagues, and queer sports media (Outsports, Compete) carries the conversation year-round.

Why the Money Follows

Sports solves the marketer's hardest LGBTQ+ problem — finding organized, year-round, real-world community at scale. A league sponsorship buys 30 weeks of jersey impressions, social content, and bar nights; a tournament title buys a city full of traveling athletes with disposable income and team loyalty. And the demographic engine repeats from every guide in this series: **23% of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQ+** (Gallup) — and they grew up with out athletes as the norm, not the news.

"Brands buy 30 seconds of the Super Bowl to reach people who watch sports. The Sin City Classic sells four days of people who actually play them — and book 10,000 hotel rooms doing it."

4 | The 2026 LGBTQ+ Athlete & Fan

Who plays, who watches & what moves them

Segment	What Drives Them
The league lifer	Plays 2–3 seasons a year across sports (softball summer, kickball fall, volleyball winter); the team is the friend group; fiercely loyal to league sponsors and the host bar.
The tournament traveler	Builds the year around Sin City, the World Series, the Gay Bowl, GLTA stops — flights, hotels, and after-parties included; the direct overlap with our Travel guide's event chapter.
The Games pilgrim	The quadrennial bucket-listers: Gay Games and EuroGames participants for whom València 2026 is part competition, part Pride, part reunion of a global village.
The women's-sports superfan	The WNBA/NWSL queer fanbase — watch parties at queer bars, jersey culture, and player-driven fandom; the fastest-growing fan economy in U.S. sports.
The fitness-first crowd	Run clubs, CrossFit, climbing, cycling — queer fitness communities outside formal leagues (see Pink Media's separate Fitness market); brand-receptive and Instagram-native.
The casual & curious	Drawn in by a friend's team, a Pride Night, or a viral Gay Bowl clip — the recruitment funnel every league depends on.

Behavior Patterns Marketers Should Know

Sport is chosen family infrastructure: for many participants the league is their primary community institution — sponsorship reads as supporting the family, not branding it.

Safety still shapes choices: Williams Institute and community research consistently show queer adults — especially trans athletes — avoiding mainstream sports settings over harassment fears; inclusive leagues exist precisely because the default wasn't safe. That history is the product.

The bar is the clubhouse: league nights anchor queer-bar economics (our Music guide's venue chapter, in jerseys) — activation belongs there as much as on the field.

Authenticity is roster-checked: the community knows which brands sponsored the league before Pride Nights were safe — and which showed up only after.

5 | The Global Game: Rugby & Soccer

Where LGBTQ+ sport is strongest worldwide

Rugby: The Inclusive-Sport Flagship

International Gay Rugby (IGR) — founded 2000, London-based, now **100+ inclusive clubs across six continents**, and formally recognized by World Rugby as the representative body for LGBT+ and inclusive rugby — the deepest mainstream-federation partnership in queer sports. igrugby.org

The Bingham Cup — the biennial world championship named for Mark Bingham, the gay rugby player and 9/11 hero of Flight 93: **Brisbane hosts August 16–24, 2026** (the Brisbane Hustlers' winning bid), with registration demand so heavy the system crashed — 42+ teams and 1,200+ players signed up early, backed by Rugby Australia.

The club layer: from the founding Kings Cross Steelers (London, 1995) to clubs across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania — rugby's contact-sport culture made its inclusive clubs the most powerful answer to the "gay men don't play rough sports" stereotype, and out internationals like Gareth Thomas gave the code its hero.

Soccer / Football: The World's Game, Both Genders

IGLFA — the International Gay & Lesbian Football Association (founded 1992): **100+ clubs from 30+ countries**, world championships on multiple continents — with **FIFA itself supporting the 2024 IGLFA World Championship in Argentina**, a milestone for federation recognition. iglfa.org

The club pioneers: London's Stonewall FC (1991) and peers across Europe and the Americas — many now playing in mainstream leagues while anchoring queer football communities.

The women's game leads the world: out stars are the norm at the top — the Rapinoe generation, current internationals across the NWSL and Europe, and Canada's Quinn as the first out trans Olympic gold medalist. The men's game lags — a handful of out pros (Josh Cavallo, Jakub Jankto's generation) against a global industry — which is exactly why the club-and-federation layer matters.

The geopolitics: World Cup hosting choices (Qatar 2022; the 2026 North American cup's state-by-state map) keep LGBTQ+ fan safety a live issue — the Travel guide's risk framework, applied to fandom.

"Rugby gave the community its proof: the roughest code in sport, with the world federation's seal, named its world cup for a gay hero. Strength was never the question — welcome was."

6 | The Core Four: Swimming, Tennis, Softball & Flag Football

The sports with the deepest LGBTQ+ institutions

Sport	The Institution & the 2026 State of Play
Swimming & Aquatics	IGLA — International Gay & Lesbian Aquatics (est. 1987): swimming, diving, water polo, and synchro clubs worldwide, with annual championships that rotate globally and feed the Gay Games aquatics program. Masters-swimming's most organized queer wing — and diving's Tom Daley remains the sport's most famous out champion.
Tennis	GLTA World Tour (est. 1991) — a genuine global tour: dozens of tournaments a year across North America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania with rankings, divisions, and a world championship. The sport's legacy is the community's proudest: Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova built modern athlete activism, and today's tour features out stars like Daria Kasatkina.
Softball	International Pride Softball (the former NAGAAA, est. 1977) sanctions city leagues across North America and stages the Gay Softball World Series — the largest annual LGBTQ+ single-sport championship on earth: Columbus hosts August 30–September 5, 2026 , expecting 230+ teams and 5,000+ athletes. Women's leagues (ASANA's lineage) run a parallel World Series.
Flag Football	NGFFL — the National Gay Flag Football League (est. 2002): 25+ city leagues and the annual Gay Bowl , heading to the Twin Cities October 8–11, 2026 (2,250+ athletes and attendees expected). The macro-tailwind is historic: flag football debuts at the LA28 Olympics — the NGFFL's two decades of infrastructure suddenly sit upstream of an Olympic sport.

Why These Four Punch Hardest

Scale with structure: each has a real governing body, rankings or sanctioning, and a marquee annual championship — sponsorable properties, not just pickup games.

Travel built in: their championships are among the biggest recurring LGBTQ+ travel events anywhere (GSWS and Gay Bowl host cities compete for the bids).

The pipeline runs both ways: these leagues supply Gay Games and Sin City rosters — and increasingly, talent and visibility back into mainstream masters and amateur sport.

7 | The Wider League Universe: Sport by Sport

The federations & leagues serving every corner of the community

Sport	The Organization
Volleyball	NAGVA (est. 1986) — hundreds of teams across North America; championships among the circuit's biggest indoor events.
Bowling	IGBO (est. 1980) — the veteran international federation; its annual tournament and mid-year events rotate worldwide.
Rodeo	IGRA (est. 1985) — the International Gay Rodeo Association's circuit and World Gay Rodeo Finals: country-western queer culture's sporting home.
Running	Front Runners International (since 1974) — clubs in 100+ cities worldwide; Pride Runs anchor June calendars everywhere.
Basketball	NGBA — the National Gay Basketball Association: city leagues plus tournaments riding the West Coast Classic and Sin City calendar.
Kickball, dodgeball & the social tier	Stonewall Sports (est. 2010, D.C.) — the social-sports juggernaut: 20+ city chapters, charity-driven, and the community's biggest on-ramp for first-time league players; OutLoud Sports and CMSA-style metro leagues round out the tier.
Ice hockey & winter sports	Madison Gay Hockey Association-style leagues, Team Trans hockey, queer curling leagues across Canada and the U.S., and ski weeks (Aspen Gay Ski Week, Whistler Pride) bridging to the Travel guide.
Wrestling, climbing & combat sports	Wrestlers WithOut Borders clubs, queer climbing collectives (Queer Crush model), and inclusive BJJ/boxing gyms — the fastest-multiplying grassroots tier of the 2020s.
Cycling, rowing & endurance	Queer cycling clubs, LGBTQ+ rowing crews at major regattas, and triathlon/Ironman teams — plus the charity-ride lineage (AIDS/LifeCycle's decades of fundraising, concluding its final ride in 2025 as an era's landmark).
Billiards, darts & pub sports	City leagues that double as nightlife programming — the venue economy's weeknight backbone.

The Pattern

Every sport above follows the same arc this guide keeps documenting: founded in the '70s–'80s out of necessity, professionalized through the '90s federations, and now serving simultaneously as athletic outlet, chosen-family infrastructure, and — for the brands paying attention — the most organized, most loyal sponsorship inventory in the LGBTQ+ marketplace.

8 | Gay Games XII València 2026 & the Mega-Events

The quadrennial peak of LGBTQ+ sport — this summer

Gay Games XII — València, Spain: June 27–July 4, 2026

The scale: the largest LGBTQ+ sporting and cultural event on the planet — **9,000+ participants from around the world across 39 disciplines**, open to all genders, orientations, and skill levels under the Federation of Gay Games' founding ethos: Participation, Inclusion, Personal Best.

The local flavor: alongside the global program, València adds two indigenous exhibition sports — **colbol and pilota valenciana** — the host-city signature touch.

The setting: a Mediterranean sports city purpose-fit for the Games — and a statement edition for Spain, consistently ranked among the world's most LGBTQ+-welcoming destinations (our Travel guide's index data, embodied).

The legacy line: from Waddell's 1,350 athletes (San Francisco 1982) through New York 1994, Amsterdam, Sydney, Cleveland, Paris, and the split Hong Kong/Guadalajara 2023 edition — València carries the twelfth torch. gaygames.org / gaygamesvalencia2026.com

The Rest of the Mega-Calendar

Event	Profile
Bingham Cup — Brisbane, Aug. 16–24, 2026	Inclusive rugby's world championship (Ch. 5) — the southern hemisphere's first hosting since Sydney 2014, with record early registration.
EuroGames	The EGLSF's rotating European multi-sport championship — the continental tier between Gay Games cycles, hosted by a different European city each edition.
Gay Softball World Series — Columbus, Aug. 30–Sept. 5, 2026	The largest annual single-sport LGBTQ+ championship (Ch. 6) — 230+ teams, 5,000+ athletes.
IGLA Championships / GLTA World Championships / Gay Bowl	The per-federation world titles (Ch. 6) — each a destination-bid event in its own right.
World Pride's sports programming	Human-rights-conference-adjacent tournaments and runs at each WorldPride (Amsterdam 2026) — the Pride and sports calendars converging.

"Tom Waddell built the Gay Games on three words — participation, inclusion, personal best. Forty-four years later, nine thousand people are flying to València to live them. That's not a sporting event; that's a civilization checking its pulse."

9 | Sin City Classic & the Tournament Circuit

The annual calendar that keeps the community in motion

The Sin City Classic — Las Vegas, January 16–19, 2026

The headline: the world’s largest annual LGBTQ+ sporting event — 10,000+ athletes and allies across 26 sports over MLK weekend, from softball (its founding sport) and basketball to dodgeball, golf, sand volleyball, kickball, bowling, wrestling, and more. sincityclassic.org

The model: one city, one weekend, every federation — a convention-scale takeover with official hotel blocks, parties, and per-sport tournaments run with the partner leagues (NGBA basketball, OutLoud kickball, and peers).

The lesson for destinations: Las Vegas treats it as the marquee January citywide it is — the template every sports commission bidding on LGBTQ+ events studies.

The Year-Round Circuit, Group by Group

Season	Anchor Events
Winter	Sin City Classic (Jan.); Aspen Gay Ski Week & Whistler Pride (Jan.); Sydney Mardi Gras sports program (Feb.–Mar.); queer curling bonspiels.
Spring	GLTA tour swing; IGLA championships (rotating); regional rugby tournaments building to Bingham years; West Coast Classic basketball (Las Vegas); Pride-run training season.
Summer	Gay Games XII València (June 27–July 4) ; Pride Runs everywhere (June); Stonewall Sports nationals; IGRA rodeo circuit; Bingham Cup Brisbane (Aug. 16–24) ; Gay Softball World Series, Columbus (Aug. 30–Sept. 5) .
Fall	Gay Bowl XXVI, Twin Cities (Oct. 8–11) ; NAGVA championships; IGBO tournaments; World Gay Rodeo Finals; city-league playoffs feeding next January’s Vegas rosters.

Reading the Circuit as a Marketer

Every group has its event: softball players, ropers, bowlers, swimmers, flag-football stars — each community’s “World Series” is its annual reunion; sponsorship there reaches the segment at maximum identity.

The calendar never sleeps: January (Vegas) to October (Gay Bowl) to January again — the 24/7, 365 principle of this series, in cleats and on skates.

Hotels and airlines should already be here: these are the most bookable, most predictable LGBTQ+ travel events of the year — with hotel blocks literally published on the events’ own sites.

10 | Pro Sports, Pride Nights & Out Athletes

The visibility tier — and what it's worth

The Out-Athlete Scoreboard

Arena	The State of Play
The Olympics	Outsports' "Team LGBTQ" counted a record ~200 out athletes at Paris 2024 — medaling at a rate that would rank among top nations; the count has grown every Games since the tally began.
Women's team sports	The norm-setters: the WNBA and NWSL feature out stars as standard (and famously queer fanbases); women's soccer, basketball, and hockey lead global visibility.
Men's major leagues	The slow wall: Jason Collins (NBA, 2013), Carl Nassib (NFL, 2021 — the first active out player), Robbie Rogers and Collin Martin (MLS), Luke Prokop (NHL pipeline) — progress measured in individuals, not cohorts.
Individual sports	Tennis's legacy (King, Navratilova) and present (Kasatkina); diving's Tom Daley; figure skating, skiing, and athletics' deep out rosters — where solo athletes answered first.
Rugby & cricket	Gareth Thomas's landmark, referee visibility (Nigel Owens), and growing out presence in women's codes worldwide.

Pride Nights & League Programs

All five major U.S. leagues run Pride programming; MLB's near-universal Pride Nights, the NBA/WNBA's long-standing programs, and NHL's jersey controversies (2023's retreat-and-recalibrate) map exactly onto this series' three corporate postures.

What the community grades: player participation, money to local LGBTQ+ orgs, and year-round follow-through — a Pride Night with a community-group partnership and a check reads entirely differently than rainbow-washed center ice.

Athlete partners over logos: out athletes and loud allies carry the credibility; NIL-era college athletes and women's-league stars are the most efficient endorsement buys in the segment.

“Paris fielded two hundred out Olympians; the NFL has had one active out player, ever. The visibility revolution is real — and unevenly distributed. That gap is the next decade’s story.”

11 | Trans Athletes & the Inclusion Battleground

The defining sports-policy fight of the decade — read clearly

The Policy Map, 2026

The restrictive wave: roughly half of U.S. states restrict trans participation in school sports; federal pressure expanded through 2025–26 executive actions; the NCAA narrowed its policy; and the **IOC moved in 2025–26 toward barring trans women from women’s Olympic events** — a sweeping shift heading into LA28.

The patchwork reality: policies differ by sport, level, and country — elite federations diverge from recreational sport, and U.S. states from each other (the state-divergence map of this entire series, applied to locker rooms).

The human data: Williams Institute and Trevor Project research document what exclusion costs — trans youth in restrictive states report worse mental-health outcomes, and sport is among the most-cited arenas of belonging lost (see our Health and Workplace guides).

Where Community Sports Stands

The community-run layer is the counterweight: the Gay Games, Sin City Classic, and virtually every federation in Chapters 5–7 maintain explicitly trans-inclusive participation policies — many with nonbinary divisions and self-ID registration; **Team Trans hockey** and trans-led clubs add dedicated spaces.

This is now a core product feature: as mainstream avenues narrow, inclusive leagues report growing trans and nonbinary membership — the safe-harbor function these organizations were founded to serve, renewed.

For partners and sponsors: inclusion policy is the first page the community reads. Backing trans-inclusive sport in 2026 carries political noise — and earns the deepest loyalty documented anywhere in this series. The double-boycott calculus applies; so does the 80% loyalty math (HRC).

Communicating Responsibly

Precision over panic: distinguish elite-eligibility debates from recreational access; cite actual policies, not headlines.

Center athletes, not arguments: trans athletes’ own stories — Quinn’s gold, Team Trans’s locker rooms — outperform abstractions in every measured campaign.

Match message with mechanism: fund inclusive leagues, underwrite youth programs, and let the policy pages speak.

Policy details shift quickly; verify current federation and jurisdiction rules before campaign or event commitments. This chapter summarizes the landscape as of June 2026.

12 | The Business Layer: Sponsorship, Tourism & Media

How the money moves in queer sports

Sponsorship Inventory, Tier by Tier

Tier	What's for Sale — and What It Buys
Mega-events	Gay Games and Bingham Cup partnerships — global naming, host-city activation, and the community's biggest stages; destination-marketing gold (València's tourism apparatus is the 2026 case study).
Annual championships	Sin City Classic, GSWS, Gay Bowl, NAGVA — title and sport-level sponsorships with hotel-block, party, and jersey inventory; the highest athlete-density buys in the market.
City leagues	Season sponsorships, kits, and bar-night activations — small checks, 30-week presence, and the deepest community embedding available.
Teams & athletes	Club kits, travel funds, and out-athlete partnerships — NIL and creator-economy economics arriving in queer sports.

The Tourism Engine

Queer sports events are the most predictable LGBTQ+ travel products in existence: fixed dates, published hotel blocks, multi-day stays, and athletes who return annually. Destinations from Las Vegas to Columbus to Brisbane now bid competitively — and the Travel guide's playbook applies wholesale: visible welcome, safety transparency, and year-round follow-through convert one tournament into a decade of return visits.

The Media Layer

- Outsports** — the newsroom of record since 1999: out-athlete coverage, Team LGBTQ tallies, and the coming-out stories that move the culture.
- Compete** — the long-running LGBTQ+ sports magazine and its annual sports diversity awards.
- League and federation channels** — collectively enormous reach into the most engaged segment of the community; plus the women's-sports media boom (queer-fanbase-powered) and #GayTok's sports corner.

“A Pride float reaches the community for an afternoon. A league sponsorship reaches it every Tuesday night, in uniform, for a decade. Sports is where LGBTQ+ marketing stops renting and starts owning.”

13 | Marketing Sports to LGBTQ+ Audiences

Best practices for brands, destinations, leagues & events

1. Sponsor the Infrastructure, Not the Aesthetic

Jerseys, field fees, travel funds, and championship titles beat rainbow creative every time — this audience wears its sponsors, literally, for a season.

Inclusion policy is the credential: back organizations whose participation rules match your stated values (Ch. 11) — the community checks.

2. Build Around the Calendar

January (Sin City) → spring tours → June–July (Pride Runs, **Gay Games València**) → August (Bingham Cup, GSWS) → October (Gay Bowl) — a full-year activation map with published dates and host cities.

Destinations: bid for the bids — and geo-target athlete feeder cities the moment hosts are announced; registration windows are the booking windows.

3. Target Like the Audience Plays

Sports data selects layered onto LGBTQ+ inventory — display, mobile, video, and **Connected TV with ACR technology** — geo-targeted to the ZIP code around venues, host cities, and league bars (Pink Media, pinkmedia.lgbt/markets/sports.html).

Amplify into the strong LGBTQ+ sports communities on social via the #ILoveGay network (1.5M+ followers); partner with out athletes, league accounts, and Outsports-style media for trust transfer.

Event weeks are mobile-first: tournament athletes live on their phones between games — geo-fenced app and social inventory in host cities converts at event-weekend rates.

4. Show Up for the Whole Season

The league calendar is the original 24/7, 365 channel (the Pink Media principle): a season-long presence at one city league outperforms a one-weekend logo at scale — and renewing year after year is the trust math of this entire series.

Fund the gaps: youth inclusion programs, trans-inclusive divisions, equipment drives — mechanism first, message after.

“This community remembers which beer was on the banner when the league had forty players — now that it has four hundred, that brand owns the bar tab. Get in before the growth, stay through the politics.”

14 | Program & Campaign Spotlights: 2024–2026

What best-in-class looks like in LGBTQ+ sports

Program	Why It Works
Gay Games XII València's city partnership	Tourism board, convention bureau, and Games organizers operating as one — 39 disciplines, indigenous exhibition sports, and a destination treating 9,000 athletes as the marquee event of its year. The host-city template.
The Sin City Classic model	26 sports, one weekend, 10,000+ athletes, published hotel blocks — grown from a softball tournament into the world's largest annual LGBTQ+ sports event by simply adding every community's game to the same dates.
IGR x World Rugby	Formal recognition of the queer federation by the world governing body — the deepest mainstream-inclusion partnership in sport, with the Bingham Cup's Brisbane demand crash as the proof of growth.
FIFA at the IGLFA Worlds	The global football federation backing the 2024 IGLFA World Championship in Argentina — the men's game's most meaningful institutional gesture yet.
Flag football's Olympic runway	NGFFL's two decades of Gay Bowls suddenly upstream of an LA28 Olympic sport — the grassroots-to-Games story every federation dreams of.
Outsports' Team LGBTQ	Turning a count into a brand: the Paris 2024 record (~200 out Olympians) became the era's defining visibility statistic — data as narrative, the GLAAD-report model applied to sport.
AIDS/LifeCycle's long ride	Three decades and hundreds of millions raised by cyclists between SF and LA, concluding its final ride in 2025 — the endurance-sport philanthropy landmark this whole sector descends from.

The Common Thread

Message paired with mechanism, in uniform: a recognition agreement, a hotel block, an Olympic berth, a finish line. Sports' version of this series' question — *"and what else?"* — is asked at registration: *who can play, who pays the fees, and who's on the jersey?*

"Nobody remembers the ad in the program. Everybody remembers who paid for the trans division's jerseys — and who showed up to the championship game."

15 | Sources & Further Reading

The research base behind this guide

Mega-Events & the Circuit

Gay Games XII València 2026 — June 27–July 4, 2026; 9,000+ participants, 39 disciplines incl. colpbol and pilota valenciana (gaygamesvalencia2026.com; gaygames.org; Visit València; València Convention Bureau).

Sin City Classic — January 16–19, 2026; 26 sports, 10,000+ athletes; the largest annual LGBTQ+ sporting event (sincityclassic.org).

Bingham Cup Brisbane — August 16–24, 2026; registration-demand coverage (igrugby.org; Rugby Australia; QNews).

Gay Softball World Series — Columbus, August 30–September 5, 2026; 230+ teams, 5,000+ athletes (gaysoftballworldseries.org; Columbus Sports Commission; International Pride Softball).

Gay Bowl — Twin Cities, October 8–11, 2026 (ngffl.org; Minnesota GFFL).

Federations & Leagues

International Gay Rugby (igrugby.org — 100+ clubs, six continents; World Rugby recognition); **IGLFA** (iglf.org — est. 1992, 30+ countries; FIFA support of the 2024 Worlds, via FIFA Inside).

IGLA aquatics; **GLTA World Tour** tennis; **International Pride Softball** (formerly NAGAAA); **NGFFL**; **NAGVA**; **IGBO**; **IGRA**; **Front Runners International**; **NGBA**; **Stonewall Sports**; Team Trans hockey.

LA28 — flag football among five added sports (la28.org; Olympics.com); IOC trans-eligibility policy coverage (NBC, 2025–26).

Athletes, Media & Research

Outsports — Team LGBTQ Paris 2024 record count; out-athlete coverage since 1999; **Compete** magazine.

Gallup (LGBTQ+ identification); **Williams Institute** and **Trevor Project** (sports-participation and youth wellbeing research); **HRC** loyalty data; Federation of Gay Games history (Tom Waddell, 1982).

Pink Media Resources

Pink Media market research page — LGBTQ+ Sports Marketing (pinkmedia.lgbt/markets/sports.html); related: Fitness (markets/fitness.html) and Outdoors (markets/outdoors.html).

Companion reports: Pink Media's 2026 LGBTQ+ Marketplace Guide and the Travel, B2B, Workplace Diversity, Health, Finance & Insurance, Literature, Music, Film & TV, and Theatre Market Guides. pinkmedia.lgbt

Statistics drawn from the sources above as compiled in Pink Media's LGBTQ+ Sports 2026 research file; where sources disagree, the most conservative defensible figure is used. Event dates verified June 2026 — confirm with organizers before contracting. Federation and policy details summarized for planning purposes only.

Pink Media is a leading LGBTQ+ digital media and marketing network with offices in New York and Los Angeles, led by President **Matthew Skallerud** — active in LGBTQ+ digital media since 1995. Through the **#ILoveGay Content Marketing Ad Network**, Pink Media delivers more than **17 million LGBTQ+ impressions monthly** — with dedicated market expertise in LGBTQ+ Sports (pinkmedia.lgbt/markets/sports.html), Fitness, and Outdoors, and deep experience marketing LGBTQ+ events and destinations.

What We Do for Sports & Event Clients

- Event & tournament campaigns** — registration drives and spectator marketing for LGBTQ+ sports events, geo-targeted down to the ZIP code in athlete feeder markets and host cities.
- Destination partnerships** — helping host cities and tourism boards reach traveling athletes before, during, and after their bid wins (the Sin City and València playbooks, applied).
- Sports data selects** — tennis, soccer, football, softball, and more layered onto LGBTQ+ inventory: display, mobile, and video plus **Connected TV with ACR technology**.
- #ILoveGay Content Marketing Ad Network** — your event news, lineups, and athlete stories amplified through the strong LGBTQ+ sports communities on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads and more — 1.5M+ followers and growing.
- #ILoveGay Today interviews** — long-form conversations with athletes, league founders, and event organizers across LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Threads, and Spotify.
- PR amplification** — turning host-city announcements, athlete milestones, and championship results into targeted LGBTQ+ marketing moments, year-round.

#ILoveGay Network Reach

Channel	Figures
Display ad impressions	10,635,000 / month
Social media reach	25,000,000
Email recipients	250,000
LinkedIn LGBTQ+ Advertising & Networking Group	31,000+ members
Total monthly LGBTQ+ impressions	17,000,000+

Campaigns are built around numbers you can see — impressions, reach, click-throughs, and engagement. We work with any budget, starting at **\$500 per month** — entry packages from **\$495**. Call **(323) 963-3653** or visit **www.PinkMedia.LGBT** to get started.

“Reach the LGBTQ+ Community — Leverage the Power of Social Relationships. Keep your message alive 24/7, 365 days per year.”



LGBTQ+ Sports Market Guide

2026 Edition



A companion to the 2026 LGBTQ+ Marketplace Guide and the LGBTQ+ Travel, B2B, Workplace Diversity, Health, Finance & Insurance, Literature, Music, Film & TV, and Theatre Market Guides — celebrating 20 years of connecting brands with the LGBTQ+ community.

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#ILoveGay Content Marketing Ad Network

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