

Will Jason Collins Find an NBA Team After Gay Confession?

Jason Collins was the most-talked-about athlete on Monday, but he faces an uncertain future in the National Basketball Association (NBA) after becoming the first active player from any major U.S. professional league to publicly reveal he is gay.

After 12 years with six NBA teams, Collins wants to continue his playing career but it is unclear if the free agent center will get an opportunity following his surprise coming out in a *Sports Illustrated* essay.

The locker rooms of North America's four biggest pro sports leagues have long been considered 'no-go zones' for gay athletes who, as a result, have hidden their sexuality from teammates.

Some of the NBA's biggest names, including former most valuable player Kobe Bryant offered support, making it clear he would welcome Collins as a teammate, but no team has yet stepped forward with a contract offer.

"Proud of @jasoncollins34. Don't suffocate who u r because of the ignorance of others," five-time NBA champion Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers tweeted.

But the locker room culture in North America has been slow to change. Even Bryant, who was among the first of many athletes and other influential voices to praise Collins, was fined \$100,000 in 2011 for using an anti-gay slur against a referee.

While attitudes and tolerance toward homosexuality are taking a positive shift across the United States there are still

signs change is not coming as quickly on the playing fields.

The National Football League has had to do damage control after controversial positions were taken by several players, including Miami Dolphins wide receiver Mike Wallace.

"All these beautiful women in the world and guys wanna mess with other guys SMH," Wallace said. "I'm not bashing anybody don't have anything against anyone I just don't understand it."

Wallace later deleted his comments and apologized for his early postings.

"Never said anything was right or wrong I just said I don't understand!! Deeply sorry for anyone that I offended."

By coming out Collins has cemented his NBA legacy.

A journeyman who has played for six teams and appeared in two NBA finals, Collins basketball resume will now be summed up in one word: "gay."

Over 713 career games Collins averaged 3.6 points and 3.8 rebounds but in the end his words will carry more weight than any of his statistics.

At 7 feet and 255 pounds, Collins brings a lot of muscle and fight to the lineup but now he will also be bringing a possible distraction to any team that signs him.

Described as a hard worker, fearless competitor and great teammate on the floor and in the locker room, Collins can offer many things to a future employer.

But the 34-year-old is also on the downside of his career and any potential team will have to balance what Collins can contribute against the distraction he will bring.

Given the significance of Monday's events, the NBA is also

likely to feel some heat to get Collins signed and into a training camp next season or face questions about the league's attitudes towards gay athletes.

If Collins does return to the NBA next season he will have to be prepared to deal with the hateful taunts and homophobic slurs that most surely await him.

"I'm glad I'm coming out in 2013 rather than 2003," said Collins in the *Sports Illustrated* article. "The climate has shifted; public opinion has shifted. And yet we still have so much farther to go."

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