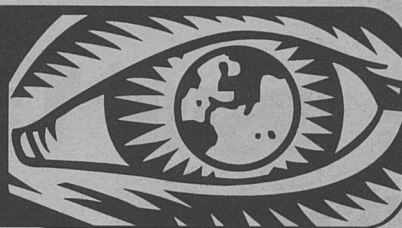


the rest of our world...



Athletic homophobia

NEW YORK — A wicked fast ball isn't the only thing John Rocker knows how to hurl.

The Atlanta Braves pitcher has taken a lot of heat for a published tirade against immigrants and homosexuals.

Forced to apologize for his words, he said his emotions made him say things he didn't mean.

Rocker told *Sports Illustrated* he would retire before ever playing for a New York team, then added, "imagine having to take the (No.) 7 train to (Shea Stadium) looking like you're (in) Beirut next to some kid with purple hair, next to some queer with AIDS, right next to some dude who got out of jail for the fourth time, right next to some 20-year-old mom with four kids. It's depressing."

He also assailed New York's famous diversity: "The biggest thing I don't like about New York are the foreigners," he went on. "You can walk an entire block in Times Square and not hear anybody speaking English. ... How the hell did they get in this country?"

Rocker, a 25-year-old who lives in Macon and was born in the southeast Georgia town of Statesboro, eventually retracted those remarks.

Military harassment

WASHINGTON — Leaders of the armed forces are being forced to face up to harassment of gay service members.

The Defense Department is pressing armed services leaders to re-emphasize to commanders that harassment of troops based on their sexual orientation will not be tolerated.

The Pentagon has drawn fire recently for its "don't ask, don't tell" policy on homosexuals. Critics say an increasing number of gay and lesbian service members are being harassed, contrary to the stated policy of permitting homosexuals to serve so long as they do not declare their sexual orientation by word or deed.

The criticism sharpened after a court-martial in which an Army private was convicted of murdering a gay soldier harassed with the knowledge of his superiors.

President Clinton said earlier this month that the Pentagon's policy on gays was "out of whack."

McCain's money

PHOENIX — Arizona Sen. John McCain has taken heat for accepting money from a gay Republican group with which he disagrees on a number of issues.

The Log Cabin Republicans group helped raise \$40,000 for McCain's presidential campaign.

Despite disagreements on a number of issues, McCain campaign spokesman Dan Schnur said the senator and the Log Cabin Republicans agree on other issues, such as taxes, school choice and the military, and that it is not inconsistent for him to accept their contributions.

"Like any other prospective donor, a member of the Log Cabin club would probably donate to him on issues that were important to them," he said.

McCain's campaign manager, Rick Davis, addressed members of the Log Cabin Republicans simultaneously by satellite at fund-raisers in Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York, Seattle, and Washington on Dec. 14, the *Arizona Republic* reported.

Bauer on Vermont

MANCHESTER, N.H. — Gary Bauer apparently doesn't like Vermont very much.

He took an opportunity recently to blast the state for alleged terrorists crossing the Canadian border and for the Supreme Court's ruling on gay marriage.

"I think what the Vermont Supreme Court did last week was in some ways worse than terrorism," Bauer told reporters at his New Hampshire campaign headquarters.

Bauer praised federal authorities in Vermont for arresting a woman allegedly linked to a terrorist group, saying, "I think we all celebrate anytime terrorism is thwarted."

But the religious activist said he strongly disagreed with the Dec. 20 Vermont Supreme Court ruling that the state must grant the same protection to gay couples as it does to married couples.

Bauer called the decision another example of "a judicial decision that attacks America's deeply held values," and said he was disappointed his Republican rivals have not spoken up.

Voluntary condoms

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — A city plan to require condom distribution has been defeated.

The proposal would have required nightclubs to hand out condoms to high-risk customers, but it was turned down 5-0 by the City Council.

The council decided unanimously to instead continue with a voluntary giveaway program and buy 50,000 additional condoms for distribution.

The mandatory program would have required condoms to be distributed at places of business with liquor licenses, adult businesses, coffee houses, and nonprofit organizations serving those most at risk for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Under the plan, the city, which has an active nightlife, could have imposed fines for noncompliance.

Gore backs up

DURHAM, N.H. — The two Democratic candidates for president are promoting their stands on gays in the military, although the issue has caused a few problems for Al Gore.

At a New Hampshire debate, Gore and former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley both said the "don't ask, don't tell" policy needs to be revamped. Gore went further, though, and then had to back down in subsequent days.

Originally, Gore said he would not appoint anyone to the Joint Chiefs of Staff who disagreed with his position on homosexuals in the armed forces.

Bradley suggested he would not need to resort to any such litmus test: "When you're president, you are commander-in-chief and you issue orders. And soldiers are good soldiers. And they follow your orders... whatever the policy is."

Gore later amended his position to align with Bradley's.

Soldier bargains

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — A soldier accused of being an accomplice in the beating death of a barracks mate rumored to be gay has pleaded guilty to lesser charges.

Army Spc. Justin R. Fisher, 26, admitted he lied to Army investigators and obstructed the investigation when he wiped blood from a baseball bat used by Pvt. Calvin Glover to kill Pfc. Barry Winchell.

Under the plea agreement, the Army dropped other charges, including participating as a principal to premeditated murder and acting as an accessory after the fact.

Glover, 19, was convicted in a court-martial of premeditated murder and sentenced to life in prison.

Glover killed Winchell as he slept in his cot at Fort Campbell. There had been a swirl of rumors on the post that Winchell, 21, of Kansas City, Mo., was gay; prosecutors said Glover was driven by hatred of homosexuals.

W. Virginia vs. marriage

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The governor of West Virginia wants to prohibit gay marriage in his state.

Gov. Cecil Underwood will ask the Legislature to put the following statement on all marriage license applications: "Marriage is designed to be a loving and lifelong union between a woman and a man."

"It's a moral issue for him. He just believes in family values and family traditions," said Jim Teets, the governor's chief of staff. "It's an issue that needs to be addressed before it becomes a problem."

The West Virginia Legislature has debated bills banning same-sex marriages for three years. Versions have passed both houses, only to die on the last day of the legislative session because lawmakers could not compromise on language.

Gays vs. Vatican

VATICAN CITY — A leading gay group in Italy says the Vatican is hostile to gays.

Members of the group laid a laurel wreath and sprinkled rose petals near St. Peter's Square in memory of a man

who burned himself to death to protest the church's treatment of gays.

Police refused to let the band of about 20 activists into the square, so they gathered nearby to remember Alfredo Orlando, a 40-year-old from Palermo, Sicily who set himself on fire there on Jan. 13, 1998. He died 10 days later.

In his suicide note, Orlando wrote at length of how he felt rejected by the church and the pain it had caused him. For many Italian gays, he has become a symbol of what they see as the intolerance of Italian society and the Roman Catholic church.

Sergio Lo Giudice, president of Arcigay, Italy's leading gay association, said activists plan to distribute "open letters" in front of churches throughout Italy, asking the faithful to act against the church's "hostility" toward gays.

"We do not expect any opening or response from church authorities, so we are appealing to the grass-roots," Lo Giudice said.

AIDS numbers change

ATLANTA — The demographics of AIDS are changing.

For the first time since the outbreak of AIDS, more black and Hispanic gay men were diagnosed with the disease in 1998 than white gay men.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggested that one reason is that homosexuality carries a greater stigma among minorities. CDC researchers said blacks and Hispanics are less likely than whites to identify themselves as gay or seek AIDS prevention and treatment services.

"Clearly, we know that homosexuality is stigmatized across all cultures, but it may even be greater in African-American and Latino communities," said Dr. Helene Gayle, director of the CDC center for prevention of HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis.

"I have had conversations with people who, upon learning that their son had AIDS, prefer to tell people that their son was a drug user than a gay man. It clearly is a badge of shame." ▼